

NEGATION IN LADAKHI: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract. This paper discusses in detail the grammatical aspect of negation in Ladakhi, a Sino-Tibetan language of the Himalayan group of languages spoken in the region of Leh and Ladakh in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. The data has been collected from a variety of sources including a book on Ladakhi grammar by Sanyukta Kaushal and 10 speakers from different regions of Ladakh. The data has been analysed in terms of the forms of negative markers across grammatical constructions and its distribution in these constructions. The analysis shows that the negative marker in Ladakhi constructions is not an independent morpheme in most cases. It rather changes its form depending on the verbal root that it affixes to. .

Keywords: Negation, Ladakhi, Tibeto-Burman Language, Marginalised and Diminishing Languages.

1. Introduction

Since the very beginning of human thought, affirmation and negation have been regarded as two basic categories of understanding. These categories, which capture the binary structure of thought and language, are integral to the process of reasoning, enabling individuals to assert or deny, agree or disagree, and ultimately make sense of the world. The Greek philosopher Aristotle, is attributed with the first systematic examination of this dichotomy in his works, particularly the *Organon and Metaphysics*. He argued that any meaningful sentence could be classified as either affirmative or negative, depending on whether it asserts or denies a predicate about a subject. This foundational idea has shaped disciplines such as logic, linguistics, and epistemology, influencing how humans perceive and articulate truths and falsehoods. By distinguishing affirmation from negation, Aristotle provided a framework that continues to underpin our understanding of cognition and

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communication. Aristotle termed assertion and negation as two basic categories of understanding in human communication. Thus, a very basic function of meaning in linguistic propositions is the expression of negation. When a speaker encodes negation in her linguistic expression, it can be manifested at multiple levels and in numerous ways. For instance, it is possible to negate the whole proposition (as in ‘I know her’ vs ‘I do not know her’) but linguistic negation also encompasses negating the presence of a thing, a person, place, time etc. (as in nobody, nowhere, never). This can also take the form of sentential compositions like ‘neither...nor’. Each form that a negative proposition takes imparts a different cognitive dimension to the phenomenon of negation. Additionally, there are socio-pragmatic aspects like politeness and diplomacy to negation. For instance, in English, a reply to the statement ‘You said I am a liar’, would carry different connotations when given the following forms- ‘No, I did not’ and ‘Not exactly’. The first one carries an outright negation of the assertion made in the original statement while the second form does not reject it outrightly. This paper explores the various manifestations of negation in Ladakhi, a Himalayan group of Tibeto-Himalayan branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family (Kaushal, 1979). The paper analyses various mechanisms that are used for negation in Ladakhi Language. It gives an account of forms and position of the negative as well as its distribution in different types of sentence structures.

2. Negation as a Morpho-syntactic Phenomenon

Aristotle’s exploration of negation extends to the nature of oppositions within logical propositions, a topic further analyzed by Laurence R. Horn in *A Natural History of Negation* (1978). Aristotle identifies two key forms of opposition: contradictory and contrary. Contradictory opposites are propositions that are both mutually exhaustive and mutually exclusive, meaning they account for all possible states of a domain and cannot both be true simultaneously. For example, “All pleasure is good” and “Some pleasure is not good” are contradictory opposites; the truth of one necessarily entails the falsity of the other, and together, they cover the entire logical spectrum. In contrast, contrary opposites are mutually exclusive but not mutually exhaustive, allowing for the possibility that both statements may be false. For instance, “All pleasure is good” and “No pleasure is good” are contrary opposites; while they cannot both be true at the same time, they leave room for a middle ground where neither extreme is valid, such as the scenario where “Some pleasure is good, and some pleasure is not good.” This distinction is crucial for logical reasoning, as it highlights the difference between binary choices and more nuanced possibilities. Aristotle’s framework, as elaborated by Horn, underscores the complexity of negation and its centrality to logical and linguistic analysis. While it may appear straightforward to define

negation as the antonym of affirmation, a closer examination reveals greater complexity. According to F. H. Bradley, as discussed in *The Principles of Logic* (1979), negation is inherently more reflexive than affirmation. Bradley argues that we often recognize affirmation before we understand denial; that is, our awareness of asserting something typically precedes our awareness of denying it. This reflexive nature of negation highlights its dependence on affirmation for its meaning and function. Furthermore, both Eastern and Western philosophical traditions have acknowledged the difficulty of precisely defining negation. Philosophers across these traditions have provided definitions that are at times contradictory and at other times complementary, reflecting the multifaceted nature of negation. These varying interpretations underscore the term's philosophical richness and its intricate relationship with affirmation, suggesting that negation is not merely its opposite but a complex and interdependent concept.

