

Nominal privative suffixes as a diachronic source of verbal negative markers:

Evidence from Pama-Nyungan languages

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One of the negation strategies of Australian languages (Dixon 2002: 81-85), found especially in languages of the Pama-Nyungan family, involves the typologically rare (Payne 1985) use of verbal negative inflections which originate as (widely attested) nominal privative suffixes, meaning ‘not having, without’. This paper will show what diachronic processes are involved in the development from a nominal privative to a verbal negative. Two separate developments from the privative are described: one that results in a standard indicative negative inflection and the other leading to a negative imperative marker. In the first case, the apparent diachronic pathway involves attaching the privative suffix to a nominalised verb heading a negative clause dependent on a positive main clause. The negative clause is then reinterpreted as a separate independent clause; i.e. ‘without/not VERBing > ‘doesn’t/didn’t VERB’ (see (1a, 1b). In the second development, a negative nominalised clause, dependent on a positive imperative clause (see (2)), is used pragmatically as a negative independent clause, with omission of the corresponding positive command; i.e. ‘not VERBing, leave it’ > ‘don’t VERB’ (see (3)). Both of these changes involve the upgrading of a subordinate to a main clause, i.e. “insubordination” (Evans 2007).

(1a) Kaytetye predicate nominal privative

enye-wanenye=rtame re, paylpe=paperte

fruit-PRIV=CNTR 3SG.NOM leaf=ONLY

‘it (conkerberry bush) **had no** fruit, there were only leaves’ (Koch n.d. 25.5)

(1b) Kaytetye verbal negative

Alwengkeyne-nye atye kwere, kwerarte=tangkwerle atye arntwe-ngewanenye.

forget-PST 1SG.ERG 3SG.ACC 3SG.ACC-DEF=FIRST 1SG.ERG tell-NEG

‘I forgot it, I **didn’t tell** about it before.’ (Koch n.d. 30.8)

(2) Ngaanyatjara two-clause negative command

Pampu-ntja-maal-tu wanti

touch-NMLSR-PRIV-ERG leave-IMP.PF

‘Without touching it leave it.’/ ‘Don’t touch it, leave it.’ (Glass 1980: 178)

(3) Djapu negative subordinate clause used as command

yatju-n-mi-nya-miriw

yell-UNM-RECIP-NMLSR-PRIV

‘No quarrelling!’ (lit. ‘without yelling at each other’) (Morphy 1983: 44, 78)

These formal, and presumably etymological, relations between nominal privative suffixes and verbal negative inflections have been noted before by Australianists (Phillips forthcoming), as well as the occasional use of a negated nominalised clause with the force of a negative command. However, the diachronic processes involved in these changes have never been explicitly described. Meanwhile, in typological literature, diachronic attention to negatives has focussed on “negative cycles” (e.g. van Geldering 2009). And more attention has been devoted to diachronic processes which combine clauses into a single construction, i.e. clause fusion (Harris & Campbell 1995, Hopper & Traugott 2003), than to those that result in a dependent clause becoming independent, i.e. insubordination. This paper thus aims to contribute both to the diachronic typology of negative constructions and to the etymology of grammatical markers of negation in Australian languages.

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