

## Negation in Mu-nya\*

IKEDA Takumi

*Institute for Research in Humanities,  
Kyoto University*

### Summary

The Mu-nya language belongs to the Qiangic branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family and is spoken by Tibetans living around Mt. Minya Konka in Sichuan, southwest China. The general expression for ‘not be’ by the speaker’s recognition, such as ‘A is not B’, is expressed as A B / $\eta\omega^{33}$ -  $\eta e^{55}(ti^{33})$ / in Mu-nya. / $\eta e^{55}$ / is a declarative, a part of speech, which expresses a statement with certainty, while / $ti^{33}$ / is another declarative that conveys a statement with confirmation. These two declaratives are often used in combination, and the negator / $\eta\omega^{33}$ -/ precedes them. Huang (1991) revealed that Mu-nya has three kinds of negative prefixes: / $\eta\omega^{33}$ -/ is the general negator and is also used in the verb predicate under the imperfect aspect; / $me^{33}$ -/ is used under the perfect aspect; and / $t\epsilon\omega^{33}$ -/ is used for prohibitive statements. Apart from Huang’s simple observation, Mu-nya has complex negative expressions that have not been reported in detail thus far. This study analyzes the basic functions and grammatical behavior of negators in Mu-nya concerning evidentiality, focusing on negating target items such as the verb, the suffix (=aspect), or the declarative (=evidential) in verb predicates. From my perspective, the negator / $\eta\omega^{33}$ -/ does not negate the verb stem directly (except for stative verbs), and mainly appears preceding the position of declaratives, or often precedes the imperfect verb suffix /- $po^{33}$ / to negate it directly. In contrast, the negator / $me^{33}$ -/ appears at the preceding position of an active verb stem under the perfect aspect, or often negates the perfect verb suffix /- $su\omega^{33}$ / directly. In addition, I will introduce some dialectal varieties corresponding to the general negative expression / $\eta\omega^{33}$ -  $\eta e^{55}(ti^{33})$ / ‘not be’ in Mu-nya.

**Key words:** Tibeto-Burman, Mu-nya, negator, evidentiality, aspect

關鍵詞：藏緬語、木雅語、否定辭、示證性、未完/完了體

---

\*This report was presented at the 53th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Language and Linguistics held at the University of North Texas, October 2–4, 2020. This study was supported by a Grant-in-Aid from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science: A Study on the Historical Development of the Sino-Tibetan Languages and their Typological Geography. (headed by IKEDA Takumi, No. 18H05219). I would like to thank Editage (www.editage.com) for English language editing.

## 1. Introduction

The Mu-nya language belongs to the Qiangic branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family and is spoken by about 10,000 Tibetans who live around Mt. Minya Konka in Sichuan, southwest China.



The Mu-nya (WɿT. *Mi nyag*) District



A snap shot at a Mu-nya village in Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture

The Chinese scholar Huang Bufan (1985) demonstrated that Mu-nya has three kinds of negative prefixes: /nɯ<sup>33</sup>-/ is the general negator and is also used in the verb predicate under the imperfect aspect; /mɛ<sup>33</sup>-/, is used under the perfect aspect; and /tɕɯ<sup>33</sup>-/ is used for prohibitive statements. Huang's observation is simple, but to the point. If we delve further into the topic, we find that Mu-nya negative expressions are somewhat complex concerning evidentiality. This negative construction in Mu-nya has not been described in detail thus far.

## 2. The Noun Predicate and Declaratives

In Mu-nya, a noun predicate sentence like 'A is B' is expressed as 'A B DEC.' See example sentence (1) below.

- (1)    nɯ<sup>55</sup>      k<sup>h</sup>i<sup>33</sup>zi<sup>55</sup>mi<sup>33</sup>      nɛ<sup>55</sup>.  
          1sg.        student                    DEC

'I am a student.'

