

Negation in Nyishi

MOUMITA DEY*

Abstract

The language 'Nyishi', spoken in Arunachal Pradesh in the lower Subansiri district, is a Tibeto-Burman language of the agglutinating type, with an SOV word-order. Placed post-verbally, negation in Nyishi is expressed by attaching the negative suffix '-ma' to the roots of main verbs. It is this negative marker that bears the information about the realis-irrealis mode in Nyishi, in the absence of explicit tense markers. The present paper examines the different functions of this negative morpheme '-ma' that functions as a negative suffix, as a negative word, and also as the negative constituent marker in the grammar of Nyishi.

Keywords: Negation, Nyishi, Realis mood, Negative morpheme, Tibeto-Burman

1. Introduction

The paper aims to present a descriptive account of negation in Nyishi, a Tibeto-Burman language, spoken in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, India. The focus of the paper is to show how negation is syntactically structured in the grammar, the specifications of the notable negative morphemes and also examine the various forms of negation with respect of tense, aspect, mood – where we will see how the phonological realization of the negative morpheme changes with the change of these categories, and whether a generalized pattern of negation in Nyishi can be sketched. The paper will also deal with the aspects of constituent negation in the language and show how it is affected by the negative morpheme. The questionnaire for data elicitation was prepared based on various sample sentences, available in the existing literature on negation such as those in Buragohain (2004); Abbi (2001); Bhatia (1995).

*Moumita Dey (smoumitadey@gmail.com) is Head, Department of English, Holy Cross College, Agartala, Tripura.

The paper is divided into the following sections: § 2 gives an overview of Nyishi language, region and people, §3 introduces the negation in Nyishi, its form and syntax, §4 deals with the description of negation in relation to tense and aspect in Nyishi, § 5 shows how negation affects the moods in the language, § 6 deals with negation in conditional clause types, § 7 illustrates how constituent negations are marked, § 8 describes the two other negative words in the language while § 9 shows the different polarity items in Nyishi. § 10 shows negation in relation to quantifiers, questions and comparatives §11 deals with the scope of negation and finally, § 12 concludes, giving a brief summary of the results of the previous sections.

2. Introducing ‘Nyishi’

‘Nyishi’, meaning ‘the land of people – the human beings’ happens to be the mother tongue of the Nyishi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, India. ‘Nyishi’ is the cover term, used to refer to all the Tani languages – the generic name - of the area and includes a number of dialects, namely, Aka Lel, Bangni, Nishang, etc. The speakers of the language are known differently by names such as Dafla, Nissi, Lel, Nyishi, Nyishing and Bangni. According to the census of 1991, there are about 173,791 Nyishi/Dafla speakers, which make them the most populous tribe of Arunachal, after the combined population of Adi and Galong tribes. On the other hand, the census of 2001, reports that there are 211,485 Nyishi/Dafla speakers, out of which there are 118,111 speakers who claim Nyishi to be their mother-tongue. However, in the *People of India*, vol IX, (Singh and Manoharan 1993) it is reported that the census of 1981 stated the number of Nyishi speakers to be 140,986, and that they belong to the NEFA group (the Nefamese community). Nefamese is said to be a pidgin, which was used as a *lingua franca* for intergroup communication by certain tribal communities in Arunachal. Some of the other languages which are included in the NEFA group are Tagin, Milang, Miri, Mishing, Pasi, Bangni, Pangi, Ramo, Sherdukpen. Though the report needs to be revised today, yet it is one of the important landmarks as far as language census and language grouping based on communities and families are concerned.

2.1. Region and Language

Belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family of languages, Nyishi is an isolating-agglutinating language. Primarily, they belong to the Indo-Mongolian race and lived in the Papum Pare districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Today, the major concentration of Nyishi population is found in the lower and upper Subansiri, east Kameng, Papum Pare, Kurung Kume districts of Arunachal Pradesh

and in the Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam (Abraham 2005). The 2001 census reports that though the bulk of Nyishi speakers are still found in Arunachal, yet, many of them are found in different states of India, owing to various socio-economic and educational purposes, in the last decade, which marks their efforts and zeal towards progress and development.

