

Negation as a nominal property in Pitjantjatjara

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(1) *ngura-ngka nyina-ma!*
home-LOC sit-IMP.IPFV
'Stay home!'

tourist tjuṭa kuli-la!
tourist PL listen-IMP
'Listen, tourists!'

puṭi=kutu a-nku-nytja wiya,
bush=ALL go-AUG-NMLZ NEG
'Don't go to the bush,'

pika kati-ntja-ku tawara!
illness take-NMLZ-DAT AVERS
'In case you bring the virus!'
(poster: Chips MacKinolty)



Negation in Pitjantjatjara is unusual in a number of respects. My focus here is on the fact that it is exclusively a nominal category.

In this talk:

- Standard negation
 - Nominalisation, tense, and ergativity
- Morphosyntactic properties of the negator
- Gaps in the typological, theoretical, and descriptive literatures

Standard negation

‘The basic means that languages have for negating declarative verbal main clauses’ (Miestamo, 2007:553).

Many Pama-Nyungan languages use pre-verbal negators, such as Kuku Yalanji:

- (2) *ngayu jungkalu kari dumbarri-ny*
I billycan NEG break-PST
‘I didn’t break the billycan’
(Patz 2002:197)

Negation often assumed to have close association with tense in the generative literature (eg Zanuttini 1991, 1996, de Clercq 2020a, 2020b).

Standard negation

(3a) *tjinguru tjana ninti-ri-nga-nyi skuula-ngka*
maybe they knowledgeable-INCH-AUG-PRS school-LOC
'Maybe they're learning at school.'

(b) *tjinguru tjana ninti-ri-ngku-nytja wiya skuula-ngka*
maybe they knowledgeable-INCH-AUG-NMLZ NEG school-LOC
'Maybe they're not learning at school.'
(SW20190425-08-PitjKunpuKanyini)

Standard negation

Pitjantjatjara is an example of 'A/Fin/Neg-LV' (Miestamo 2005):

Asymmetry: There is a difference between affirmative and negative clauses (other than the presence of the negator).

Finiteness: 'The lexical verb loses its finiteness, and usually a new finite element (auxiliary) is introduced ... to bear the finite verbal categories.' (p. 73)

LV: The lexical verb is negated, not the auxiliary.

Nominalisation

Action nominalisation refers to the action itself.

- (4) ... *munu kuli-**ntja** tjana-mpa kampa kutjupa-na-**ny**i*
and.ss think-AC.NMZ 3PL-GEN side another-AUG-PRS
'(New things are coming in and) changing their thinking to a different way.'
(SW2090531-01-TjukurpaPt1)

Agent nominalisation refers to the agent of the action.

- (5) *ngaṅkurpa kaṭa-**lpai-ngku** ngaṅkurpa kaṭa-**ni***
beard cut-AG.NMZ-ERG beard cut-PRS
'The barber [beard cutter] is cutting the beard.'
(SW20191004-PJ28)

Nominalisation

The agent nominalisation can be negated too.

- (6) *tjana* *Pitjantjatjara ninti-ri-ngku-pai* *wiya*
3PL.NOM/ERG Pitjantjatjara knowledgeable-INCH-AUG-AG.NMZ NEG
'They don't learn Pitjantjatjara / They are not learners of Pitjantjatjara.'
(SW20190425-08-PitjKunpuKanyini)

Nominalisation

Both have the properties of regular nominals (cf. Nordlinger 2001):

- Can take full range of case markers,
- Can head core argument,
- Can modify or be modified by other nominals,
- Can be possessed,
- Can be negated.

Tense

Tense is unspecified with both types of nominalisation.

(7) *palu-ru mungartji/kuwari/mungawinki ngalku-ntja wiya*

3SG-ERG yesterday/now/tomorrow eat-AC.NMZ NEG

‘She did not eat yesterday/is not eating now/will not eat tomorrow’

(elicited)

(8) *Tjamu-nya Kami-ny tjana panya iriti a-nku-pai,*

gfather-NOM gmother-ACC 3PL.NOM ANAPH long.time.ago go-AUG-AG.NMZ

puṯi=kutu

bush=ALL

‘Those old people, like Grandma and Grandpa, used to go to the bush in the old days.’

(SW20190418-04-GoingBush)

Tense

You can add a finite verb:

- (9) *palu* *kuma-ma-ntja* *wiya* *a-nu*
3SG.ERG comb-LOAN-NMLZ NEG go-PST
'He went without combing (his hair)'
(SW20190607-03-LeafStory)

But this is not the default way to negate a clause.

Only a quarter of the examples in my corpus have a finite matrix verb, and in most cases it is adding extra lexical semantics.



Tense

Another strategy to is to **reverbalise** the standard negation construction with the **inchoative suffix**. This can subsequently be inflected for **tense**.

