Negative participles in Surgut Khanty

Negative participles, i.e. specialized forms that are used as negative counterparts of affirmative participles in a given language, are a typologically rare phenomenon. As shown in Shagal (2019: 175–184), in a genealogically and geographically diverse sample of 100 languages, forms of this kind are only attested in 15 languages. Interestingly, six of these languages belong to the Uralic family. Therefore, Uralic languages offer a unique opportunity not only to explore the use of such forms in general, but also to look closely at the intragenealogical variation they can show. However, the available data on the use of negative participles is very scarce; descriptive grammars often explain briefly how they are formed and, in the best-case scenario, give a couple of examples.

In this paper, we aim to contribute to the overall understanding of negative participles by providing an overview of their use in one Uralic language – Surgut Khanty. Importantly, we consider the actual use of these forms rather than their functional potential, because earlier studies on negative participles in other languages have discovered a significant mismatch between the two (see, for example, Shagal & Ozerchuk 2021 on negative participles in Finnish).

The data we use come from two Surgut Khanty subdialects, Yugan and Tromagan. The majority of the materials were collected in 2010–2017 from 32 native speakers, and they primarily contain narratives. Our corpus counts around 135 000 words: 72 000 from Tromagan Khanty and 63 000 from Yugan Khanty. The corpus features 235 instances of the use of the relevant forms.

Negative participles in Surgut Khanty are formed by adding an abessive marker -*ɬəɣ* to a verbal stem, for example, *jiːs-* 'to cry' > *jiːs-ɬəɣ* 'the one who is not crying'. Similarly to non-finite forms in other eastern Uralic languages (see, for instance, Bikina, Rakhman, et al. 2022 on Kazym Khanty), these forms are highly multifunctional, that is, they can appear in a broad range of syntactic contexts. As briefly outlined in Csepregi (2017: 182–185), they mainly appear as adnominal modifiers, adverbial modifiers, and lexical verbs in periphrastic main-clause predicates. All these cases can, indeed, be illustrated by examples from our corpus; see (1)–(3), respectively.

However, despite this apparent multifunctionality, the use of the negative participle by the native speakers is notably restricted in many aspects. Firstly, in around half of the cases in our corpus the negative participles are used predicatively, like in example (3). Moreover, in these contexts, the range of verbs attested with the relevant marker is very limited, and the verbs *βaɬ-* 'be', *βuː-* 'know, see', and *taj-* 'have' take up a large share of the examples. The frequency of the resulting constructions may be seen as an indication that they have, in fact, lexicalized, and the negative participles within them do not function as independent units. Secondly, fixed expressions featuring negative participles in adnominal or adverbial function are also widely attested, which means that productive adnominal and adverbial uses are generally quite rare. Besides, in adnominal and adverbial contexts, negative participles very often appear as single modifiers

without any dependents of their own. That is, despite their potential to take direct objects, as in (1), or express notional subjects, as in (2), this potential is rarely realized in practice. This, again, speaks for negative participles becoming lexical items rather than fully productive forms with regular verbal properties.

In our talk, we will address these and other restrictions in more detail and propose possible motivations behind the observed patterns.

(1) Tromagan Khanty, adnominal modification

tʲi	[*βɛɫi*	***βuːjiɫə-ɫəɣ***]	*jɒːɣ*	*əjnɐm*	*toːɣə*
DEM.PROX	reindeer	**see-PTCP.NEG**	people	all	directly

tʲuː	*qorɐs-nə*	*pəɫ-ɫ-ət*
DEM.DIST	resemblance-LOC	be_afraid_of-PRS-3PL

'These people who have not seen reindeer, they are all so afraid.'

(2) Yugan Khanty, adverbial modification

[*qatəɫ*	***pɒːqən-ɫəɣ-nə***]	*tʲi*	*poːm*	*oːβtijɐ*
sun	**rise-PTCP.NEG-LOC**	DEM.PROX	grass	to_the_surface_of

suːmintɐɣ	*pan-ɫ-i*
kerchief	put-PRS-PASS.3SG

'Before the sun has come up, one needs to put a kerchief on that grass.'

(3) Yugan Khanty, predicative function

tʲuː	*ɐːj*	*moːq*	***jiːs-ɫəɣ***	*jəɣ*
DEM.DIST	small	child	**cry-PTCP.NEG**	become[PST.3SG]

'That small child stopped crying.'

References

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