Nyishi is mutually intelligible with the neighbouring languages of Adis, Apatanis, Hill Miris, Tagins, Galos and others. These languages are said to belong to a common ancestor – the Abotani group – from which they have descended and developed their separate identities.

Nyishis are basically agriculturists, but some are also engaged in the small-scale handicrafts and handloom works. It is reported that all these languages show remarkable similarities in their phonological, lexical and grammatical systems and because of this genetic link, they are together grouped as the Tani languages (Abraham 2007). This analysis is further strengthened in Post (2009), where a sketch of the possible branching of the languages of the Tani group is elaborately presented and these languages are clubbed under the broad western Tani group.

2.2. A Glimpse of Nyishi's Linguistic Features

Certain salient features make Nyishi an interesting language to study, such as the presence of the four basic nasal sounds from bilibials to the velar: /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /ŋ/. There are five back vowels, out of which /ʌ/ and /ɑ/ are most notable. The three others being: /u/, /o/, /ɔ/. Interestingly, words undergo frequent nasalisations and the voiceless sounds sometimes seem to be unreleased in the language, especially in the word final position, like in 'hitapɾ', 'book', where /p/ is sometimes unrealised. Similar to most other languages of the region, Nyishi has rich a stock of classifiers, deictic items and expressives, besides having compound verb constructions like: *kakYr kátá*, 'see properly' and reduplicated structures such as: *ribá ribá*, 'fast fast'.

The language has mainly the SOV word order, typical of Indian languages. However, there are varieties which show both SOV and SVO word orderings, such as those spoken in central parts of Arunachal. The language has a complete range of pronominal system that not only categorises the three persons – first, second and third, - but also differentiates between the three numbers – singular, dual and plural as in: (table 1).¹ Abraham (2007) gives a detailed account of the pronominal systems of some of the languages

of the Tani group². Owing to such similarities, some linguists tend to count these languages as variations or dialects of one Tani or Apatani language, to be considered broadly.

Table 1			
Example of Nyishi Pronominal System			
Person/number	Singular	Dual	Plural
First person	<i>no</i>	<i>nuni</i>	<i>nul</i>

3. Negation and its types

Negation implies opposing the sense of affirmation, that which is held to be correct. Linguistically, a negative particle, may it be the insertion of a negative word in a sentence or attaching a negative affix to a word, owes the property of negating the word, phrase, part or whole of the proposition, depending upon its scope, in defined contexts.

Negation is of two types, namely, sentential negation and affixal negation. The former negates the given affirmative sentence, using a negative word such as *not*, *never* as in English or *mYt*, *nYhi*, meaning 'not' as in Hindi. On the other hand, affixal negation constitutes attaching a negative affix to a word, negating its sense, such as the negative prefixes 'ku-', 'du+'-', in Bangla, Hindi like in: (table 2). (Abbi, (2001); Bhatia, (1995)

Table 2		
Example of Affixal Negation		
Bangla (prefix)	Words	English
<i>duʃ-</i>	<i>duʃcinta</i>	Bad/ill thoughts
<i>ku-</i>	<i>kuʃɔɲoti</i>	Bad company
Hindi (prefix)		
<i>ə-</i>	<i>əʃanti</i>	Chaos
<i>ku-</i>	<i>kukərmə</i>	Bad deed

3.1. The Negative Morpheme in Nyishi

The primary negative morpheme identified in Nyishi is the monosyllabic morpheme - ‘*ma*’, which tends to bear the job of negating any given contentful element in the grammar of Nyishi. Similar to Nyishi, even Tagin, a neighbouring language, employs this sole morpheme to negate anything and everything in its grammar. From the typological perspective as reported in Post (2009), the Tani sub-family uses some or the other phonological variation of the single morpheme ‘*ma*’ as the negative morpheme, like *maa*, *maK*, *moK*, *mãã*, and such others.

Interestingly, the feature of the presence of a sole negative morpheme is specific to the grammar, for the grammar exhibits characteristics, which are unique in themselves, probably to the Tani sub-family as suggested by Post (2009). It is noteworthy that a single negative morpheme - a negative particle – serves as a word in sentential negation and as a suffix in affixal negation in the grammar, and also modifies its form, along with the modification of the verbal stem to which it attaches, in certain cases, as we will see in the data ahead.

