Negation as an exclusively nominal category in Tupari

This talk argues that negation in Tupari (Tupian; Brazil) is an exclusively nominal category, one largely indistinguishable from privation. I show that Tupari does not make use of any of the main crosslinguistic strategies for negation, such as verbal inflection, clausal particles, or negative auxiliaries (Payne 1985, Miestamo 2005, Dryer 2013). Instead, the language’s only negator morpheme, -?om, is in fact a derivational suffix also used to mark nominal privation (i.e., ‘-less’ or ‘without’). As Tupari has been only minimally described before (Casp and Rodrigues 1957, Seki 2001), all data presented here come from my own fieldwork in Rondônia, Brazil.

First, although -?om can attach directly to nominal predicates, with verbs the suffix -to must intervene between the root and -?om. (1), featuring the nominal predicate Tupari, and (2), featuring the verbal predicate tey ‘come’, illustrate this contrast:

(1) Oet Tupari-?om.
    my.father Tupari-NEG
    ‘My father is not Tupari.’

(2) Oet tey-to-?om.
    my.father come-NMLZ-NEG
    ‘My father did not come.’

Verbal roots marked with -to do not inflect for TAME, suggesting that they are non-finite. However, they can combine with case endings, as in teytope ‘before coming’ (from tey ‘come’, -to, and locative -pe). In addition, a verb marked with -to can serve as the object of the transitive light verb ná, which selects only nominal complements. Taken together, these pieces of evidence indicate that -to is a kind of non-finite nominalizer. This means that -?om displays a consistent selectional preference: it attaches to nominal complements only.

Like all other nominal predicates in Tupari, negated verbs (such as teyto’om in 2) cannot directly inflect for TAME. Instead, they must first take -ka, a suffix which productively derives verbs from nouns (as in ?apka ‘to fry’ from ?ap ‘oil’). (3), recorded during everyday conversation, illustrates:

(3) Haytokia s-etes-to-’om-ka-pná-n
    much it-bring-NMLZ-NEG-VBLZ-EVID-PAST you
    ‘You didn’t bring much of it (they say).’

Note the extensive – and obligatory – category changes in (3). The verbal root etes ‘bring’ is first nominalized with -to in order to be negated with -?om, and this is in turn reverbalized with -ka so as to carry evidential -pná and past tense -n. Since -ka is independently used to build verbs from nouns, these facts indicate that words headed by -?om are nouns. And since -?om can only attach to nouns in the first place, it performs nominal derivation.

Semantically, there is a crucial opposition between -?om and the possessive suffix -siro, meaning ‘with’ or ‘having.’ Consider example (4), a native speaker’s summary of a local soccer match:

    shirt-with FOCUS win shirt-NEG-the lose
    ‘Those with shirts were the ones who won. The shirtless ones lost.’

Here, -?om best translates as the privative ‘-less’ or ‘without’. Indeed, Tupari regularly uses -?om to derive new nouns in the fashion of (4). Hence we have apsikum?ẽ’om ‘deaf’ from apsikum?ẽ ‘inner ear’, a?usi?om ‘bachelor’ from a?usi ‘wife’, tàn?om ‘short’ or ‘lack of height’ from tàn ‘tall’ or ‘height’. (Note that Tupari lacks a clear distinction between nouns and adjectives in the realm of property concepts.) In all these cases, -?om behaves as a privative marker on nouns, creating new words in the manner of derivational, not inflectional, morphology.

Importantly, -?om cannot be iterated: *tàn?om-?om, predicted to mean ‘not short’ or ‘without shortness’, is apparently ill-formed. To negate words such as tàn?om ‘short’ or ‘lack of height’ (from tàn ‘tall’ or ‘height’), speakers resort to periphrasis with ta?ate ‘true/very’:
My consultants offer constructions along the lines of (5) when prompted for translations which would appear to require iterations of -?om. If – as all present data indicate – the morphosyntactic and semantic properties of the suffix -?om render ‘not short’ (or ‘not not tall’) ineffable in Tupari, then this language provides a strong example of the sort of crosslinguistic variation in expressibility described by Deal 2011, among others.

In sum, Tupari lacks verbal negation altogether as an inflectional category: the ‘negative’ suffix -?om is actually a derivational morpheme that can attach to nouns only. Although this suffix may be loosely translated as ‘not’, its morphosyntactic and semantic properties more strongly recall derivational – that is to say, lexical – privation/negation of the sort accomplished by ‘-less’ or ‘un-’. Additional facts concerning Tupari grammar and lexicon are naturally explained if all negation in this language is lexical. For instance, Tupari lacks any negative polarity items, a striking gap which makes sense if there is no high NegP to license them. More broadly, I claim that Tupari instantiates a pan-Amazonian tendency for categories which are prototypically verbal in their semantics to surface on nouns instead of verbs. Much like tense in certain varieties of Guaraní (Thomas 2014), negation in Tupari resides within the extended projection of the noun phrase; it is absent from the verbal domain. Although it is well-established that negative constructions tend to lose verbal finiteness and as a result become more noun-like (see Miestamo 2005 for a typological overview and Donohue et al. 2014 for the specific case of Kusunda), Tupari takes this tendency to a level without precedent in the literature. In this language, negation is an exclusively nominal category.

References