- /nɛ<sup>33</sup>/    statements with certainty [+certain]  
 /ni<sup>33</sup>/    general/objective statements  
 /ti<sup>33</sup>/    confirmed statement [+confirm]; discover/notice

The "declarative" is a part of speech in Mu-nya, which appears at the end of a predicate and implies the speaker's evidentiality. Mu-nya has three kinds of declaratives for statements: /ni<sup>33</sup>/ is used for general statements; /nɛ<sup>33</sup>/ is used for statements that connote certainty; and /ti<sup>33</sup>/ indicates confirmation or discovery. /nɛ<sup>33</sup>/ and /ti<sup>33</sup>/ are often combined together as /nɛ<sup>33</sup> ti<sup>33</sup>/. However, no other combinations are grammatically allowed. Typical affirmative expressions with declaratives include the following:

- (2)    nɯ<sup>55</sup>      pu<sup>33</sup> ɣũ<sup>33</sup>ndɯ<sup>33</sup>      k<sup>h</sup>i<sup>33</sup>zi<sup>55</sup>mi<sup>33</sup>      nɛ<sup>55</sup> (ti<sup>33</sup>).    [+certain]  
          1sg.        Tibetan letters                    student                    DEC

'I am a student in the Tibetan class.'

- (3)    ʔɛ<sup>33</sup>tsu<sup>55</sup>      nɯ<sup>55</sup> = ɣa<sup>33</sup>      k<sup>h</sup>i<sup>33</sup>zi<sup>55</sup>mi<sup>33</sup>ndzu<sup>35</sup>      ni<sup>33</sup>.    [general]  
          3sg.                    1sg. = GNT        student friend                    DEC

'S/he is my classmate.'

- (4)  $\eta e^{55} tsw^{33}$  =  $n\eta^{33}$   $k^h i^{33} z i^{55} m i^{33}$   $t i^{33}$ . [+confirm] discover/notice  
 3sg. = also student DEC

‘S/he is also a student.’ [just noticed]

### 3. Negation in the Noun Predicate

Negation in the noun predicate in Mu-nya is expressed by the negator / $n\eta^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}$ / preceding a declarative like / $n\eta^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}$ /. Negations such as ‘[noun] A not be [noun] B’ is communicated in Mu-nya as follows (|| indicates the boundary of the subject and the predicate in the sentence): noun A is the subject, and noun B plus / $n\eta^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}$  ( $t i^{33}$ )/ is the predicate.

[noun] A		[noun] B	$n\eta^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}$ ( $t i^{33}$ ).
<b>Subject</b>		<b>Predicate</b>	[+certain, (+confirm)]

#### Negative Construction in the Noun Predicate in Mu-nya

Now let us examine the negative counterpart of typical sentences with three kinds of declaratives:

- (2)'  $\eta\eta^{55}$   $pu^{33}$   $\gamma\tilde{u}^{33}$   $nd\eta^{33}$   $k^h i^{33} z i^{55} m i^{33}$   $n\eta^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}$  ( $t i^{33}$ ).  
 1sg. Tibetan letters student NEG- DEC [+certain, (+confirm)]

‘I am NOT a student in the Tibetan class.’

- (3)'  $\eta e^{33} tsw^{55}$   $\eta\eta^{55}$  =  $\gamma a^{33}$   $k^h i^{33} z i^{55} m i^{33}$   $ndz\eta^{35}$   $n\eta^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}$  ( $t i^{33}$ ).  
 3sg. I = GNT student friend NEG- DEC [+certain, (+confirm)]

‘S/he is NOT my classmate.’

- (4)'  $\eta e^{55} tsw^{33}$  =  $n\eta^{33}$   $k^h i^{33} z i^{55} m i^{33}$   $n\eta^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}$   $t i^{33}$ .  
 3sg. = also student NEG- DEC [+certain, (+confirm)]

‘S/he is NOT a student, either.’ [just noticed]

Regardless of the ranking of evidentiality in affirmative sentences, all of these negative counterparts employ one negative expression — / $n\eta^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}$  ( $t i^{33}$ )/ — to make a statement.

As seen above, the general negative expression in the noun predicate is / $n\eta^{33}$ - $\eta e^{55}$  ( $t i^{33}$ )/, and is merely used in negative combinations with other declaratives like / $n\eta^{55}$ -

$ni^{33}$ / and  $/n\mu^{55}-ti^{33}/$ .  $/n\mu^{55}-ni^{33}/$  is used when it is necessary to emphasize ‘it is NOT: that is the truth’, and  $/n\mu^{55}-ti^{33}/$  is used especially when the speaker needs to stress ‘just discovered/noticed: it is NOT, (I have never known at all.)’.