3.2. Syntagmatic Position of the Negative Morpheme

In Nyishi, the negative morpheme is realized in the post-verbal position, as a negative suffix, attached to the verbal root. Apart from indicating the sense of negation, this negative suffix, also carries the information about the realis-irrealis mode. The structure of the main verb in Nyishi is as in (1) and (2), where the aspectual morphemes ‘-*pan*’ and ‘-*dYn*’ follow the verbal root, and also carry the information about the realis-irrealis mode. As Moscati (2006) reports there are agglutinating languages, of other language families, as well, like Turkish, which show similar structural configurations of their verbal stem, in which the negative morpheme ‘-*me*’ is suffixed to the verbal root, which is then followed by the tense-agreement markers. It is thus, not an uncommon feature, for there are languages having specific inflectional projections, which tend to host the negative sentential morpheme – the cliticised morpheme of negation.

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| (1) | soma | hitap | bəa-pan |
| | soma | book | bring-perf.rls |
| | Soma brought the book. | | |
| (2) | mi | bimin | bi-dən |
| | 3p.s | song | sing-hab.rls |
| | She sings song. | | |

On negating (1) and (2), the negative suffix, ‘-*ma*’, is inserted in the verbal stem, such that the verbal root is followed by the negative suffix, which is then followed by the aspect marker as in (3) and (4). Here, the aspectual morphemes carry the realis-irrealis mode information, which raises the question as to why the negative suffix is also marked as carrying the mode information, the answer to which will be sorted out as we move on to the next sections, where we deal with data on irrealis mode.

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (3) | <i>soma hitap</i> | <i>bəa-ma-pan</i> |
| | soma book | bring-neg.rls-perf.rls |
| | Soma has not brought the book. | |
| (4) | <i>mi bimin</i> | <i>bi-ma-dən</i> |
| | 3p.s song | sing-neg.rls-hab.rls |
| | She does not sing song. | |

4. Tense and Aspect

Similar to Galo (Post 2009), Nyishi makes two way distinctions for reference to time – the realis mode and the irrealis mode, and probably this would be the case in other languages of the Tani sub-family, if not of the entire Tibeto-Burman family at large.

4.1. Negation in Realis-irrealis Mode

So far we have seen that the negative morpheme ‘-*ma*’ has been marked as representing the realis mode. In case of irrealis mode of event, Nyishi uses the negative morpheme ‘-*rYm*’, which is also suffixed to the verbal root, similar to ‘-*ma*’. Sentence (5) shows the structure of the verbal stem in an affirmative sentence, where the morpheme ‘-*tain*’ marks the irrealis mode, which gets realised as zero, on negating the sentence, using the negative suffix ‘-*rYm*’, as in (6), the negative counterpart of (5).

- | | | |
|-----|------------------------------|----------------------|
| (5) | <i>ŋo sija</i> | <i>ə-tain</i> |
| | 1p.s now | go-irrl |
| | I will go now. | |
| (6) | <i>ŋo sija</i> | <i>ə-rəm</i> |
| | 1p.s now | go-neg.irrl |
| | I will not go now. | |
| (7) | <i>rəmən siti</i> | <i>he-rəm</i> |
| | raman letter | write-neg.irrl |
| | Raman will not write letter. | |

4.2. Negation and Aspect

Though the realis-irrealis mode is differentiated in the negation, with the different negative suffixes of ‘-ma’ and ‘-rem’, still the grammar of Nyishi makes a distinction between the present time and the past, which is not apparently visible, in the presence of the negative suffix ‘-ma’. Sentence (8) and (11) shows the information in the realis mode with reference to the present time of event, where, the **habitual markers** are overtly present in the negative constructions, but are realized as zero in (9) and (10), which refer to the simple past actions. Finally, as in sentence (6)-(7), so in (12), the irrealis mode in the negative constructions are represented by ‘-rYm’, with the habitual marker, ‘-dYn’, being realized as zero.

