

## Negation in Tamil and Issues of Scope and NPI Licensing

The status and clausal position of negation has far-reaching syntactic and semantic consequences cross-linguistically, affecting such phenomena as *do*-support in English and scope interpretation. While research in these areas has covered a wide range of languages, negation in Tamil has not received much treatment in the literature (though see Rangan 1971; Schiffman 1982). In this paper we will be looking at Tamil negation with respect to clause structure, licensing of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs), and scope issues. Consider the following Tamil sentences:

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|-----|---------------------------------------|-----|--|
| (1) | avan- $\emptyset$ veelai-ye sen-j-aan | (2) | avan- $\emptyset$ veelai-ye seyya- $\emptyset$ -le |
|     | he-nom work-acc do-pst-3sm            |     | he-nom work-acc do-inf-neg                         |
|     | ‘He did the work.’                    |     | ‘He didn’t / doesn’t do the work.’                 |

The negation *-le* in (2) is a head that adjoins to the verb; the verb form that is its complement is always invariant for tense<sup>1</sup>, number, and person. This suggests that the negated verb complex is nonfinite. However, the non-negated verbal counterpart in (1) is so marked, suggesting that Neg in (2) may be playing the role of these features. In fact, Amritavalli and Jayaseelan 2001 argue that negation in Dravidian contributes finite features, making the verbal complex finite. Their proposal divides what is conventionally *tense* into a finite/nonfinite distinction and temporal aspect; the former is located in a Mood Phrase, headed by Neg, Agr, or modals, and the latter in an Aspect Phrase. The verb thus adjoins first to the negative auxiliary in MP and that complex moves to AspP. Their approach appealingly minimizes the difference between negated and non-negated clauses by positing negation as occupying the position of other elements with which it is in complementary distribution. It is not, however, a conclusive account. It remains unclear to what extent Neg and the verb are bound at the syntactic stage or whether this fusion occurs at the later, morphological level; it is crucial to understand the status of the Neg-verb complex at each stage in the derivation to give a complete account of its features and its interaction with related syntactic phenomena.

Crucially, negation being part of a complex head clearly affects the treatment of related semantic phenomena in the language, such as that Tamil negation can only take wide scope (constituent negation can only be accomplished with intonation), and the licensing of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs). Tamil shares some similarities with Hindi in this latter regard. Both languages lack negative quantifiers; instead, they have an NPI and negation to express *no* NP, *nowhere*, etc. Interestingly and contra standard assumptions about NPI-licensing, NPIs in both Hindi and Tamil need not be c-commanded by a licenser at S-structure, as (3) shows.

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|-----|--|
| (3) | oru paiyan- $\emptyset$ -um veelai-ye seyya- $\emptyset$ -le |
|     | one boy-nom-NPI work-acc do-inf-neg                          |
|     | ‘Not a single boy did the work.’ <sup>2</sup>                |

Because the NPI is in subject position, it is not c-commanded by negation. To explain subject NPI licensing for Hindi, Mahajan 1990 argues that NPIs are licensed by negation raising to c-command them at LF. We see, however, that Mahajan’s argument cannot be applied to Tamil because of certain crucial differences between properties of negation in Hindi and Tamil. Hindi negation functions like an adverbial, a free morpheme with fairly unrestricted movement; the main verb in a negated sentence is marked for person, tense, and number features. Specifically, Mahajan’s argument requires that Neg raise to finite IP at LF, and further that no barriers can intervene between Neg and the NPI (Mahajan 1988, 1990). Both

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<sup>1</sup> The interpretation of (2) is ambiguous between past and present tense; future negation is expressed differently depending on whether a habitual or distant future reading is intended; see Schiffman 1982 for details.

<sup>2</sup> *-um* also has a non-NPI meaning, ‘also,’ which we aren’t concerned with here.

parts of the argument are complicated in Tamil by the fact that negation is bound to the verb and cannot move independently of it.

In looking for other ways to explain NPI licensing in Tamil, then, two possible solutions arise. Firstly, NegP can be positioned above TP and c-command the NPI from there at S-structure, a position taken by Laka 1990; this may mean that the ordering of functional projections is parametrized. (Roper 1992 proposes that NegP c-commands TP in Tamil on grounds other than NPI licensing.) The second possibility is that constituents reconstruct to base position at LF, so that subjects reconstruct to Spec(VP) and subjects with NPIs are thus c-commanded by negation at LF. This proposal is supported by independent evidence making it more appealing than the first. Reconstruction of subjects at LF follows naturally from the interesting fact that scrambling in Tamil does not affect scope interpretation. The following two sentences illustrate this:

- (4) reNDu pasang-aL-Ø ellaa maanga-ve-yum<sup>3</sup> sapp-TT-anga  
 two boy-pl-NOM all mango-ACC-Qu eat-pst-3pl  
 ‘Two boys ate all the mangoes.’
- (5) ellaa maanga-ve-yum reNDu pasang-aL-Ø t sapp-TT-anga  
 all mango-ACC-Qu two boy-pl-NOM eat-pst-3pl  
 ‘Two boys ate all the mangoes.’

The interpretations of (4) and (5) are identical, with *two boys* taking wide scope despite surface scrambling of the direct object in (5). Sarma 1999 argues on the basis of this fact that scrambled constituents obligatorily reconstruct to base position at LF. If we assume reconstruction of all elements at LF, we can easily explain licensing of NPIs in subject position.

To sum up, the status of negation both in terms of its status as a functional head rather than an adverb and its association with the verbal complement to form a complex have interesting consequences for issues of scope. The case of NPI licensing particularly is further complicated by the fact that these items in Tamil are not licensed by Neg at S-structure itself. Even though NPIs in Hindi share this property, we cannot easily extend arguments for NPI licensing made for Hindi (by e.g. Mahajan and Lahiri 1998) because negation in Tamil exhibits certain crucial differences from negation in Hindi. Our paper will consider various treatments of the clausal status of negation and how these, in turn, bear on scope and NPI licensing in Tamil.

## References

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<sup>3</sup> This reading of *-um* is crucially different from the NPI reading; here it is just a clitic that must co-occur with the universal quantifier *ellaa* ‘all.’