Numerous studies have sought to analyze and categorize the various forms of negation across languages, highlighting its linguistic and conceptual diversity. Otto Jespersen, in his pioneering work as early as 1917, explored the multifaceted dimensions of negation, including instances where propositions lack explicit surface-level linguistic markers for negation. While Jespersen's primary focus was on English, he also drew comparisons with several other European languages to underscore cross-linguistic variations. One of his significant contributions was the formulation of the Negative-First Principle, which posits that, by default, the negative marker tends to precede the element it negates. This principle reflects a syntactic tendency observable in many languages, wherein negation is positioned prominently to emphasize its scope and function. Jespersen's work remains foundational in understanding the structural and functional aspects of negation, offering valuable insights into how it operates within and across linguistic systems.

David Crystal defines negation as “a process of constructing grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of a sentence's meaning.” This definition highlights the dual impact of negation on syntax and semantics. By introducing a negative element into a sentence, a syntactic change occurs, which in turn leads to a semantic transformation, resulting in a contradiction of the original meaning. Crystal's reference to “some or all of the sentence's meaning” points to recent theories of negation that examine how linguistic elements are distributed within a sentence and how this distribution affects the interpretation of negation. This approach underscores the importance of structural arrangement in determining the meaning of a negated sentence. By focusing on the interplay between grammatical form and semantic function, Crystal's perspective provides a nuanced understanding of negation as a dynamic and multifaceted linguistic process.

Payne (1985) focusses on standard negative which consists of morphological negation, negative markers and verbal negation. He clarifies the scope of sentential negation as in the following sentence-

Suneel didn't marry Shyama in the temple.

In this sentence the scope of negation can be either on the whole verb phrase, which will give the meaning that 'it is not true that Suneel married Shyama in the temple' or it might be a negation of the locative only, which will give the meaning that 'Suneel did marry Shyama but not in the temple'. So, the meaning of the sentence will differ according to the scope of negation.

Miestamo (2014, 2017) has done the most elaborate work on negation in the world's languages in recent times. He has looked at the structural differences between affirmatives and negatives systematically on the basis of a sample of 297 languages. Miestamo (2017) claims that negation is a function that has been universally grammaticalized in the world's languages. According to him, some languages may lack explicit grammatical forms to represent the negative element but it does not imply that they do not have other tools of negation. He proposes a basic distinction between symmetric and asymmetric negation where symmetric negatives show no structural differences with respect to affirmatives apart from the presence of the negative marker(s), whereas in asymmetric negatives, additional structural differences can be found. Asymmetric negation can be divided into subtypes according to the nature of the asymmetry. The main subtypes have to do with the marking of finiteness, reality status, emphasis, tense-aspect, mood and person-number.

Croft (1991) introduces the concept of 'cycle of negation' in which a standard form evolves from the existing forms of negation in languages which undergo changes in a cyclic form.

3. Ladakhi: An Overview

3.1. Typological characteristics of Ladakhi. The language which is treated linguistically as Ladakhi is known by several names in different regions of Ladakh. Namgial (2018) classifies it as an off shoot of classical Tibetan which is usually identified as Bhoti in Ladakh and Yi-ge in Baltistan, whereas spoken Tibetan is known as Phal-skad. The speakers of Ladakhi belong to different groups across the trans-Himalayan region. The grammatical system of Ladakhi differs from colloquial Tibetan and both are mutually unintelligible as Ladakhi retains archaic and classical Tibetan terms which are not in frequent use in contemporary spoken Tibetan, but are bound up with the Tibetan people and

its literature through learning classical Tibetan (Namgial 2018:5). Zeisler (2008) identifies Ladakhi along with Balti as the westernmost language group of the Tibeto-Burman languages. Typologically Ladakhi, like other Tibeto-Burman languages, is an SOV language, e.g.

ŋã ðon zen
I melons eat
'I eat melons'.

As in most SOV languages Ladakhi has postpositions:

bukpo tebale yoken/thilne duk
book table under is
'The book is under the table.'

The marker of Comparison (MC) follows the standard of comparison (SC) as below and MC follows SC:

ra:mi sete sŋ riŋmo duk
Ram SC MC tall is
'Ram is taller than Sita.'

