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Negation in Mu-nya*

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Summary

The Mu-nya language belongs to the Qiangic branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family and is spoken by Tibetans living around Mt. Minya Konka in Sichuan, southwest China. The general expression for ‘not be’ by the speaker’s recognition, such as ‘A is not B’, is expressed as A B / $\eta\omega^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}(ti^{33})$ / in Mu-nya. / ηe^{55} / is a declarative, a part of speech, which expresses a statement with certainty, while / ti^{33} / is another declarative that conveys a statement with confirmation. These two declaratives are often used in combination, and the negator / $\eta\omega^{33}$ -/ precedes them. Huang (1991) revealed that Mu-nya has three kinds of negative prefixes: / $\eta\omega^{33}$ -/ is the general negator and is also used in the verb predicate under the imperfect aspect; / me^{33} -/ is used under the perfect aspect; and / $t\epsilon\omega^{33}$ -/ is used for prohibitive statements. Apart from Huang’s simple observation, Mu-nya has complex negative expressions that have not been reported in detail thus far. This study analyzes the basic functions and grammatical behavior of negators in Mu-nya concerning evidentiality, focusing on negating target items such as the verb, the suffix (=aspect), or the declarative (=evidential) in verb predicates. From my perspective, the negator / $\eta\omega^{33}$ -/ does not negate the verb stem directly (except for stative verbs), and mainly appears preceding the position of declaratives, or often precedes the imperfect verb suffix /- po^{33} / to negate it directly. In contrast, the negator / me^{33} -/ appears at the preceding position of an active verb stem under the perfect aspect, or often negates the perfect verb suffix /- $su\omega^{33}$ / directly. In addition, I will introduce some dialectal varieties corresponding to the general negative expression / $\eta\omega^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}(ti^{33})$ / ‘not be’ in Mu-nya.

Key words: Tibeto-Burman, Mu-nya, negator, evidentiality, aspect

關鍵詞：藏緬語、木雅語、否定辭、示證性、未完/完了體

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1. Introduction

The Mu-nya language belongs to the Qiangic branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family and is spoken by about 10,000 Tibetans who live around Mt. Minya Konka in Sichuan, southwest China.



The Mu-nya (WɿT. *Mi nyag*) District



A snap shot at a Mu-nya village in Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

The Chinese scholar Huang Bufan (1985) demonstrated that Mu-nya has three kinds of negative prefixes: /nɯ³³-/ is the general negator and is also used in the verb predicate under the imperfect aspect; /mɛ³³-/, is used under the perfect aspect; and /tɕɯ³³-/ is used for prohibitive statements. Huang's observation is simple, but to the point. If we delve further into the topic, we find that Mu-nya negative expressions are somewhat complex concerning evidentiality. This negative construction in Mu-nya has not been described in detail thus far.

2. The Noun Predicate and Declaratives

In Mu-nya, a noun predicate sentence like 'A is B' is expressed as 'A B DEC.' See example sentence (1) below.

- (1) nɯ⁵⁵ k^hi³³zi⁵⁵mi³³ ɲɛ⁵⁵.
 1sg. student DEC

'I am a student.'

- /ɲɛ³³/ statements with certainty [+certain]
 /ni³³/ general/objective statements
 /ti³³/ confirmed statement [+confirm]; discover/notice

The "declarative" is a part of speech in Mu-nya, which appears at the end of a predicate and implies the speaker's evidentiality. Mu-nya has three kinds of declaratives for statements: /ni³³/ is used for general statements; /ɲɛ³³/ is used for statements that connote certainty; and /ti³³/ indicates confirmation or discovery. /ɲɛ³³/ and /ti³³/ are often combined together as /ɲɛ³³ ti³³/. However, no other combinations are grammatically allowed. Typical affirmative expressions with declaratives include the following:

- (2) nɯ⁵⁵ pu³³ ɣũ³³ndɯ³³ k^hi³³zi⁵⁵mi³³ ɲɛ⁵⁵ (ti³³). [+certain]
 1sg. Tibetan letters student DEC

'I am a student in the Tibetan class.'

