

NEGATION IN THE LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD: ITS DIFFERENT DOMAINS AND THEIR EXPRESSIONS

Category TPI poster

The study summarized in this poster compares ways to express negation in 100 languages from different language families around the globe. The three sentence types shown in (1) *Harry does not eat pizza*, (2) *Harry is not happy* and (3) *There are no wild cats* present simple illustrations of three different semantic domains: those of action, state and existence. In some languages such as French (the written variety), cf (1), it is possible to use one and the same strategy for the negation of these domains. However, in most languages of the world, there is at least one way to distinguish between the negation of actions, states and existence (cf (Dahl, 1979, Miestamo, 2003/2005). For instance, in Bulgarian, the word *ne* is used in sentences that express negated actions and states, cf (2a-b). A different word *njama* and a different sentence structure altogether are used for the statement that wild cats do not exist as a species, cf. (2c). There are also languages such as Thai in (3), where the negation of identity is expressed in a special way (3d-e), different from the negation of action and existence, (3a-b). Finally, there are languages such as Turkish where the three domains of action, state and existence are expressed by three different strategies under negation. The suffix *-me-* is used to negate action sentences (4a), the particle *değil* negates states as in (4b) and the special verb *yok* is used to negate existence as in (4c). Proportionally, languages like French cover 27% of the sample, languages like Bulgarian represent 36%, languages like Thai-17%, and languages such as Turkish-20%. Generally, the most common preference appears to be to distinguish the negation of existence from the negation of actions, (cf also (Croft, 1991)).

The explanation proposed here draws on evidence about the origin and development of negation markers for these different domains as well as on differences in the ways negation of action and negation of existence are used. For instance, using a statement such as *Harry does not eat pizza* is felicitous only after there had been some discussion about the kinds of food Harry likes (cf also (Givón, 1984: 323)), it does not introduce a new entity/participant in the discourse. On the other hand, a statement such as *There are no wild cats* can be used to introduce a new subject/entity in the discourse. This goes to show that negation of actions and negation of existence differ greatly in their meaning. When we negate an action, we assume, consciously or unconsciously, that our interlocutors know about it already. When we negate the existence of something, we are often making a statement about its absence. Our listeners need not have any previous knowledge about it. In this respect, the act of negating existence is rather a statement about absence. This makes it very different from other domains of negation and can therefore be used as an explanation for the fact that negation of actions and negation of existence are so commonly expressed in different ways in the languages of the world.

EXAMPLES

(1) French (Indo-European, Romance) (Hugues Tarall, p.c.): Once and the same strategy for all three domains

a. *Marie ne chante pas bien* b. *Je ne suis pas heureux*
Marie NEG sing.3.SG.PRES NEG Well I NEG am NEG happy
'Marie does not sing well' 'I am not happy'

c. *Il n'y a pas de fumée sans feu*
3SG NEG' LOC have.3.SG NEG PART smoke without fire
'There is no smoke without fire'

(2) Bulgarian (Indo-European, South Slavic) (Maria Avgustinova, p.c.): one and the same particle for negating actions and states; a different verb for negating existence

a. *Harry ne jada pizza* b. *Harry ne e shtastliv*
Harry NEG eat.3.SG.PRES pizza Harry NEG Is Happy
'Harry does not eat pizza' 'Harry is not happy'

c. *Njama divi kotki*
Not.have.3.SG wild.PL cats.PL
'There are no wild cats'

(3) Thai (Tai-Kadai), (Miestamo, 2003/2005: 355) (Tu Zlatev, p.c.): a negative particle precedes the predicate for the negation of action and negation of existence; the negative particle replaces the copula (3d.) or a different verb is used with the copula (3e.) for the negation of statements of identity

a. *Khǎw may3 Aan nǎysǐ dǎwnǐ* b. *May3 mii0 sin3to0 Sii4 khao4*
he NEG Read book Now NEG Exist lion color white
'He is not reading a book' 'There are no white lions/White lions do not exist'

c. *Chay1 pen1 khruul* d. *Chay1 may3 chay3 khruul* e. *Chay1 may3day3 pen1 khruul*
Chay Be teacher Chay NEG Chay Teacher Chay not the case be teacher
'Chay is a teacher' 'Chay is not a teacher' 'Chay is not a teacher'

(4) Turkish (Altaic, Turkic), (van Shaaik, 1994): Three different strategies: suffix for negating an action, particle for negating states, a special verb for negating existence

a. *Gel-me-yecek* b. *Hasta değil-yim*
come-NEG-FUTURE ill NEG-1.SINGULAR
'(she) will not come' 'I am not ill'

c. *Su yok-tu*
Water not exist-PAST
'There was no water'

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