- (10) *Ka kuwari nyanga tjana-ny, tjana kuli-ntja wiya-ri-ngu*
and.D S now this 3PL-ACC 3PL.NOM/ERG listen-AC.NM Z NEG-INCH-PST
'But now they no longer listen to those (old people).'
(Milpatjunkunyaja_20190916_KT, recorded by Rebecca Defina)

Ergativity

When the lexical verb is transitive, the subject is **ergative**.

- (11) *kutjupa-ngku tjinguru ninti-ntja wiya*
someone-ERG maybe teach-AC.NMZ NEG
'Maybe nobody teaches (them Pitjantjatjara).'
(SW20190425-08-PitjKunpuKanyini)

This is a property of nominalised subordinate clauses more broadly.

- (12) *papa nyanga-ngku pintapinta witi-nti-tja mukuri-nyi*
dog this-ERG butterfly catch-AC.NMZ-INTENT want-PRS
'This dog wants to catch the butterfly.'
(SW20180930-PJ12)

Ergativity

Also true for agent nominalisations when they are predicates, even though these are not used in subordination:

- (13) *mama ngunytju-ngku kati-pai alatai-ngka*
father mother-ERG take-AG.NM Z holiday-LOC
'Mum and dad used to take (us) on holiday.'
(SW20190531-01-TjukurpaPt1)

As predicates, agent nominalisations are a bit more verb-like.
E.g. they do not form a constituent with their **objects**:

- (14) *tjukur palatja ngayu-lu kuli-lpai*
story that(MED) 1SG-ERG listen-AG.NM Z
'I used to listen to that story'
(SW20190528-05-TjitjikuTjukurpa)

Wiya is a nominal

Morphological evidence:

- *Wiya* can take the full range of case markers.
- It can undergo derivational processes which only apply to nominals.

Nominal

ninti

‘knowledgeable’

Inchoative

ninti-ri-nga-nyi

‘learn’

Causative

ninti-ni

‘teach’

wiya

wiya-ri-nga-nyi

‘come to an end’

‘pass away’

‘disappear’

‘stop doing X’

wiya-ni

‘finish (trans.)’

‘kill’

‘make disappear’

Wiya is a nominal

Wiya can be an argument.

- (15) *ka palu paka-ra wiya nya-ngu.*
and.DS 3SG.ERG get.up-MV NEG see-PST
'And she got up and saw nothing.'
(SW20190331-08)



Wiya is a nominal

Wiya can modify other nominals.

- (16) *uwa tjitji panya wanka-ri-ngu munu palu-ru paka-ra*
yes child ANAPH awake-INCH-PST and.SS 3SG-ERG get.up-M V
nya-ngu kita wiya
see-PST guitar NEG
'That kid woke up and saw no guitar.'
(SW20190328-03-GuitarStory)



Wiya is a nominal

Wiya can be a predicate in a verbless clause.

(17) *Ka palu ngayunya ringamilara wangkapai,*
And she'd call me up and say,

"Nyuntu waarkarinyi warungka?"

"Are you still working with the waru?"

Ka ngayulu wangkangu

And I said,

"Wiya, ngayu-ku malpa wiya"

no 1SG-GEN friend NEG

'No, my friend is gone'

(SW20190528-03-WorkPt2)



(📷: Kanyinirnpa Tjukurpa)

Wiya is a nominal

Wiya has all the same morphosyntactic properties as any other nominal (Goddard 1985: 123).

Only one other language where the clausal negator is synchronically a nominal: Nadëb (Nadahup; Brazil. Weir, 1994, cited in Miestamo, 2005).

No real discussion of this in the literature.

- “Negative nouns are a marginal type and will not be exemplified here” (Miestamo 2007: 555)
- Not included as a possibility in recent overviews of morpho-syntactic properties of negative markers (Gianollo 2020, de Clercq 2020)

Unusual features

1. Finiteness asymmetry, lexical verb negated:
13% of languages in sample (23/179, Miestamo 2005)
2. ...with no finite element:
Small minority of that 13%?
3. Only nominals can be negated:
One other language? (Singerman 2018)
4. Standard negator is synchronically a nominal:
One other language? (Weir 1994)

(just to mention a few!)

Is it really so unique?



And in the Amazon:

- Arawakan languages (Michael 2014, 2015)
- Paresi (Brandao 2014)
- Tuparí (Singerman 2018)
- Several others (Krasnoukhova & van der Auwera 2019)

Evolution of negation

Decades of cross-linguistic research on other negative cycles.

Only recently has this diachronic pathway been recognised:

- Kroskrity (1984, 2010) on Arizonan Tewa
- Privative extension (Michael 2015)
- Ascriptive cycle (Krasnoukhova & van der Auwera 2019, van der Auwera & Krasnoukhova 2020)
- Phillips (2015) on Arrernte

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Thank you

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