- (3) ʔɛ³³tsu⁵⁵ nɯ⁵⁵ = ɣa³³ k^hi³³zi⁵⁵mi³³ndzu³⁵ ni³³. [general]
 3sg. 1sg. = GNT student friend DEC

'S/he is my classmate.'

- (4) $\eta e^{55} tsw^{33}$ = $n\eta^{33}$ $k^h i^{33} z i^{55} m i^{33}$ $t i^{33}$. [+confirm] discover/notice
 3sg. = also student DEC

‘S/he is also a student.’ [just noticed]

3. Negation in the Noun Predicate

Negation in the noun predicate in Mu-nya is expressed by the negator / $n\eta^{33}$ - ηe^{55} / preceding a declarative like / $n\eta^{33}$ - ηe^{55} /. Negations such as ‘[noun] A not be [noun] B’ is communicated in Mu-nya as follows (|| indicates the boundary of the subject and the predicate in the sentence): noun A is the subject, and noun B plus / $n\eta^{33}$ - ηe^{55} ($t i^{33}$)/ is the predicate.

[noun] A		[noun] B	$n\eta^{33}$ - ηe^{55} ($t i^{33}$).
Subject		Predicate	[+certain, (+confirm)]

Negative Construction in the Noun Predicate in Mu-nya

Now let us examine the negative counterpart of typical sentences with three kinds of declaratives:

- (2)' $\eta\eta^{55}$ pu^{33} $\gamma\tilde{u}^{33}$ $nd\eta^{33}$ $k^h i^{33} z i^{55} m i^{33}$ $n\eta^{33}$ - ηe^{55} ($t i^{33}$).
 1sg. Tibetan letters student NEG- DEC [+certain, (+confirm)]

‘I am NOT a student in the Tibetan class.’

- (3)' $\eta e^{33} tsw^{55}$ $\eta\eta^{55}$ = γa^{33} $k^h i^{33} z i^{55} m i^{33}$ $ndz\eta^{35}$ $n\eta^{33}$ - ηe^{55} ($t i^{33}$).
 3sg. I = GNT student friend NEG- DEC [+certain, (+confirm)]

‘S/he is NOT my classmate.’

- (4)' $\eta e^{55} tsw^{33}$ = $n\eta^{33}$ $k^h i^{33} z i^{55} m i^{33}$ $n\eta^{33}$ - ηe^{55} $t i^{33}$.
 3sg. = also student NEG- DEC [+certain, (+confirm)]

‘S/he is NOT a student, either.’ [just noticed]

Regardless of the ranking of evidentiality in affirmative sentences, all of these negative counterparts employ one negative expression — / $n\eta^{33}$ - ηe^{55} ($t i^{33}$)/ — to make a statement.

As seen above, the general negative expression in the noun predicate is / $n\eta^{33}$ - ηe^{55} ($t i^{33}$)/, and is merely used in negative combinations with other declaratives like / $n\eta^{55}$ -

ni^{33} / and $/n\mu^{55}-ti^{33}/$. $/n\mu^{55}-ni^{33}/$ is used when it is necessary to emphasize ‘it is NOT: that is the truth’, and $/n\mu^{55}-ti^{33}/$ is used especially when the speaker needs to stress ‘just discovered/noticed: it is NOT, (I have never known at all.)’.

$/n\mu^{33}-\eta e^{55}(ti^{33})/$	ordinary negative statements with certainty [+certain, (+confirm)]
<hr/>	
$/n\mu^{55}-ni^{33}/$	emphasizing ‘it is NOT: objective true’: < general statements [-certain, -confirm].
$/n\mu^{55}-ti^{33}/$	emphasizing ‘just discovered/noticed: it is NOT’ < confirmed statement [+confirm, +certain]

4. Declaratives in the Adjective Predicate

Mu-nya adjectives in the predicate should be poly-syllabic or duplicated mono-syllabic words like $/ku^{55}ku^{55}/$ ‘cold’.