(8)	rəmən siti	he-ma-dən
	raman letter	write-neg.rls-hab.rls
		Raman does not write letter.
(9)	rəmən siti	he-ma
	raman letter	write-neg.rls
		Raman did not write letter.
(10)	mi bimin	bi-ma
	3p.s song	sing-neg.rls
		She did not sing song.
(11)	mi bimin	bi-ma-dən
	3p.s song	sing-neg.rls-hab.rls
		She does not sing song.
(12)	mi bimin	bi-rəm
	3p.s song	sing-neg.irrl
		She will not sing song. [habitual]

As in (12), where the habitual marker is realised as zero in the irrealis mode, similarly, all other aspect markers get realized as zero morphemes in the irrealis mode, when Nyishi negates the given affirmative statements, like in (14) and (16). The grammar does not make distinctions with regard to different aspects in the negative irrealis mode, but uses lexical words, adverbial or prepositional phrases to mark the intended differences, like the use of *in the morning ortomorrowas* in (14).

- | | | | |
|------|--------|--------|---|
| (13) | ɲo | arəm | ə-tain |
| | 1p.s | tomrrw | go-irrl |
| | | | I will be going tomorrow. |
| (14) | ɲo | arəm | ə-rəm |
| | 1p.s | tomrrw | go-neg.irrl |
| | | | I will not be going tomorrow. [progressive] |
| (15) | ɲul-əm | hasti | pai-tain |
| | 1p.pl | punish | get-irrl |
| | | | We will be punished. |
| (16) | ɲul-əm | hasti | pai-rəm |
| | 1p.pl | punish | get-neg.irrl |
| | | | We will not be punished. [simple future] |

However, the case with realis mode is different, for the aspectual morphemes of the progressive type and of the perfective type are overtly realised. Unlike in the case of the habitual aspect, where the present and past time of reference is further differentiated in the realis mode, it is not done so in the present cases of **progressive and perfective aspects**, as can be seen in (17)-(19) and (20)-(22), respectively. Further, the progressive morphemes are preceded by the **imperfective morpheme**, which is used in cases where the speaker stresses the fact that the action has not completed as yet.

- (17) ηo $\text{pori-l-do-m}\alpha$
 1p.s read-impf-prog.rls-neg.rls
- I am not reading.
- (18) ηo $\text{\textethers-l-do-m}\alpha$
 1p.s go-impf-prog.rls-neg.rls
- I was not going.
- (19) ram kuppa? $\text{d}\text{\textethers-du}\eta\text{-do-m}\alpha$
 ram banana eat-impf-prog.rls-neg.rls
- Ram is not eating a banana.
- (20) ram $\text{kuppa?-k}^{\text{h}}\text{\textethersm pi-m}\alpha\text{-p}\alpha$
 ram banana-acc cut-neg.rls-perf.rls
- Ram had not cut the banana.
- (21) ηo $\text{pori-m}\alpha\text{-p}\alpha\text{n}$
 1p.s read-neg.rls-perf.rls
- I have not read.
- (22) no $\text{pori-m}\alpha\text{-p}\alpha\text{n}$
 2p.s read-neg.rls-perf.rls
 You had not read.

The northern variety of Nyishi uses ‘-duK’ as the imperfective morpheme as in (19), while the southern variety uses ‘-l-’ for the same as in (17)-(18). Similarly, the perfective morpheme is ‘-pán’ in southern Nyishi, while ‘-pá’ in the northern variety. ‘-do’ is the progressive aspectual morpheme in both the varieties.

5. Negation Hortative and Imperative Moods

5.1. Hortative Statements

In Nyishi, the Hortative mood is expressed using the reduplicated structure in the sentence – ‘*kuj-tuj/-nej*’, out of which ‘*kuj*’ begins the sentence and ‘*-tuj/-nej*’ ends it, by being suffixed to the verbal stem word finally. The ‘*-tuj*’ morpheme is used in the southern variety while the ‘*-nej*’ morpheme in northern Nyishi, like in (23) and (24), respectively.