Like other SOV languages, in Ladakhi also, auxiliary follows the main verb.

ŋe: gongzŋ zoste in
I+enr dinner eat pst perf (aux)
'I have had my dinner.'

Genitive in Ladakhi precedes the governing noun.

ra:m- i loped
raam Gen book
'Ram's book.'

Place adverbial occur in descending order

delhi- kŋmla nŋgŋr-I hati naŋa:
Delhi-of Kamla Nagar in shop+pstp (in)
'In the shop in Kamla Nagar in Delhi.'

Adverb can precede as well as follows the head noun

mother tongue. Nevertheless, linguistically these dialects are mutually understandable and linguists like Kaushal (1979) have treated Ladakhi as the umbrella-term for these languages. Hence, in this paper, we will discuss the grammatical aspect of negation, treating Ladakhi as one group of these linguistic varieties, giving specific variations of form where necessary.

4. Negation in Ladakhi

4.1. **Previous studies.** The grammatical aspect of negation in Ladakhi has been studied by several scholars including some studies on dialectal varieties like Purik and Balti but it is mostly not a focussed study on negation, rather it has appeared as a part of the overall Ladakhi grammar. Some major studies that discuss negation in Ladakhi are- Koshal (1979, 2005), Campbell (2000), Zeisler (2008) among others. All these studies have one common finding, which is that Ladakhi manifests negative through the negative morpheme *ma-*.

Additionally, different studies have brought out different specific details of negation. For instance, Koshal's (1979) study on Ladakhi grammar reports *met/d* and *mən* as the opposites of *yot/d* and *yin*, without breaking the whole form into the negative affix and the verbal stem. On the other hand, Campbell (2000) goes on to describe each element of the final morphological form which consists of the negative affix and the verbal forms. The following examples from Campbell (933) show the details of this affixation.

- a. *gro-gi-yod*
 'I go'
 ηagro-gi-med
 'I don't go' (ma + yod → med).
- b. *kho za-gi-dug*
 'he eats'
 kho za go-mi-dug
 'he doesn't eat'.
- c. *dig Yag red*
 'this is a Yak'
 dig Yak (yin-pa) ma-red
 'this isn't a Yak'.

As shown by Campbell, a sentence is negated by placing negative particle *ma-* between stem and auxiliary. He specifies that 'The copula is *dug* or *yod*; negative *med*, allomorphs of *yod*; -əd added to vocalic final; C: əd→t added to consonantal final c: e.g. root *sil-* 'read' + *yod* → *sil-lət*' (2000: 933).

5. Data and Analysis

The present study uses data from several sources. This majorly includes informants from various regions of the Ladakhi-speaking area. Other sources include research papers, blogs, websites and social media platforms. The collected data, usually in the form of sentences has been presented in terms of the diverse constructions which imply negation in any sense, for example sentential negation, neither-nor construction, affirmative or negative answers etc.

5.1. Sentential Negation.

1. *nəməza: gjala: mi-ruk*
weather pleasant neg-is

‘The weather is not pleasant.’

2. *kho ram-i pomo ma-nok*
today Ram-Gen daughter neg-is

‘She is not Ram’s daughter.’

3. *dhirin tsh:ti: ma-nok*
today holiday neg-is

‘Today is not a holiday.’

4. *ŋa: thətpo mjet-pin*
I happy neg-pst-prog

‘I was not happy.’

In example (1) the simple present tense marker is -duk. When mi- is prefixed to it, it results in miruk. This shows that the negative affix is phonologically conditioned.

5.2. Constituent Negation.

5. *lasp-o ma-dupkhəŋ inok*
work-def neg-complete is

‘This work is incomplete.’

6. *kho ma-thuŋkhəŋ inok*
he/she neg-known person is

‘He is an unknown person.’

7. *doβo ma-tsukhən inok*
 door neg-known is
 ‘The door is unlocked.’

The same meaning as in constituent negation can be expressed as sentential negation also as in examples (8)

8. *doβo tsukhən ma-nok*
 door locked neg-is
 ‘The door is not locked.’

5.3. Neither nor Construction. Ladakhi has two ways of expressing neither-nor construction. One which is like English or Hindi, where corresponding to the English ‘either’ Ladakhi has ‘*jaṇəna:*’ which is the general pattern in Ladakhi for forming negation. In this construction too, the negative particle is attached to the verb.