- (5) $pu^{55}su^{55}$ $m\mu^{55}$ $ku^{55}ku^{55}$ ti^{33} .
today, sky/weather cold DEC [+confirm]

‘It is cold today.’ [just noticed]

The declaratives $/\eta e^{33}$, ni^{33} , $ti^{33}/$ are also used in the adjective predicate to express evidentiality, as well as in noun predicate sentences.

Negative construction in the adjective predicate in Mu-nya is basically the same as in the noun predicate, expressed by the negator $/n\mu^{33}-/$ preceding a declarative; the adjective itself must not be negated.

[noun] A		[Adjective]	$n\mu^{33}-\eta e^{55}(ti^{33})$.
Subject		Predicate	[+certain, (+confirm)]

Negative Construction in the Adjective Predicate in Mu-nya

Let us look at the negative counterpart of sentence (5), a typical adjective predicate sentence.

- (5)' pu⁵⁵su⁵⁵ mu⁵⁵ ku⁵⁵ku⁵⁵ ɲu³³- ɲe⁵⁵ (ti³³).
 today, sky/weather cold NEG- DEC [+certain, (+confirm)]

‘It is NOT cold today.’

It is merely used in negative combinations with other declaratives like /ɲu⁵⁵- ni³³/ and /ɲu⁵⁵- ti³³/, except for special situations.

- (5)'' pu⁵⁵su⁵⁵ mu⁵⁵ ku⁵⁵ku⁵⁵ ɲu³³- ti³³.
 today sky/weather cold NEG- DEC [+confirm]

‘It is NOT cold today.’ [just noticed]

- (6) mbo⁵⁵ ti³³ti⁵⁵ ɲu³³- ni⁵⁵.
 mountain flat NEG- DEC [-certain, -confirm] = objective statement.

‘The mountain is NOT flat.’ [it is the truth]

/ɲu⁵⁵- ni³³/ is used when it is necessary to highlight ‘it is NOT: that is the truth’.

5. The Negative Structure of the Verb Predicate

A Mu-nya verb consists of a directional prefix plus a verb stem, and adds a suffix for the aspect or a modal if needed, and takes declaratives at the end of the predicate.

Prefix- Stem	(=Suffix) / (=Modal)	Declarative
direction (person)*	< person (vowel alternation)	
Verb	aspect / mood	evidentiality

*When the verb does not contain a suffix, the vowel alternation appears on the stem.

Verb Predicate in Mu-nya

Next, we examine a typical affirmative sentence with a verb suffix.

- (7) ɲi⁵⁵ ndzu⁵⁵ fa³³- ndzu⁵⁵ = po³³ ɲe³³.
 1sg. [ERG] meal DIR- eat =SFX:impft DEC

‘I eat a meal.’ [imperfect = present/future]

Sentence (8) is a sentence with a modal instead of a suffix.

- (8) $\eta\omega^{55}$ me^{55} fa^{33} - $t\epsilon^h u^{55}$ xwi^{33} ti^{33} .
 1sg. medicine DIR- drink MOD: must DEC

‘I must drink medicine.’

5.1 Negation in the verb predicate: Imperfect Aspect

Negation in the verb predicate under the imperfect aspect is expressed as a verb plus the Vstem = / $\eta\omega^{33}$ - po^{55} /. It is noteworthy that the target item of the negator is the verb suffix /- po^{55} /, expressing the imperfect aspect, which often includes the volitional future. See negative sentence (9).