- | | | | | |
|------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|--|
| (23) | kuj | səje | ə-tuj | |
| | hort | now | go-hort | |
| | Let us go now. | | | |
| (24) | kuj | səje | əŋ-nej | |
| | hort | now | go-hort | |
| | Let us go now. | | | |
| (25) | kuj | ui-kəm | nicniy ɲi-mα-buj | |
| | hort | enemies-acc | harm do- neg -hort | |
| | Lets not harm our enemies. | | | |
| (26) | kuj | αα-kəm | əmα-mə-mα-buj | |
| | hort | other-acc | lie-caus- neg -hort | |
| | Lets not lie others. | | | |
| (27) | kuj | αyɔŋ-ri-mα-buju | | |
| | hort | late-do-neg-hort | | |
| | Lets not be late. | | | |
| (28) | *kuj | ui-kəm | nicniy ɲi-buj | |
| | hort | enemies-acc | harm do-hort | |
| | Lets not harm our enemies. | | | |

The negative hortative statements are also similarly expressed using the reduplication, but here instead of the reduplicated morpheme, ‘-tuj/-nej’, in the sentence final position, it is the negative hortative morpheme ‘-buj/-buju’ that is used, respectively, in the two varieties, as in (25) and (27).

Interestingly, it must be noted that the reduplicated morpheme ‘-buj/-buju’ at the end of the hortative statements implies the sense of negation, inherent in it, but in spite of this inherent negative sense, the presence of the negative suffix ‘-má’ is essential, else the sentences become unacceptable as in (28). Therefore, it can be so concluded that it is ‘-má’ that marks negation in these constructions and the final reduplicated morpheme ‘-tuj/-nej’ in the environment of negation, becomes ‘-buj/-buju’.

5.2. Imperative Statements

The imperative mood marker in Nyishi is the morpheme ‘-to’, which is suffixed to the verbal root. On negating such imperative affirmation sentences, the imperative ‘-to’ morpheme is realized as ‘-má-b’ morphemes, where ‘-má’ marks negation, to which is suffixed ‘-b’, the ‘negative imperative, + honorific’ morpheme as in (29). Such imperative negative constructions are used in cases of politeness, humbleness and when said with some kind of respect towards the hearer. In other cases, where imperative negative statements are used to command, to order or in casual speech, then instead of two different morphemes ‘-má’ and ‘-b’, each assigned with individual functions, Nyishi uses a single morpheme ‘-yo’. Similar to the other case, ‘-yo’ is suffixed to the verbal stem and it not only marks the negative imperative mood but also carries the sense of negation, with ‘- honorific’ value like in (30).

(29)	sikir-ho	log	lej- má-b
	cold-loc	out	go- neg-imp.hon
	Do not go out in the cold.		
(30)	sikir-ho	log	lej- yo
	cold-loc	out	go- neg.imp
	Do not go out in the cold.		
(31)	arəm	ayun	ha- yo
	tomrrw	late	come- neg.imp
	Do not come late tomorrow.		

Thus, the imperative negation has two ways of expression in the grammar. The morpheme *-b* is the + honorific, negative imperative morpheme, which marks the imperative mood in negative sentences, and remains suffixed to *'-ma'*, the negative morpheme. On the other hand, *'-yo'* seems to be the – honorific, negative imperative morpheme, marking three values, those of negation, imperative mood and the – honorific sense. Putting it the other way round, we can conclude, that the negative suffix *'-ma'* in the environment of imperative mood, with –honorific value, becomes *'-yo'*. Since commands and orders are in general, given to someone at a level lower than the speaker's, the regular negative imperative morpheme is *'-yo'*. While, commands and orders, with the sense of politeness are special cases, so to indicate such instances, the combination of the two morphemes of *'-ma-b'* is used.

6. Negation in Conditionals Statements

6.1. Unless..not

To express 'unless..not' statements, the conditional morpheme *'-dáb'* is used, which remains attached to the verbal stem, carrying the negative morpheme with it. Probably, it is the sequence of the two morphemes of *'-má-dáb'*, which stands for the word, 'unless', in the language. This negative conditional morpheme is then conjugated to the conditioning verbal stem, like in (32), where it is suffixed to the verbal stem, *fill*, leaving the conditioned verb, to take just the negative suffix.

- | | | | | | |
|------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| (32) | ηο | kepo-ηə | dəje- mα-dáb | ηο | gorup- rəm |
| | 1p.s | stomach-nom | fill- neg.rls-cond | 1p.s | stand- neg.irrl |
| | Unless my stomach is filled, I will not get up. | | | | |
| (33) | αciη-əm | nu- mα-dáb | ηul | də- pi-rəm | |
| | food-acc | cook- neg.rls-cond | 1p.pl | eat-do- neg.irrl | |
| | Unless the food is cooked, we cannot eat. | | | | |

6.2. Negative Linker: Neither..nor

The negative linker 'neither..nor' links two negative clauses into one. Some languages use two different words always in pair to construct such sentences like in English. There are languages like Hindi, which uses a single negative

word, *nahi*, twice in a sentence to construct such sentences (Shopen 1985; Bhatia 1995).