9. *jaṇəna: meri: jaṇəna: zon dən ika ma-joṇ-s*
 either Mary either John yesterday here neg-come-past
 ‘Neither Mary nor John came here yesterday.’

10. *jaṇəna: kho-a: khædzī mi-ruk jaṇəna: pene mi-ruk*
 either he-dat food neg-pres either money neg-pres
 ‘He has neither food nor money.’

A similar meaning can also be conveyed by the following construction, where unlike Hindi or English, Ladakhi uses only one negative element *ma-* for neither nor construction and the form *na:ŋ* ‘and’ perform the role of neither-nor as in (11) below.

11. *zon naṇ meri ŋieska dəŋ ika ma:-joṇ-s*
 John and Mary both yesterday here nneg-come-past
 ‘Neither John nor Mary came here yesterday.’

5.4. Imperative Construction. Similar to Hindi, in Ladakhi also, pronominals are not used in imperative sentences.

12. *dōksa: ma-tšha*
 now neg-go
 ‘Don’t go now’.

13. *me n̄ŋ ηⁱ ɔmpo j̄ŋ spa: m̄ŋ-rt̄sei*
 Fire of with to have fun neg-play
 ‘Don’t play with fire’.

14. *i-βo ma-t̄so*
 this neg-do
 ‘Don’t do this’.

As it is evident from examples 12-14, for imperative sentences as well, the general pattern of forming negative is employed, that is the negative element is affixed with the verb.

5.5. Negative Interrogative Construction.

15. *dirin̄ t̄shuti: -k ma-nog-a:*
 today holiday of neg-is-Q.mkr
 ‘Is it not a holiday today?’

16. *sua: t̄sh̄tpa: thop-gosa: ma-nok*
 who+dat punishment get should neg-Pres.
 ‘Who shouldn’t get punishment?’

17. *sita kheorann̄-i la:s mi-t̄sot̄ses-la: t̄sh̄ŋtpa: thoba- ma-nuk*
 Sita she-gen work neg-to do for punishment get-neg-fut
 ‘Will Sita not get punishment for not doing her work?’

As evident from examples 15-17, the question marker *a:* is attached with the verb to show the question form in Ladakhi.

5.6. Negative and Affirmative Answer.

18. *ŋjera:ŋ-e ŋaZa t̄sapik jato dZa den-a*
 You (for) us little help to Q.P.
 ‘Can you help me/us a bit?’
 ka:sale - ‘yes’
 ma-nle - ‘no’

19. *t̄ši kheora : η bazar-la š̄jead-a:*
 Q.word you market to go Q.P.
 ‘Did you go to the market?’

tʃ^he-jɔ̃t - yes
go-affirmative marker

tʃɔ̃-met - no
go-negative marker

In the case of negative and affirmative answer, as it can be seen the negative maker -ma- is always affixed with the verb like a normal negative construction in Ladakhi.

5.7. Scope of Negation.

- a. Not many arrows hit the target
- b. Many arrows didn't hit the target.

In English these two sentences have two different shades of meaning because of the scope of negation. But in Ladakhi both these sentences are expressed similarly:

20. *da mɔ̃ŋpo niʃana: tʃɔ̃k mɔ̃ŋjɔ̃ŋ*
 arrow many target hit -neg-pst

In English the two sentences are different because in first sentence (1a.) negation has the quantifier also in its scope with the verb whereas in second (1b.) only verb is in the scope of negation. In Ladakhi, the general pattern of the occurrence of negative particle is with the verb (aux) so that there is no possibility of negation having quantifiers in its scope. As we can see in the above sentences, only verb is in the scope of negation.

5.8. **Negative Quantifiers.** Let us see the following English sentences and compare them with their Ladakhi equivalents.

- a. I don't want anything
- b. I want nothing and
- c. I don't want nothing.

21. *ŋa: tʃɔ̃ŋ gosa:-met*
 I anything want-neg-aux

In a Ladakhi sentence, double negation is not allowed. Thus, all these sentences of English have only one Ladakhi equivalent which has been given above (21).

In the case of sentential and constituent negation also, anything can be either negated by sentential negation or by constituent negation but both sentential or constituent negation cannot occur together. That is in Ladakhi, the fact negated once by constituent negation cannot be negated again.

22. **ðoβo ma-tʃukh̃ðŋ ma-nok*
 door aff-neg-locked sen neg-is
 *‘The door is not unlocked’.

