

A NOTE ON DOUBLE NEGATION MARKING IN SISSALA

Regina Blass
Société Internationale de Linguistique
Ouagadougou, Upper Volta

Double Negation Marking in Sissala, a Voltaic language spoken on the Ghana-Upper Volta border, raises some interesting questions about sentence negation and poses some problems regarding semantic interpretation.

There are the following realizations of negative marking (henceforth NEG) in Sissala:

1. Clausal NEG Markers

Sissala has basically three clausal NEG markers, which are *wɪ* for non-copular clauses, *tɔ* for copular clauses, and *rá* for noun clauses. Structurally *wɪ* is a particle, *tɔ* a verb, and *rá* an emphatic particle.

The word order is complement-verb in non-copular clauses while it is verb-complement in copular clauses:

- (1) ω *wɪ* *ja-á* *mɔ* 'he is not going home'
he NEG house-IMPERF go
- (2) ω *tɔ* *páárɔ́* 'he is not a farmer'
he is-NEG farmer
- (3) Jean *rá* 'it is not Jean'
Jean NEG

2. Constituent NEG Marker

The constituent NEG marker, which marks noun phrases as being within the scope of negation, is also *rá* (see (3)). This marking occurs when a noun phrase is negated and in initial position.

- (4) *píé* *rá* *ń* *ja* 'it is not yam I like' (but rather
yams NEG-emph I like something else)

3. Double NEG Marking

Whenever the subject is negated, the following VP has to be negated with *wɪ* or *tɔ* depending on the clause type. The semantic result of this double NEG marking is still negative.

- (5) ω *rá* *wɪ* *jaa* *mó-é* 'it wasn't he who went home' (lit: it
he NEG-emph NEG house go-PERF wasn't he, he didn't go home)

- (6) ω rá to pááró 'it isn't he who is a farmer' (lit: it
he NEG-emph is-NEG farmer isn't he, he isn't a farmer)

However, whenever a non-subject noun phrase is frontshifted and marked with rá as being within the scope of negation, no other NEG marking is necessary.

- (7) Jean rá ḡ zɪŋ 'it isn't Jean who I know'
Jean NEG-emph I know

Should an object-negated clause be marked twice for negation the result will be positive:

- (8) Jean rá ḡ wɪ ɛ 'it isn't Jean who I don't know', i.e.
Jean NEG-emph I NEG know I do know Jean, but I don't know someone else

The question is why two NEG markers have to be present uniquely whenever the subject is focally negated. The answer may be that the basic scope for non-constituent negation in Sissala is VP and not S. Therefore the subject has to be negated together with the VP whenever the subject is meant to be within the scope of negation. In the case where the object is marked with focal negation, no second NEG marker is necessary, since the object is part of the VP.

- (9) ω rá wɪ jaa mɔ-ɛ 'it isn't he who went home' (lit: it
he NEG-emph NEG house go-PERF isn't he, he didn't go home)
- (10) Jean rá ḡ zɪŋ 'it isn't Jean who I know'
Jean NEG-emph I know

4. Conclusion

Double NEG marking in Sissala does not in every case come to the same result. It is semantically negative in the case where the subject is within the scope of negation and it is positive whenever NP's which are part of the VP are especially focally negated. The reason for this uneven result may be the fact that VP is the basic scope of non-constituent negation in Sissala rather than the sentence. How these different results may be explained in semantic terms remains a problem.