Nyishi uses a slightly different strategy for such constructions. There are no negative linker words present in the grammar, and negation is expressed by '*má*' suffixed to the verbal stem but uses conditional markers/morphemes to construct sentences of the 'neither..nor' types. There are two ways which are employed for such constructions. In one case, the language has the single conditional participle '*lá*', meaning 'or' and 'and', which joins the two negative clauses into one as in (34).

(34)	ηo-gə	la	mi-gə	name	ogum-ho	do- mα
	1p.s-gen	or	3p.s-gen	home	near-loc	be- neg .rls
	Neither I nor her home is nearer					
(35)	sita	la	rita	okum-ho		ə- pi-rəm
	sita	or	rita	party-loc		go-be- neg .irrl
	Neither Sita nor Rita can go to the party.					
(36)	sita	kəm	rita	kəm	okum-ho	ə- pi-rəm
	sita	at all	rita	at all	party-loc	go-be- neg .irrl
	Neither Sita nor Rita can go to the party.					
(37)	ηo-gə	kəm	mi-gə	kəm	name	ogum-ho
	1p.s-gen	at all	3p.s-gen	at all	home	near-loc
					do- ma	be- neg .rls

In the other case, they use the co-ordinating particle '*-kYm*' twice, one each with the two doers individually. '*-kYm*' conveys the sense of 'at all' in the grammar and tends to link the two clauses into one as in (36). In all these cases, it is the sole morpheme '*-má*', suffixed to the verbal stem, which expresses the sense of negation again.

7. Constituent Negation

Here again, the same negative morpheme '*ma*' is used for negating a given constituent, may it be a nominal phrase or a verbal phrase. As we have seen, that '*ma*' as a negative suffix attaches to the verbal root, so given the **verbal constituent** to be negated, '*má*' does as expected. For example, given two verbs in a sentence, if we wish to negate the former verb *buy*, Nyishi needs to suffix the negative morpheme to its verbal stem, as in (38), but if we have

to negate the latter action, then the negative suffix has to be attached to the latter verbal stem, irrespective of the ordering of the two verbs, in the sentence, as in (39).

- | | | | | | |
|------|--|------------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| (38) | <i>mi</i> | <i>acin</i> | <i>rə-ma</i> | | <i>mə-pan</i> |
| | 3p.s | food | buy-neg.rls | | make-perf.rls |
| | He did not buy the food, but cooked (made). | | | | |
| (39) | <i>mi</i> | <i>acin</i> | <i>rə-pan</i> | <i>hebejekəm</i> | <i>mə-ma</i> |
| | 3p.s | food | buy-neg.rls | but | make-neg.rls |
| | He has bought the food, but did not cook (make). | | | | |
| (40) | <i>mi</i> | <i>ə-ma</i> | <i>sija</i> | <i>ə-tain</i> | |
| | 3p.s | go-neg.rls | now | go-irrl | |
| | He did not go, but will go now. | | | | |
| (41) | <i>ram</i> | <i>ma</i> | <i>sita</i> | <i>hitap-əm</i> | <i>ji-pan</i> |
| | ram | neg | sita | book-acc | give-perf.rls |
| | Ram not Sita gave the book. | | | | |
| (42) | <i>soma</i> | <i>hitap ma</i> | <i>magjin</i> | <i>bəa-pan</i> | |
| | soma | book neg | magazine | bring-perf.rls | |
| | Soma brought not the book, but magazine. | | | | |

On the other hand, when a given **noun constituent** is to be negated, say an object or a person, the negative morpheme, serving as a negative word, is placed after that specific noun constituent, for example, as in (41) ‘*ma*’ is positioned after *Ram* and in (42), after *book*.