5.9. Sentential Negation.

23. *kho-e ige-zik dia-mi-ruk*
 He-erg letter-sing progressive-neg-simple pres
 ‘She is not writing a letter’.

24. *tus ma: gjukspa: buda mi-ruk*
 time so fast fly (neg) simple pres
 ‘Time doesn’t fly so fast’.

5.10. **Inherently Negative Quantifiers.** Ladakhi does not have separate words for ‘somebody’ vs. ‘nobody’ and ‘something’ vs. ‘nothing’.

25. *su: zago sige jato tʃo-ma-ŋjan*
 any friend single help do-neg-can
 ‘Not a single friend can help us’.

26. *ŋa: tʃðŋ gosa: mi-t*
 I anything want neg-be
 ‘I want nothing’.

27. *tʃuk̃ðri-naŋa tʃu mi-ruk*
 Bucket-in water neg-present
 ‘There is no water in the bucket’.

In sentences with quantifiers also, the general pattern of expressing negation is used, that is the negative particle is affixed with the verbal stem.

5.11. **Negated Adverbials.** Negated Adverbials in Ladakhi can be expressed as

28. *ŋa: ri-a: ma:ŋpo tʃatʃes th̃ðda: mi-ruk*
 I mountain-pst always to go like neg-is
 ‘Not always I like to go to mountains’.

Again, there is no difference between this sentence and the English sentence ‘I don’t like to go to mountains always’.

5.12. **Inherently Negative Adverbials.** Ladakhi does not make distinction between ‘ever’ vs. ‘never’. The word for ‘ever’ is *mane*. To express the sense which is expressed by English ‘never’, Ladakhi uses *mane* with negative element *-ma-* occurring with the verb. As we can see in the following sentences.

29. *i: pomo- gortšes mane mi-gagok*
 this girl-erg to laugh ever neg-stop-fut
 ‘This girl will never stop laughing’.

30. *tši: i: pomos gortšes mane mi-ga-gog-a:*
 Q-word this girl laugh ever neg-stop-future Q. Marker
 ‘Won’t this girl ever stop laughing?’

Thus, we can see in these two sentences there are not separate words for ‘never’ and ‘ever’ in both these sentences *mane* ‘ever’ is used which gives the meaning of never when the negative particle is affixed with the verb. The data in this study shows that Ladakhi has one negative morphological item which expresses various negative aspects. This negative item is a particle which takes many forms depending on its environment. This negative particle does not stand on its own; its status is never independent. It is a bound morpheme which is generally fixed with the verb in between the stem and the auxiliary and sometimes with adjectives. Its placement with the auxiliary verb has also been attested by Campbell (2000: 1644). Thus, the negative particle *ma-* in Ladakhi has to perform the function of expressing various types of negation. It takes different morphological forms *ma-*, *mi-* and *me-* in different sentences. Its independent existence is not possible even in reply to a question.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of our data brings out some major findings about negation in Ladakhi:

1. Ladakhi shows a negative element form *ma-* which functions as an affix that is, it gets affixed to a verbal stem. As opposed to languages like Hindi or English, Ladakhi negative marker does not occur independently.
2. The Ladakhi negative marker *ma-* also follows ‘Neg-first’ principle as proposed by Jespersen, as it occurs before the aspect to be negated.
3. Since Ladakhi negative marker changes its form in accordance with the verbal stem, it exhibits phonologically conditioned allomorph-like behaviour.
4. The data also seems to show that different regional dialects of Ladakhi have a tendency to use one form more than the other.

To conclude, the occurrence of negative particle *ma-*, which takes different forms and is often phonologically-conditioned, is the general pattern of forming negation in Ladakhi. There are some cases where the constituent negation occurs but that is fairly rare. There are also some kinds of negative constructions which do not occur in Ladakhi, for instance ‘neither...nor’. This small study on Ladakhi negation shows the need for further study to explore the diachronic variations as well as the socio-pragmatic dimension of this grammatical aspect. At this juncture, it is also especially relevant to study a language whose native speakers (as reported in the last census) are suddenly dropping in numbers, because of the impetus that NEP 2020 puts on the preservation of marginalised and diminishing languages. The recent political restructuring of the region is also bound to have an impact on the linguistic identity of the speakers of this region, very likely resulting in subtle changes over a short period of time. Hence it is important to document these changes.

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