---

$/n\mu^{33}-\eta e^{55}(ti^{33})/$	ordinary negative statements with certainty [+certain, (+confirm)]
<hr/>	
$/n\mu^{55}-ni^{33}/$	emphasizing ‘it is NOT: objective true’: < general statements [-certain, -confirm].
$/n\mu^{55}-ti^{33}/$	emphasizing ‘just discovered/noticed: it is NOT’ < confirmed statement [+confirm, +certain]

---

#### 4. Declaratives in the Adjective Predicate

Mu-nya adjectives in the predicate should be poly-syllabic or duplicated mono-syllabic words like  $/ku^{55}ku^{55}/$  ‘cold’.

- (5)  $pu^{55}su^{55}$      $m\mu^{55}$      $ku^{55}ku^{55}$      $ti^{33}$ .  
today,            sky/weather    cold            DEC [+confirm]

‘It is cold today.’ [just noticed]

The declaratives  $/\eta e^{33}$ ,  $ni^{33}$ ,  $ti^{33}/$  are also used in the adjective predicate to express evidentiality, as well as in noun predicate sentences.

Negative construction in the adjective predicate in Mu-nya is basically the same as in the noun predicate, expressed by the negator  $/n\mu^{33}-/$  preceding a declarative; the adjective itself must not be negated.

---

[noun] A		[Adjective]	$n\mu^{33}-\eta e^{55}(ti^{33})$ .
<b>Subject</b>		<b>Predicate</b>	[+certain, (+confirm)]

---

##### Negative Construction in the Adjective Predicate in Mu-nya

Let us look at the negative counterpart of sentence (5), a typical adjective predicate sentence.

- (5)' pu<sup>55</sup>su<sup>55</sup> mu<sup>55</sup> ku<sup>55</sup>ku<sup>55</sup> ɲu<sup>33</sup>- ɲe<sup>55</sup> (ti<sup>33</sup>).  
 today, sky/weather cold NEG- DEC [+certain, (+confirm)]

‘It is NOT cold today.’

It is merely used in negative combinations with other declaratives like /ɲu<sup>55</sup>- ni<sup>33</sup>/ and /ɲu<sup>55</sup>- ti<sup>33</sup>/, except for special situations.

- (5)'' pu<sup>55</sup>su<sup>55</sup> mu<sup>55</sup> ku<sup>55</sup>ku<sup>55</sup> ɲu<sup>33</sup>- ti<sup>33</sup>.  
 today sky/weather cold NEG- DEC [+confirm]

‘It is NOT cold today.’ [just noticed]

- (6) mbo<sup>55</sup> ti<sup>33</sup>ti<sup>55</sup> ɲu<sup>33</sup>- ni<sup>55</sup>.  
 mountain flat NEG- DEC [-certain, -confirm] = objective statement.

‘The mountain is NOT flat.’ [it is the truth]

/ɲu<sup>55</sup>- ni<sup>33</sup>/ is used when it is necessary to highlight ‘it is NOT: that is the truth’.

## 5. The Negative Structure of the Verb Predicate

A Mu-nya verb consists of a directional prefix plus a verb stem, and adds a suffix for the aspect or a modal if needed, and takes declaratives at the end of the predicate.

---

<b>Prefix- Stem</b>	<b>(=Suffix) / (=Modal)</b>	<b>Declarative</b>
direction (person)*	< person (vowel alternation)	
<span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Verb</span>	aspect / mood	evidentiality

\*When the verb does not contain a suffix, the vowel alternation appears on the stem.

---

### Verb Predicate in Mu-nya

Next, we examine a typical affirmative sentence with a verb suffix.

- (7) ɲi<sup>55</sup> ndzu<sup>55</sup> fa<sup>33</sup>- ndzu<sup>55</sup> = po<sup>33</sup> ɲe<sup>33</sup>.  
 1sg. [ERG] meal DIR- eat =SFX:impft DEC

‘I eat a meal.’ [imperfect = present/future]

Sentence (8) is a sentence with a modal instead of a suffix.



## 6. Negation in the Verb Predicate with Declaratives /rΛ<sup>33</sup>/

### 6.1 Another Declarative in the Verb Predicate

Mu-nya has another declarative, /rΛ<sup>33</sup>/, which indicates a statement with the speaker's evidentiality as either experienced or realized. See sentence (11).

- (11) ndə<sup>33</sup>q<sup>h</sup>Λ<sup>55</sup>    ʔu<sup>33</sup>tʃe<sup>55</sup>    nΛ<sup>33</sup>- q<sup>h</sup>Λ<sup>55</sup>    rΛ<sup>33</sup>.  
 mountain            rain            DIR- fall            DEC

‘It rained on the mountain.’

