

A contrastive study of negation among Amele, English, and Tok Pisin

This study is a contrastive linguistic study of negative expressions. The languages used for the contrastive study were Amele, a local language spoken in Papua New Guinea, Tok Pisin, a creole language that is the lingua franca of Papua New Guinea, and English. By contrasting these three languages, we want to determine the differences between the negative forms of English and Amele and the functional role Tok Pisin plays between them. This contrastive study aims to provide a more in-depth description of the negative forms of languages spoken in New Guinea. As pointed out in a previous study by Foley (2000), New Guinea (or Papuan) languages exhibit different grammatical behavior than English and other major languages. Similarly, Tok Pisin, a creole, has a grammar similar to English, but its usage is quite different. Therefore, we contrast English, Tok Pisin, and Amele with English to provide a deeper analysis of the negative form usage and clarify the differences between English and Tok Pisin (Payne 1985; Elliott 2000).

Example (1) shows an example of a negative sentence in English, Tok Pisin, and Amele. English uses the negation marker "not," Tok Pisin uses the negation marker "no," and Amele uses "qee" ('q' is here a dorso-labiovelar). These negatives share the same position before the verb "eat".

(1) Negation in the sample languages:

English: I don't eat a cake.

Tok Pisin: Mi no kaikai cake.
I not eat cake

Amele: Ija cake qee jerim.
I cake not eat-negative past. 1st person singular
Ija cake jigina.

The point to note in example (1) is that in Amele, the verb agrees with the present tense and 1st person singular in the affirmative sentence but agrees with the negative past tense and 1st person singular in the negative sentence. The special word formation of negative verbs in Amele is specifically investigated in this contrastive study. Although descriptive grammar for Amele by Roberts (1987) already exists, this study uses parallel texts that the author prepared with Amele speakers during field research. The parallel texts are the translations of Snow White, Hansel and Gretel, and the Three Little Pigs from English into Tok Pisin and Amele. The texts were created for Amele-speaking children but can also be used in controlled studies. The negative expressions present in the texts were extracted and studied.

(2) Snow White:

English: Then give it to me, because **I cannot live without her.**

Tok Pisin: Orait, givim long mi long wanem **mi no inap i stap suupose** yupla no givim mi.
I no enough stay; I cannot live

Amele: Odi fii ija iteiga, elnuc **ija uqa kec bahic gabigina.** (no use of negation)
I her too much love-present tense (her); I love her too much

In Example (2), the original English sentence is a negative sentence with the auxiliary verb "cannot". In Tok Pisin, the negation occurs before the auxiliary verb "inap". In Amele, the negative is translated as an affirmative sentence, not a negative sentence with a negation. Although this is a small number of examples, the complexity of the negative verb form in Amele suggests an incentive to use active sentences instead of negative ones when possible.

Based on the results observed the data, this study concludes the following. Amele negation is morphologically more complex than in English, and Tok Pisin negation is simpler than in English. We point out that negation in Amele is considered to be semantically burdensome (belonging to the sense of unreality: Elliott 2000).

References

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