

Negation in languages of the Lotuxo sub-group of Eastern Nilotic

Abstract

Lokoya, Lopit and Otuho (Lotuxo) are Eastern Nilotic languages spoken in the area around Torit in Eastern Equatoria province, South Sudan. Negation in the three languages is expressed using a negative verb and a lexical verb, whereby the lexical verb maintains its pronominal marking. The negative verb is usually a higher negative verb taking a full sentential complement, using the terminology of Payne (1985, p. 207). In some cases, the negative verb has become lexicalized in that the pronominal marker is generalized. However, in all three languages, the constituent order together with the case-marking demonstrate the verbal nature of the negative constructions. This paper presents an overview of these constructions based on primary data collected with speakers based in Melbourne, Australia, the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya and in Torit, South Sudan.

These languages are verb-initial (VSO) and have marked-nominative case systems. In a negated construction, the order is NEG SUBJECT VERB OBJECT. The subject retains its nominative marking in the negative construction. This demonstrates the verbal nature of the negative constituent, since, in marked-nominative languages, the unmarked (absolute) is used when the subject is placed in front of the verb (König, 2008).

A basic declarative clause in Otuho is shown in (1). When the negated construction is formed, as in (2), the negative verb /beŋ/ is clause-initial and the lexical verb /lo/, ‘go’, is now placed after the subject. The subject /ni/, retains its nominative marking.

(1) Otuho
á-ló ní tòrit
1SG-go 1SG.NOM Torit
‘I’m going to Torit.’

(2) Otuho
á-béŋ ní á-ló tòrit
1SG-not.be 1SG.NOM 1SG-go Torit
‘I’m not going to Torit.’

The literal translation of (2) is something like ‘I am not that I am going’. That is, the clause /alò torit/, ‘I’m going to Torit’, is the complement of the verb /abeŋ/. A complementizer is not used in this construction, although complementizers are often used in complement constructions.

The three languages vary in the use of subordinate marking on the lexical verb, on pronominal marking on the negative verb and on TAM marking on the negative verb. A summary is shown in Table 1. The clause-initial negative verb is used for most negation constructions in all three languages, including stative predications and subordinate clauses. Quantifiers and indefinites are all negated with a verbal construction. The three languages use a verbal prefix for negative imperatives.

These observations indicate that, despite some variation, there is a strong commonality in negation constructions across these languages. The use of higher negative verbs, as seen in these three languages, might be unusual in African languages.

	Otuho	Lopit	Lokoya
pronominal marking on negative verb	yes	sometimes	no
pronominal marking on lexical verb	yes	yes	yes
subject has nominative marking	yes	yes	yes
subordinating prefix on lexical verb	no	yes	yes
TAM marking on the negative verb	no	yes	no

Table 1: Features of negative constructions

References

- König, C. (2008). *Case in Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Payne, J. R. (1985). Negation. In T. Shopen (Ed.), *Language typology and syntactic description* (Vol. 1, pp. 197–242). Cambridge University Press.