- (9) ηi^{55} $p\emptyset^{55}$ $\gamma\tilde{u}^{33}$ ndu^{55} $k^h u^{33}$ - ri^{55} $\eta\omega^{33}$ - po^{55} (ηe^{33}).
 1sg. [ERG] Tibetan letters DIR- $\sqrt{\text{write}}$ NEG- SFX:impfct. DEC

‘I do not write Tibetan letters.’ [imperfect = present/future]

The construction of the negative verb predicate under imperfect conditions is as follows:

DIR- STEM = NEG- SFX (/≠MOD) DEC.
 / $\eta\omega^{33}$ - po^{55} /

DIR-: Directional prefix SFX: Aspect suffix
 MOD: Modal auxiliary verb DEC: Declarative

5.2 Negation in the Verb Predicate: Perfect Aspect

Negation in the verb predicate under the perfect aspect is expressed as a verb plus / $m\epsilon^{33}$ - $s\emptyset^{55}$ /. Here, another negator, / $m\epsilon^{33}$ -/, is used in the perfect aspect. The target item of the negator is the verb suffix /- $s\emptyset^{55}$ /, expressing the perfect aspect. See negative sentence (10).

- (10) ηi^{55} $\gamma\tilde{u}^{33}$ ndu^{55} $k^h u^{33}$ - ri^{55} = $m\epsilon^{33}$ - $s\emptyset^{55}$ (ni^{33}).
 1sg. [ERG] letter DIR- $\sqrt{\text{write}}$ = NEG- SFX: pft. DEC

‘I did not write a letter.’ [perfect = past]

The construction of the negative verb predicate in the perfect situation is as follows:

DIR- STEM = NEG- SFX (/≠MOD) DEC.
 / $m\epsilon^{33}$ - $s\emptyset^{55}$ /

6. Negation in the Verb Predicate with Declaratives /rΛ³³/

6.1 Another Declarative in the Verb Predicate

Mu-nya has another declarative, /rΛ³³/, which indicates a statement with the speaker's evidentiality as either experienced or realized. See sentence (11).

- (11) ndə³³q^hΛ⁵⁵ ʔu³³tʃe⁵⁵ nΛ³³- q^hΛ⁵⁵ rΛ³³.
 mountain rain DIR- fall DEC

‘It rained on the mountain.’

This declarative /rΛ³³/ expresses the statement with experience [+realize], which is only used in the verb predicate under the perfect aspect.

6.2 Negation in the VP with Dec /rΛ³³/

Negation in the verb predicate with the declarative /rΛ³³/ is somewhat unique. See sentences (12) and (13). The negator /mɛ³³-/ comes into the position after DIR- before the Vstem as /nΛ³³-mΛ³³-q^hΛ⁵⁵/ ‘have NOT fallen’, to express negation under the perfect aspect with experience. The target item of the negator /mɛ³³-/ is not the declarative /rΛ³³/, but rather the verb stem.

- (12) ʔu³³tʃe⁵⁵ tɛ³³ lɔ⁵⁵ = nɯ³³ nΛ³³- mΛ³³- q^hΛ⁵⁵ rΛ³³.
 rain one CLS =also/even DIR- NEG- fall DEC

‘It did NOT rain at all.’

- (13) ŋɯ⁵⁵ fɪa³³- mɛ⁵⁵- ʃe³³ rΛ³³.
 1sg. DIR- NEG- tired DEC

‘I am NOT tired. (=I have never [been] tired).’

Let us consider one more negative sentence with the declarative /rΛ³³/.

- (14) ʔɛ³³tʃi⁵⁵ k^hɯ³³- mɛ⁵⁵- rɪ³³ rΛ³³.
 3sg. [ERG] DIR- NEG- write DEC [+realize: pft]

‘S/he did NOT write.’ [witness]

It is interesting that this negative expression has dialectal variation in terms of word order. See sentence (14) in the Tanggu dialect.

