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Negation in Nar

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1. INTRODUCTION

The existence of variability in the frequency and distribution of linguistic structures and lexical items across different discourse genres poses a challenge for the adequate documentation and description of languages, and for any theory-building exercise that uses empirical data as its base. For both tasks, the competition between ensuring a realistic representation of the facts and the ability to make meaningful generalizations about empirical data will determine the final output of the research. However, while ‘best practice’ in language documentation assumes that different genres of discourse are collected as part of a representative corpus (cf. Himmelmann 1998, 2008), theoretical work in syntax and semantics has been less obviously concerned with variation across genres. Despite this, genre-based variation is important in establishing theoretical claims about language simply because surprisingly little is known about the distributional restrictions on the use of different structures across different speech practices (and what this might show us about language); at the same time, intuitive judgments about which types of structures are most prevalent in language have proven to be unreliable when scientifically tested (see Chelliah 2001, Mithun 2001, Noonan 2008, Lüpke 2010 for coverage of this issue).

One area of language use where variability is likely to be significant across discourse genres and discourse structures is negation, because the use of a particular negation strategy is not only constrained by the syntactic structure and semantic scope of negation (which may be independent from each other, cf. Kroskrity 1984, Bickel 2010, Bond 2011), but also by information-structure and other ‘pragmatic’ concerns (Carston 1996, Horn 2001, Schwenter 2005).

This paper reports one aspect of an initial analysis of variability in the use of negative structures across different discourse genres in Nar, a Tamangic language of Manang district, Nepal. The negation strategies found in Nar are of particular interest because they involve a complex interaction of discourse-oriented syntactic structures, information-source referencing, and dependency-marking morphology. The analysis here focuses specifically on the use of dependent verb forms in negative subordinate clauses. Such clauses have received little attention so far in the typological literature on negation (although see Bickel 2010 and Bond 2011 for recent discussion).

The data are largely from spontaneous speech, in a number of genres, and thus represent the observations (and puzzles) of structures, strategies and functions found in on-line language use. This is particularly important given the complex discourse structure evident in Nar, which contributes to a negation system that can only be adequately understood if it is analysed from a documentary perspective.¹

¹ The data for this study come from Noonan (2008), Noonan’s unpublished notes provided to the

The paper is organised as follows: in Section 2 we outline the typological and structural characteristics of Nar, before examining three different types of predicator used in negative clauses and the dependent verb forms that they license (Section 3). Brief conclusions are presented in Section 4.

2. TYPOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NAR

Nar (ISO 639-3: npa, endonym *f^hypruŋ*) is part of the Nar-Phu language complex (consisting of two dialect variants) spoken in the villages of Nar and Phu in the Manang District of Nepal. There are fewer than 600 speakers of Nar-Phu. This study relies on data gathered from Nar speakers only, and as such our analysis is limited to this variety.

There is very little published information on Nar, although some aspects of the grammar are discussed by Noonan (2003) in a sketch of the language. Mazaudon (1997) is the only other known published account of Nar, focusing on diachronic phonology. Nar is in many ways typical of the Tibeto-Burman languages occupying a zone of transition in the Nepal Himalaya between what Matisoff (1991: 485-486) has termed the ‘Indosphere’ and the ‘Sinosphere’. Indospheric languages are situated west of the Brahmaputra River, have more polysyllabicity, are incipiently tonal or a-tonal, and show a higher degree of morphological synthesis. Sinospheric languages are situated east of the Brahmaputra, have prevalent monosyllabicity, a proliferation of lexical tones and a low degree of morphological synthesis. As such, Nar has four lexical tones (manifested by pitch and modal/breathy phonations) and greater phonotactic restrictions, a limited amount of nominal and verbal morphology, and mixed constituent ordering. Complex sentences in Nar are typically characterised by a final verb complex, comprising the semantic predicate, auxiliaries and verb particles of the main clause. While verbs may appear in serial verb constructions, only the final verb in a main clause verb complex is marked for tense/aspect, either by suffixation, as in example (1), or by suppletion, as in example (2).²

- (1) *nôkju=ce=ce tŋuŋ nâpraŋ cŋaŋ=ce pi tê lâ-cin.*
 dog=DEF=ERG bee insect nest=DEF go.fast fall do-PST

‘The dog unwittingly knocked down the beehive.’

(F: Frog Where Are You, Noonan 2003: 346)

authors by Sally Noonan, and from data gathered by Hildebrandt during 2010 fieldwork in Nar village using various field-methodologies. Support for this study comes from Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project, ELDP SG0025. The authors wish to thank the members of the Nar community for providing them access to their language; all errors are the responsibility of the authors.

² Abbreviations used here follow the conventions of the Leipzig Glossing Rules, with the addition of: HON = honorific, ISUB = imperfective subordinator, PFSUB = perfective subordinator, POT = potential, PTSUB = potential subordinator.