8. Other Negative Words

As far as the common negative words, such as ‘no’, ‘never’, ‘without’, found in most of the world’s languages are concerned, once again Nyishi leans upon the negative morpheme ‘*ma*’. As stated, ‘*má*’ is the primary negative morpheme in Nyishi, having multi-purpose usage. Apart from the above uses of ‘*má*’, this negative morpheme is also used to serve the function of the word ‘no’ in the grammar, like in (43).

(43)	ma	ŋo	sija	ə-rəm
	no	1p.s	now	go-neg.irrl
	No, I will not go now.			

8.1. The Case of ‘Never’

In Nyishi, one specific word for ‘never’ does not exist but depending upon the type of verb in the construction, certain particles are used, which are followed by the morpheme ‘-kŷm’, meaning ‘at all’. ‘*icir-*’ is used with verbs like allow, talk.

(44)	ŋo	mi-əm	icir-kəm	ji-ŋi-rəm
	1p.s	3p.s-acc	never prt-at all	allow-do-
	neg.irrl			
	I can never allow this.			
(45)	rəhul	ŋul-əm	lig-kəm	
		logku-rəm		
	rahul	1p.pl-acc	never prt-at all	meet-
	neg.irrl			
	Rahul will never meet us.			
(46)	ŋo	sim	hidlo-kəm	ji-ŋi-rəm
	1p.s	this	never prt-at all	allow-do-
	neg.irrls			
	I can never allow this.			

Beside ‘*icir-*’, the other particles that are used to signify the sense of ‘never’ are ‘*lig-*’ (sing, run, meet). This is typical of the southern variety of Nyishi, for the choice of the ‘*never*’- particle seems to be pragmatically determined by the verb in a given instance. However, in the northern variety, they use the particle ‘*hidlo-*’ (meet, allow) for ‘never’ with all verbs, unlike the southern variety, as in (46). Apart from this, the language has the negative suffix, in the verbal stem in all cases, to complete the sense of negation, as in Hindi, Bangla and other Indian languages.

8.2. The Only Other Negative Morpheme: ‘*Apalaila*’ (*without*)

Though Nyishi uses the negative morpheme ‘*ma*’ in almost all the cases of negating a constituent, the exceptional case is of the word *without*, for which the lexicon has a separate word – ‘*ápálái*’ in the southern variety and ‘*ápá?láilá*’ in the northern.

(47)	mi	ɲul-ə m	αpαlɔi	bɔjar	ən-ba
	3p.s	1p.pl-acc	without	market	go-perf
	He went to the market without us.				
(48)	mi	ɲul-ə m	αpα?lɔilɔ	bɔjar	ən-ba
	3p.s	1p.pl-acc	without	market	go-perf
	He went to the market without us.				
(49)	əm	αpαlɔi	tir-ɲi-mα		
	fire	without	smoke-be-neg.rls		
	Without fire smoke cannot be				

9. Negative Polarity Items

For the expression of words for negative polarity items, such as ‘nobody’, ‘none’, ‘nowhere’, ‘nothing’, ‘wh’-words and affirmative items, followed by the morpheme ‘*-kYm*’, meaning ‘*at all*’ are placed in pre-verbal position. The use of ‘*-kYm*’ seems to be an essential requirement as is the use of ‘*b^{hi}*’ in Hindi, for the very use of ‘*-kYm*’ and ‘*b^{hi}*’ brings in the sense of the polarity sensitive item (Vasishth 1999).

However, for the sense of negation, the negative morpheme ‘*-má*’ is suffixed to the verbal stem as usual. Nyishi employs techniques similar to Indo-Aryan and other Indian languages for the expression of negative polarity words. Examples (50)-(51) illustrate the construction of such sentences and a list of the words of negative polarity in Nyishi is given in: (table 3).

