Negation in Lotha

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Abstract

This paper attempts to describe negation in Lotha, spoken in Wokha district, Nagaland. Lotha is a generic name and refers to both the linguistic group and the ethno-cultural entity. Lotha are racially Mongoloid. Linguistically, it has been classified under the Ao group of the Naga sub-branch of the Tibeto-Burman languages (Lewis et.al, 2015). Normally a negative sentence is the negative counterpart of an affirmative sentence, and is used to communicate that, some proposition communicated by the affirmative sentence is false. In Lotha there are three different ways to express negation. The default sentential negation in Lotha is the prefix n-. The other syntactic negator in Lotha is ti- and the third negation is ‘mek’ referred to as negative indefinite. The negative prefix n- occurs with the non-imperative form of a verb as a kind of statement in the utterance of the speaker. While the negative prefix, ti- occurs with the imperative form of a verb which designates to a grammatical mood expressing a command, a request or an exhortation. In the imperative form, negative commands are expressed by using the verb stem in combination with the negative marker found in declarative sentences.

Keywords: Lotha, Nagaland, Tibeto-Burman, Negation

Introduction

The Lothas with an approximate population of 1, 66,343 (Census of India, 2001) inhabit the Wokha district of Nagaland. The speakers of Lotha are scattered all over Nagaland but the majority are concentrated mainly at Wokha district of Nagaland. Lotha has no script of its own and has adopted Roman script introduced by the British and the American Missionaries in the late 19th century. Lotha has a number of varieties but, the variation is mainly at the phonological level, that is, the accent of the speaker, which varies from village to village. However, for the purpose of literary works, the variety spoken in central villages, particularly in and around Wokha town is used. The present study is based on the language spoken in Wokha town, of Wokha district in Nagaland.
1. **Negatives in Lotha**

Normally a negative sentence is the negative counterpart of an affirmative sentence, and is used to communicate that, some proposition communicated by the affirmative sentence is false. In Lotha there are three different ways to express negation. The default sentential negation in Lotha is the prefix /n-/ The other negator in Lotha is /ti-/ and the third negation is /me/ referred to as prohibitive negative. The negative prefix n- occurs with the non-imperative form of a verb as a kind of statement in the utterance of the speaker. While the negative prefix, /ti-/ occurs with the imperative form of a verb which designates to a grammatical mood expressing a command, a request or an exhortation. In the imperative form, negative commands are expressed by using the verb stem in combination with the negative marker found in declarative sentences. In Lotha an affirmative statement is transformed into its opposite denial by the negative markers /n-/, /ti-/, /me/, and /mol/. The occurrences of negation in the language vary with respect to different types of sentence constructions found in the language i.e. declaratives, imperatives, interrogatives and indefinite.

1.1. **The Negative /n-/**

The default sentential negation in Lotha is the prefix /n-/ as seen in (2) and has the widest scope in a clause. However, when the verb takes tense marking such as the future the negative /n-/ loses its scope and the negative /me/ is employed as seen in (3) which occur in the final position of a construction.

1. ombɔ na p'anti-a la
   3P.MAS morning wake PRES
   ‘He wakes up early’

2. ombɔ na n-p'anti
   3P.MAS morning NEG-wake
   ‘He did not wake up early’

2. ombɔ na p'anti-v mek
   3P.MAS NOM morning wake-FUT NEG
   ‘He will not wake up early’

In a negative interrogative construction, the negative /n-/ occur in both yes/no interrogatives and wh- interrogatives as in (4) and (5). In both yes/no and wh- the interrogatives occur in the final position of a construction and the negation /n-/ as always occur in the medial position of a construction pre verbally.

3. ni na a sə ci n- həŋ tfə alo
2P.SG NOM 1P cloth DET NEG see PST QM
‘haven’t you seen my shirt’

4. otʃɔ n-roa la
   who NEG-come QM
   ‘who is not coming’

5. a na ni ezov –ji ndioli n-ŋa la
   1P NOM 2P tell det QM NEG listen QM
   ‘why don’t you listen to what I told you?’

2.2. The Negative /ti/-

   The negative /ti-/ occur with the imperative form of a verb which designates to a grammatical mood expressing a request or an exhortation. It is employed in an imperative construction and cannot occur interchangeably with the negative /n-. Following are some of the instances where the /ti-/ is employed in a construction.

6. kipŋ-ci ti-kʰana
   door DET NEG-close
   ‘Don’t close the door’

7. fəro-ci pelŋ-poni na ti-phia
   dog DET bed-PSTP NOM NEG-feed
   ‘don’t feed the dog on the bed’

8. jokɔ-ci oʃɔ cilo ti-hana
   necklace DET dress DEM NEG-wear
   ‘don’t wear the necklace with that dress’

   The negative /ti-/ occur always pre verbally in the medial position of a verb; it can also occur in the initial construction of an imperative clause as in (10) and (11).