- (2) *kfi-i laki=re nfiô câ-reme tano mû.*
 2SG=GEN for.the.sake.of=DAT/LOC garlic eat-COND good COP
 ‘If you eat garlic, it’s good for you.’
 (Noonan 2003: 351)

All other clausal constituents, including most subordinate clauses, typically precede the verb complex (Noonan 2003: 348). Among these constituents, locative or temporal information used to orient the discourse occurs first, followed by the remaining constituents arranged not by their grammatical relations, but rather their rank on the following empathy hierarchy:

speech act pronouns > third person pronouns > personal names >
 other human referents > animate non-humans > inanimates

Further constraints conditioning the relative order of constituents are summarised by Noonan (2003: 351) as:³

In general, the higher a referent is on the hierarchy, the closer to the beginning of the clause it will appear. When there are two referents of equal rank, the subject will precede the object, and the object will precede obliques. Deviations from this arrangement are usually attributable to considerations like focus: topicalized items may be placed first in the clause.

Arguments in Nar are characterised by an ergative-absolutive case marking system, with ergative case =*ce*/*se*/*tse* used to mark transitive subjects as well as instruments and ablative sources. Absolutive case (for transitive objects and intransitive subjects) is morphologically unmarked. Direct objects high on the empathy hierarchy are marked as dative case rather than as absolutive. The dative =*re* is also used for indirect objects, allatives, and locatives with a static ‘location at’ sense. More than one element within a clause may be marked with the same case providing the different instances code different relations. The remaining case markers are genitive =(*j*)*e*=*i*, independent Genitive =*nê* and comitative =*ten*. Despite the tendencies outlined above, case marking is not consistent enough to serve as a reliable diagnostic for establishing grammatical relations.

All nominal markers, including case and plural number, are enclitic to the NP; they can be repeated and have phrasal scope. Definiteness of nominals is marked by the generic third person pronoun =*ce*/*ce* following the head noun. Attributive adjectives follow their heads, while relative clauses precede their head noun, a configuration that is seen in some, but not all Tamangic languages. Nar is situated at the western edge of a language area exhibiting this low frequency typological pattern (see Dryer 2011a, 2011b).

³ Constraints on constituent order can be violated by post-posing topics and certain subordinate clauses, e.g. the conditional clause in example (10).

All negative verb forms in Nar involve the negative prefix *a-*, or some reflex of it. Negation stands out as being the only instance of prefixation identified in the language. Noonan also notes that when a verb is negated, finite indicative suffixes are replaced by *-i*, as in example (3), although this suffix is much rarer in connected speech. A few other negative formatives are also found, including two negative copulars *hare* and *jin*. Some negative pronouns and adverbs have been observed in discourse contexts (*tajan*, *cikan*, *cilki*, *lalemfi* ‘nothing/nobody’, *kate-man* ‘never’, lit. Nepali ‘how much’-never), but they have yet to be closely examined.

- (3) *ŋæ ara a-thuŋ-i.*
 1SG liquor NEG-drink-NEG.IND
 ‘I didn’t drink liquor.’
 (Noonan, unpublished notes)

- (4) *lame a-khæ-kî.*
 lama NEG-come-POT
 ‘The lama may not come.’
 (Noonan 2003: 349)

- (5) S1: *khjû mwo.*
 sheep female
 ‘It’s a female sheep.’
- S2: *phô a-jin, mwo.*
 male NEG-be.NEG female
 ‘It’s not male, it’s female.’”
 (F: Sheep Organs)

From a typological perspective, negating main clauses in this way, i.e. through prefixation coupled with a (possible) reduction in finiteness marking on the verb, is well attested (see, e.g., Miestamo 2005). However, as will be shown in the following sections, most negative clauses in the discourse data involve some form of structural dependency, either by virtue of being a subordinate clause in adjunct function, or through the use of a negative predicator selecting a clause-like complement.

3. THE ROLE OF DEPENDENT FORMS IN NEGATION MARKING

Negative subordinate clauses in Nar involve a variety of different predicates that license a dependent verb phrase. We have identified several different syntactic structures used for the expression of negation in which a predicator requiring a dependent verb phrase is found. These can be formally characterised by:

- (i) the type of verb form permitted as the head of the clause;
- (ii) the form of the predicative complement itself.

The different verb phrase complements identified here will be referred to using the form of the inflectional suffix that differentiates them: potential subordinator (PTSUB) *-ne*, imperfective subordinator (ISUB) *-te* and perfective subordinator (PFSUB) *-ce*. In negative clauses, each type of verb phrase complement has the potential to combine with a different type of negative predicator, either a negative verb (NEG-V), probably from a restricted subset of verbs, or the negative copula (NEG-COP). This results in (at least) the following configurations:

- (6) [V-*ne*] NEG-V
 [v-*ce*] NEG-V
 [v-*ne*] NEG-COP
 [v-*te*] NEG-COP

In the following three subsections, we discuss each of these constructions in turn.