- (14)' ʔe³³tsi⁵⁵ k^hu³³- ri⁵⁵ me³³- rɿ³³.
 3sg. [ERG] DIR- write NEG- DEC [+realize: pft]

‘S/he did NOT write.’ [witness] (Tanggu dialect)

The negator /me³³-/ is a prefix, so the target item of the negator in this sentence is the declarative /rɿ³³/. This word order is caused by analogical influence from the negative construction; that is, the negational target is a declarative in the noun predicate and the adjective predicate.

We can point out one more constructional similarity to negation in the verb predicate under the perfect aspect (and the evidentiality is different), as follows:

- (15) ʔe³³tsi⁵⁵ k^hu³³- ri⁵⁵ me³³- su⁵⁵.
 3sg. [ERG] DIR- write NEG- SFX [general statement: pft]

‘S/he did NOT write.’ (without evidentiality)

Although the target item of the negator /me³³-/ in this sentence is not a declarative, but rather a suffix, compare (14)' with (15): We find clear structural parallelism.

7. Dialectal Variation of the Negative Predicate

As mentioned above, there are some Mu-nya dialectal varieties of negative constructions. Besides the variation in word order in the Tanggu dialect, some negative expressions, such as /ŋu³³je⁵⁵/ or /tɕa³⁵ŋe³³/, are used in the northern villages instead of /ŋu³³-ŋe⁵⁵ti³³/.

All of these expressions are also used for the negative answer ‘No’ independently. /ŋu⁵⁵je³³/ is primarily used in Liupa 六巴 village, while /tɕa³⁵ŋe³³/ is used in Shenggu 生古 village. Both villages are in the northern part of Mu-nya district (in Kangding xian 康定縣), but these expressions are never used in Tanggu 湯古 village, located in the southern area (in Jiulong xian 九龍縣).

- | | | | | |
|------|------------------|--|--|-------------------------------|
| (1)' | ŋu ⁵⁵ | k ^h i ³³ zi ⁵⁵ mi ³³ | ŋu ³³ - ŋe ⁵⁵ (ti ³³). | Tanggu/Liuba/shenggu daialect |
| | 1sg. | student | NEG- DEC [general statement] | |
| | ŋu ⁵⁵ | k ^h i ³³ zi ⁵⁵ mi ³³ | ŋu ⁵⁵ je ³³ . | Liuba dialect |
| | 1sg. | student | DEC [NEG?] [general statement] | |
| | ŋu ⁵⁵ | k ^h i ³³ zi ⁵⁵ mi ³³ | tɕa ³⁵ ŋe ³³ . | Shenggu dialect |
| | 1sg. | student | NEG DEC [general statement] | |

‘I am not a student.’

These are negative variations for ‘No.’ Since the morphemes /jɛ³³/ and /tɕʌ:³⁵/ only occur in this negative phrase sporadically, it is difficult to identify its origin and to analyze the function. Further investigation is required.

8. Concluding Remarks

This report describes the basic construction of negation in the Mu-nya language. Mu-nya has two kinds of negators: The general negator /ɲɯ³³-/ is used in the noun predicate, the adjective predicate, and the verb predicate, which negate the impft-suffix /=pɔ³³/ or declaratives representing evidentiality. The second negator, /mɛ³³-/, is only used in the verb predicate, and expresses negation under the perfect aspect; it negates the pft-suffix /=su³³/, or the verb stem with the declarative /rʌ³³/ [+realize] contrastively. Here I have introduced two major issues: ‘negation and evidentiality’ and ‘negation and the impft/pft aspect’ in Mu-nya. Further issues in negation such as ‘partial negation’ and the ‘double negative’ are still under investigation. In addition, we should conduct a thorough study to expound upon the negation system in terms of experience, possibility, and progression.

Abbreviations

CLS	Classifier	IRG	Interrogative
CPT	Comparative	MOD	Modal
DAT	Dative	NEG	Negative
DEC	Declarative	NMR	Nominalizer
DIR	Directional prefix	NUM	Numeral
ERG	Ergative	PCL	Particle
GNT	Genitive	SFX	Suffix

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