9. ti-ŋoa
   NEG -say
   ‘don’t say it’

10. ti-tsʰoa
    NEG -do
    ‘don’t do it’
The negative /ti-/ however cannot be used interchangeably with the negative /n-/ as it cannot occur in an imperative or interrogatives and adding it will make the sentence meaningless and ungrammatical as seen in (12) and (13).

*12. kipəŋ-ci          n-kʰana  
door-DET         NEG -close

*13. a na          ni          ezov-ci          ndioli  ti-ŋa         la  
1P NOM      2P      tell-DET      QM      NEG-listen      QM

2.3. The Negative /me/

The negation /me/ performs as the prohibitive marker in a construction. In a prohibitive construction the negative /me/ is always accompanied by the prohibitive particle /ka/ (14) and (15).

14. otsə          tso-ka  
    rice          eat PROH  
    ‘eat rice’

15. otsə          tso          me-ka  
    rice          eat          NEG PROH  
    ‘don’t eat rice’

16. jipvə-ka  
    sleep PROH  
    ‘you sleep’

17. jipvə          me-ka  
    sleep          NEG PROH  
    ‘don’t sleep’

The negative /me/ can occur in an interrogative construction and can be reduplicated as seen in (18). The negative /me/ however cannot be reduplicated in wh-interrogative constructions (19) and by reduplicating the negation in a wh-interrogative construction will result in ungrammatical sentence (20).

18. ni-no          pəŋnoi          me me
2p Nom teacher NEG NEG
‘Are you a teacher?’

19. otʃɔ-co pəŋnoi me
who-NOM teacher NEG
‘Who is not a teacher?’

20.* ocho-jo pəŋnoi me me
who- NOM teacher NEG NEG

2.4. Negative Indefinites
The negative indefinites are inherently negatives and are accompanied by the default negation /n-/ in a construction. The inventory of negative indefinites in the language following Penka (2011) is shown in table 1:

Table 1. Inventory of negative indefinites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative indefinites</th>
<th>Lotha</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>otʃiame</td>
<td>‘nobody’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thing</td>
<td>Ntiame</td>
<td>‘nothing’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>kvəlɔhame</td>
<td>‘nowhere’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Det</td>
<td>Me</td>
<td>‘no’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Negative indefinites in Lotha are /otʃiame/ ‘nobody’, /ntiame/ ‘nothing’, /kvəlɔhame/ ‘nowhere’ and /me/ ‘no’. When the negative indefinites occur as a one word response to an interrogative sentence, the inherent negatives remains the same as seen in the following instances.

21.(a) co otʃɔ la    (b) otʃiame
‘who is that’       ‘nobody’

22. (a) co ndo la    (b) ntiame
‘what is that’      ‘nothing’

23.(a) co kvəlɔ lo la (b) kvəlɔhame
‘Where is that’     ‘nowhere’

In a clause construction the occurrence of negative indefinites alone may meant ungrammatical therefore it is always accompanied by the negative marker /n-/.
negative indefinites along with the negative marker also results to a double negative construction.

24. ṭsəpənə i ntia n cə
    pot LOC nothing NEG there
    ‘there’s nothing in the pot’

25. nə co ətʃia n-tso
    yesterday NOM nobody NEG-eat
    ‘nobody ate yesterday’

26. a jə kəvəloha n-ji
    1P NOM nowhere NEG-go
    ‘I am not going anywhere’

Conclusion

The process of negation in Lotha is morphologically formed by prefixing the negative marker to its constituents. Negation is expressed by three negative prefixes /n-, /ti- and /me/. The negative /n- is the default sentential negator in Lotha and it has the widest scope in a clause construction. However, the scope is limited to tense because when the verb takes future tense the negation /n- loses its scope and the negator /me/ is employed which occurs in the final position of a sentence construction. The negative /ti- occurs with the imperative form of a verb which designates to a grammatical mood expressing a request or an exhortation. Although both the negatives /n- and /ti- occur in both declarative and interrogative constructions they cannot be used interchangeably. The negation /me/ performs as a prohibitive negator and is always accompanied by the prohibitive particle /kal/. However, in an interrogative clause /me/ is reduplicated for the purpose of emphasis but cannot be reduplicated in wh- clause construction. The negative indefinites are inherently negatives and are accompanied by the default negation /n- in a construction. Negative indefinites in Lotha are /ətʃiməl ‘nobody’, /ntiaməl ‘nothing’, /kəvəlohəməl ‘nowhere’ and /meəl ‘no’. When the negative indefinites occur as a one word response to an interrogative sentence, the inherent negatives remain the same. The occurrence of negative indefinites along with the negative marker /n- results to a double negative construction.

Abbreviations

1p First Person
2p Second Person
3p Third Person
DEM Demonstratives
DET Determiners

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:6 June 2019
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