3.1. *Dependent verb-form 1: -ne*

The potential subordinator *-ne* is typically used to mark a verb form in clauses that encode immediate future and potential states of affairs. For instance, predicates expressing inability to accomplish a particular task are expressed by the verb *chûr* ‘be able’ plus a dependent verb phrase headed by a verb marked with *-ne*. In example (7), the verb of the dependent verb phrase *to* ‘meet’ is preceded by its direct object (P) argument, and suffixed with *-ne*. The transitive subject (A) argument is unexpressed, and understood as co-referential with the subject of the matrix clause. The matrix clause verb *tshûr* ‘be able’ is negated with the negation prefix *a-*. The subject of the matrix verb remains unexpressed in this particular example, but is retrievable from the discourse context.

- (7) [*ŋe-e* *the-cuke* *to-ne*] *a-chûr-ce*,
 1SG=GEN sibling-PL meet-PTSUB NEG-able-PFSUB,
 ŋe-e *cawe* *lame=ce* *rokram* *naŋke-cin*.
 1SG=GEN root lama=ERG help give.HON-PST
 ‘Having not been able to meet my brothers, my root lama gave (me) help.’
 (F: The Three Brothers)

In turn, the head of the subordinate clause *chûr* ‘be able’ is marked with the perfective suffix *-ce*, indicating a sequential relationship between the subordinate clause and the main clause. In the terminology of Longacre (2007), the subordinate clause is part of the SENTENCE MARGIN, indicated by an intonation reset (represented here by a comma in the first line of the example). The remaining constituent part is the SENTENCE NUCLEUS. The final verb of the complex sentence (in this case, the verb of the sentence nucleus) in example (7) is *naŋke* ‘give (honorific form)’ and it is marked with the past tense suffix *-cin*. This contrasts with verbs in subordinate

clauses, which cannot inflect for this tense/aspect.⁴ A similar structure can be seen in example (8):

- (8) [*ŋe-e the som to-ne*] *a-chîûr-ce*,
 1SG=GEN sibling three meet-PTSUB NEG-be.able-PFSUB,
 khana khana ca-cin.
 where where look-PST
 ‘Having not been able to meet my three brothers, (I) looked
 everywhere.’
 (F: The Three Brothers)

In both (7) and (8) the negated verb form licensing the dependent verb form is itself the head of a dependent structure. However, this need not be the case. In the following examples of conditionals, the clause containing the verb taking the *-ne* complement is the apodosis. In example (9) it is the negated form of the verb *chîûr* ‘be able’, while in example (10) it is the copula *mo*. In both instances there is a negative protasis in which the verb is marked with the negative prefix *a-* and the conditional suffix *-reme*. In (9) the negative protasis precedes the apodosis. Note that the negative verb-form *a-chîûr* does not inflect for tense or aspect.

- (9) *kju a-thuŋ-reme*, [*kan tsa-ne*] *a-chîûr phi-pæ*.
 water NEG-drink-COND, rice eat-PTSUB NEG-able say-NOM
 ‘“If (you) don't drink water, (you) aren't able to eat rice”, is the way the
 saying goes.’
 (D: Grinding Chili, 2)

Example (10) demonstrates that verbs marked with *-ne* are not restricted to complements of negative predicators. In this example, the apodosis precedes the negative protasis.

- (10) [*fi-ne*] *mo-pe*, *fiŋ khor a-so-reme*.
 die-PTSUB COP-NOM, wood piece NEG-make-COND
 ‘(The yak) might die, if the wood piece (that prevents strangulation)
 isn't made.’
 (D: Yaks)

Note that in (10), the dependent verb form, and not the copula, contributes the reading of potentiality.⁵

⁴ Following Noonan (2003) we currently gloss this inflectional form as past (PST) but recognise that it may be better analysed in terms of its aspectual, rather than temporal, characteristics.

⁵ Both (9) and (10) exhibit ‘nominalised’ verb forms. A full explication of the distribution of such forms awaits future research.

3.2. *Dependent verb-form 2: -te*

The second dependent verb marker *-te*, is claimed by Noonan (2003) to occur in subordinate clauses conveying completed events in relation to the main verb, but in instances found in discourse it is more frequently with events which are imperfective in nature.⁶ In example (11), we assume that the dependent phrase headed by *-te* functions as the complement of the negative copula *a-re*.