This declarative /rΛ<sup>33</sup>/ expresses the statement with experience [+realize], which is only used in the verb predicate under the perfect aspect.

### 6.2 Negation in the VP with Dec /rΛ<sup>33</sup>/

Negation in the verb predicate with the declarative /rΛ<sup>33</sup>/ is somewhat unique. See sentences (12) and (13). The negator /mɛ<sup>33</sup>-/ comes into the position after DIR- before the Vstem as /nΛ<sup>33</sup>-mΛ<sup>33</sup>-q<sup>h</sup>Λ<sup>55</sup>/ ‘have NOT fallen’, to express negation under the perfect aspect with experience. The target item of the negator /mɛ<sup>33</sup>-/ is not the declarative /rΛ<sup>33</sup>/, but rather the verb stem.

- (12) ʔu<sup>33</sup>tʃe<sup>55</sup>    tɛ<sup>33</sup> lɔ<sup>55</sup> = nɯ<sup>33</sup>    nΛ<sup>33</sup>- mΛ<sup>33</sup>- q<sup>h</sup>Λ<sup>55</sup>    rΛ<sup>33</sup>.  
 rain            one    CLS =also/even    DIR-    NEG-    fall            DEC

‘It did NOT rain at all.’

- (13) ŋɯ<sup>55</sup>    fɪa<sup>33</sup>- mɛ<sup>55</sup>- ʃe<sup>33</sup>    rΛ<sup>33</sup>.  
 1sg.            DIR- NEG- tired            DEC

‘I am NOT tired. (=I have never [been] tired).’

Let us consider one more negative sentence with the declarative /rΛ<sup>33</sup>/.

- (14) ʔɛ<sup>33</sup>tʃi<sup>55</sup>    k<sup>h</sup>ɯ<sup>33</sup>- mɛ<sup>55</sup>- rɪ<sup>33</sup>    rΛ<sup>33</sup>.  
 3sg. [ERG]    DIR-    NEG- write            DEC [+realize: pft]

‘S/he did NOT write.’ [witness]

It is interesting that this negative expression has dialectal variation in terms of word order. See sentence (14) in the Tanggu dialect.



- (14)' ʔe<sup>33</sup>tsi<sup>55</sup> k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup>- ri<sup>55</sup> me<sup>33</sup>- rɿ<sup>33</sup>.  
 3sg. [ERG] DIR- write NEG- DEC [+realize: pft]

‘S/he did NOT write.’ [witness] (Tanggu dialect)

The negator /me<sup>33</sup>-/ is a prefix, so the target item of the negator in this sentence is the declarative /rɿ<sup>33</sup>/. This word order is caused by analogical influence from the negative construction; that is, the negational target is a declarative in the noun predicate and the adjective predicate.

We can point out one more constructional similarity to negation in the verb predicate under the perfect aspect (and the evidentiality is different), as follows:

- (15) ʔe<sup>33</sup>tsi<sup>55</sup> k<sup>h</sup>u<sup>33</sup>- ri<sup>55</sup> me<sup>33</sup>- su<sup>55</sup>.  
 3sg. [ERG] DIR- write NEG- SFX [general statement: pft]

‘S/he did NOT write.’ (without evidentiality)

Although the target item of the negator /me<sup>33</sup>-/ in this sentence is not a declarative, but rather a suffix, compare (14)' with (15): We find clear structural parallelism.

## 7. Dialectal Variation of the Negative Predicate

As mentioned above, there are some Mu-nya dialectal varieties of negative constructions. Besides the variation in word order in the Tanggu dialect, some negative expressions, such as /ɳu<sup>33</sup>je<sup>55</sup>/ or /tɕa<sup>35</sup>ɳe<sup>33</sup>/, are used in the northern villages instead of /ɳu<sup>33</sup>-ɳe<sup>55</sup>ti<sup>33</sup>/.

All of these expressions are also used for the negative answer ‘No’ independently. /ɳu<sup>55</sup>je<sup>33</sup>/ is primarily used in Liupa 六巴 village, while /tɕa<sup>35</sup>ɳe<sup>33</sup>/ is used in Shenggu 生古 village. Both villages are in the northern part of Mu-nya district (in Kangding xian 康定縣), but these expressions are never used in Tanggu 湯古 village, located in the southern area (in Jiulong xian 九龍縣).