- (11) *ŋæ khi-cin. [ŋa tosor h̄jûl-re ju-te]*
 1SG be.happy-PST. 1SG now village=LOC arrive-ISUB
 a-re, ʈoŋraŋ ʃa t̄û-pa kæ.
 NEG-NEG.COP forest always stay-NOM PART
 ‘I’m happy now (in comparison to earlier years). I don’t go to the
 village now (very often), I always stay in the forest.’
 (D: Life Story 1)

The imperfective sense of subordinate *-te* is also found in final position or in simple clauses, where it provides an imperfective or durative reading. Noonan (2003: 345) notes that negated imperfectives may be directly prefixed, while *-te* is replaced by *-i* (e.g. *a-V-i*), but our data contradicts this. An elicited example of this contradiction is given in (12). Note that it is not grammatical to add the negative prefix to the lexical verb *ni* ‘go’ (**a-ni-te*):

- (12) [*ŋa tosor h̄jûl-re ni-te*] *a-re.*
 1SG now village=LOC go-ISUB NEG-NEG.COP
 ‘I am not going to Nar village now.’

An unresolved issue regarding these structures is whether the negative copula *a-re* takes a complement clause with its own subject (distinct from that of the main clause) as suggested by the bracketing in (11) and (12), or whether the first-person singular pronoun is the subject of the copular verb. Given variability in the order of verbal arguments in Nar, the unreliability of case marking as a diagnostic for grammatical relations and the lack of head-marking of argument functions, a more robust syntactic analysis awaits further investigation.

3.3. *Dependent verb-form 3: -ce*

This suffix marks two types of dependency relations in Nar.⁷ The first, and most pervasive, is adverbial subordinate clauses, where the clause is an adjunct, and does not fulfill an argument function of the main clause, as in examples (7) and (8). Its second use is for verb phrase complements functioning as an argument of a negated light verb. For instance, in one analysis of example (13), *ju* ‘use’ is marked as a complement of *lâ* ‘do’ through the use of *-ce*.

⁶ Noonan (2003: 345-346) labels *-te* forms as Subordinate Determinate, with a reading of a more completed event/action that is more direct to speaker senses.

⁷ This suffix has several allomorphs: [t̄j̄e, t̄se, se, ʃe].

- (13) *kje* *chô-ce*, *ʈa-ten-ce*, *njaŋ* [*ju-ce*] *a-lâ*.
 Kathmandu.rope rope-DEF, be.rough-TEN-PFSUB, 1PL use-PFSUB NEG-do.
cû ce-ce *a-ʈa-pe*, *cû-ce* *a-ʈa-pe*.
 this kind-DEF NEG-rough-NOM, this-DEF NEG-rough-NOM
 ‘The Kathmandu type of rope is rough (i.e. damaging to the yak's skin),
 so we don't use it. This one is not tough, this one is not rough.’
 (D: Yaks)

A similar affirmative construction is found in example (14). Here the potential subordinate verb form is dependent on the inflected form of *lâ* ‘do’. There are no intonation-unit breaks between the subordinated form and *lâ* ‘do’, and given the context of the utterance (in response to video stimuli developed by the Max Planck Institute Nijmegen) a reading like ‘separating, s/he does it’, where *rhaŋ* ‘separate’ is adverbial, is not appropriate.

- (14) [*kap ɲhî-ce rhaŋ-ce*] *lâ-cin*.
 cup two-DEF separate-PFSUB do-PST
 ‘(Someone) pulled apart/separated two cups (from each other).’
 (D: CB11)

Examples of this kind suggest that the dependent verb forms used for the subordination of adjunct clauses are also prevalent in marking the dependency of verb-forms in ‘light verb’ type constructions.

4. CONCLUSION

Research into the distribution of negative constructions in Nar discourse data has revealed a wealth of strategies for negation which are different from those observed in simple clauses generated from elicitation. These greatly expand upon the strategies presented in Noonan’s (2003) sketch. In this paper, we have shown that negative clauses involving a head verb inflected with negative prefix may take a complement resembling a clause, which is not offset by an intonation break, yet clearly marked for dependency. This contrasts with examples from main clauses in which the verb complex may consist of several serialised verbs, none of which is morphologically marked as having an asymmetrical dependency with the final verb. In this sense, negative structures in Nar appear to pattern differently in terms of the type of subordinating structure they exhibit with respect to the verb phrase and sentential syntax.

In this paper we have been able to give only the briefest explication of the role of dependent verb forms in Nar negative constructions, but the data discussed reveal that inflectional forms of verbs (e.g., those marked with *-ce*) which appear to mark one form of dependency in Nar clause linkages (i.e. adjunct clauses that are subordinate to a main clause) may be put to use in marking complements of negative predicators. That is, they are obligatory structural components in negative clauses. However, even these preliminary observations pave the way for further analysis of

the varied syntactic and pragmatic dimensions along which negation in this language may be distributed. Without looking at discourse data featuring negative subordinate structures, the multifunctional application of dependent verb forms in Nar would not have been revealed.

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