- |      |                  |                                                                  |                                                          |                               |
|------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (1)' | ɳu <sup>55</sup> | k <sup>h</sup> i <sup>33</sup> zi <sup>55</sup> mi <sup>33</sup> | ɳu <sup>33</sup> - ɳe <sup>55</sup> (ti <sup>33</sup> ). | Tanggu/Liuba/shenggu daialect |
|      | 1sg.             | student                                                          | NEG- DEC [general statement]                             |                               |
|      | ɳu <sup>55</sup> | k <sup>h</sup> i <sup>33</sup> zi <sup>55</sup> mi <sup>33</sup> | ɳu <sup>55</sup> je <sup>33</sup> .                      | Liuba dialect                 |
|      | 1sg.             | student                                                          | DEC [NEG?] [general statement]                           |                               |
|      | ɳu <sup>55</sup> | k <sup>h</sup> i <sup>33</sup> zi <sup>55</sup> mi <sup>33</sup> | tɕa <sup>35</sup> ɳe <sup>33</sup> .                     | Shenggu dialect               |
|      | 1sg.             | student                                                          | NEG DEC [general statement]                              |                               |

‘I am not a student.’

These are negative variations for ‘No.’ Since the morphemes /jɛ<sup>33</sup>/ and /tɕʌ:<sup>35</sup>/ only occur in this negative phrase sporadically, it is difficult to identify its origin and to analyze the function. Further investigation is required.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

This report describes the basic construction of negation in the Mu-nya language. Mu-nya has two kinds of negators: The general negator /ɲɯ<sup>33</sup>-/ is used in the noun predicate, the adjective predicate, and the verb predicate, which negate the impft-suffix /=pɔ<sup>33</sup>/ or declaratives representing evidentiality. The second negator, /mɛ<sup>33</sup>-/, is only used in the verb predicate, and expresses negation under the perfect aspect; it negates the pft-suffix /=su<sup>33</sup>/, or the verb stem with the declarative /rʌ<sup>33</sup>/ [+realize] contrastively. Here I have introduced two major issues: ‘negation and evidentiality’ and ‘negation and the impft/pft aspect’ in Mu-nya. Further issues in negation such as ‘partial negation’ and the ‘double negative’ are still under investigation. In addition, we should conduct a thorough study to expound upon the negation system in terms of experience, possibility, and progression.

## Abbreviations

CLS	Classifier	IRG	Interrogative
CPT	Comparative	MOD	Modal
DAT	Dative	NEG	Negative
DEC	Declarative	NMR	Nominalizer
DIR	Directional prefix	NUM	Numeral
ERG	Ergative	PCL	Particle
GNT	Genitive	SFX	Suffix

## References

### [English]

Ikeda, Takumi (池田巧)

- 2003 On pitch accent in the Mu-nya language. *Linguistics of Tibeto-Burman Area*. 25.2. University of California, Berkeley: 27–45.
- 2007 Exploring the Mu-nya people and their language. *ZINBUN*. 39. Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University: 19–147.
- 2012 Verbs of Existence in Tangut and Mu-nya. In Nathan W. Hill (ed.) *Mediaeval Tibeto-Burman Languages IV*. BRILL: 191–210.

**[Chinese]**

戴庆厦 (Dai, Qingxia) et al.

1991 《藏缅语十五种》北京燕山出版社.

黄布凡 (Huang, Bufan)

1985 木雅语概况. 《民族语文》1985.3: 62-77 页. (又收录在《藏缅语十五种》98-131 页.)

2007 木雅语. 《中国的语言》北京: 商务印书馆. 903-923 页.

2009 《川西藏区的语言》北京: 中国藏学出版社.

池田巧 (Ikeda, Takumi)

1998 木雅語語音結構的幾個問題. 『内陸アジア言語の研究 XIII』中央ユーラシア学研究会: 83-91 頁.

2015 木雅語作格特征. 张曦、黄成龙 (主编)《地域棱镜 藏羌彝走廊研究新视角》北京: 学苑出版社. 021-033 页.

林英津 (Lin, Ying-chin)

1995 木雅語口語語料收集與分析. (Ms.) 台北: 中央研究院.

孙宏开 (Sun, Hongkai)

1983 六江流域的民族语言及其系属分类—兼述嘉陵江上游、雅鲁藏布江流域的民族语言. 《民族学报》1983.3. 云南民族出版社: 99-273 页.