(50)	ŋo 1p.s	roŋu-ho ground-loc	hiyənə-kəm somebody-at all	kα-mα see-neg.rls
I saw nobody at the ground.				
(51)	mi 3p.s	huglo-kəm where-at all	əs-do-mα roam-be-neg.rls	

Table 3 Negative Polarity Words		
English words	Nyishi morphemes	Polarity elements
None	<i>hiyə (who)</i>	<i>hiyə-kəm</i>
Nowhere	<i>huglo (where)</i>	<i>huglo-kəm</i>
Nothing	<i>hoggo (something)</i>	<i>hoggo-kəm</i>
Nobody	<i>hiyənə (somebody)</i>	<i>hiyənə-kəm</i>

9.1. The Use of ‘-kYm’

The use of ‘-kYm’ seems to be an essential requirement in those cases, where the sense of a negative word is partially reflected by some morpheme in the grammar, such that the semantics of these morphemes are insufficient in conveying the sense of negation completely, like in the cases of words like ‘nothing’, *nobody*, etc. as in (50)-(51) in §9 and also in §6 from examples (36)-(37) as in conditional statements and in the expression of other negative words, as in §8, such as for *no*, *never*, etc.

But the morpheme ‘-kYm’ is not used with the word ‘without’ where probably the sense of negation is fully specified in the word ‘*ápálái*’ / ‘*ápá?láilá*’, as in §8.2.

10. Negative Quantifiers, Comparatives and Questions

10.1. Negative Quantifiers

A common trend of expressing negation by negating the quantifier in a sentence is seen across languages. In the languages with pre-verbal negation, the quantifier is positioned beside the negative particle in a sentence. However,

in languages with post-verbal negation, a stress is applied on the quantifier to ensure the sense of negation on the quantifier (Bhatia, 1995).

This latter trend is what is visible in Nyishi as can be seen in sentence (52).

(52) **mɔlə** istuden-ə so-ma
all student-nom play-neg.rls
 All students did not play.

(53) nalego ɲɲ-gə do-ma-pan
 many people-gen be-neg.rls-perf.rls
 Not many people were present.

Irrespective of the type of quantifier, whether high-ranking quantifier or low-ranking, when greater emphasis is laid on the quantifier in a sentence, the quantifier stands to be negated in the grammar. Also a typical dialectal difference is visible in the use of negative quantifiers, which is the interchangeability of the position of the quantifier with that of the subject. In the northern variety, as in sentence (54), the quantifier follows the subject, while in the southern, the quantifier precedes the subject, as in (52), that is the quantifier is placed in the sentence-initial position. In the Minimalist Theory, this interchangeability of positions can be accounted for by raising the negative quantifier to some position, adjoined to spec TP, similar to that of AgrsP.

(54) himi **mɔlə-ŋe** so-ma
 child **all-nom** play-neg.rls
 All students did not play.

(55) ɲɲ ma?ləŋ do-ma-pan
 people many be-**neg.rls-perf.rls**
 Not many people were present.

10.2. Negative Comparative Sentences

As in other cases of negation in the grammar, so also for negating comparative sentences in Nyishi, a simple technique is used. The comparative morpheme ‘than’ in Nyishi is ‘ya’, to which when the negative suffix ‘-ma’ is attached, it forms the resultant negative comparative morpheme ‘yama’, which means ‘than not’. This morpheme follows the adjectival word in the given sentence to express negative comparative sentences.

- | | | | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|------------|-----------|------------------|
| (56) | ram-əṭə | ab-ham | ayo | ya-ma |
| | ram-gen | father-acc | taller | than-neg |
| | Ram is not taller than his father. | | | |
| (57) | sita | rita-nən | ən-ṛa | ya- ma |
| | sita | rita-abl | beautiful | than- neg |
| | Sita is not more beautiful than Rita. | | | |

10.3. Negative Question Markers

A negative interrogative sentence employs an intonation, specially a rising tone, to mark it different from a negative assertive sentence in Nyishi, as in most other Indian languages. To express a negative question sentence, the verb, with the negative morpheme, suffixed to it, is uttered with the rising tone. It is simply the application of the rising tone on the verbal word, bearing the negative morpheme, in the sentence final position that marks the sense of question in a given situation, as in the case of ‘yes-no’ question sentences.

- | | | | | |
|------|-----------------------------|----------------|------|----------|
| (58) | mi | hac-ma | | |
| | 3p.s | arrive-neg.rls | | |
| | Hasn't he arrived? | | | |
| (59) | solmoi | no-gə | ga | al-ma |
| | these days | 2p.s-gen | body | well-neg |
| | Aren't you well these days? | | | |

11. Scope of Negation

The simplest way to check the scope of negation is to move the negative morpheme ‘*má*’ across a given sentence and note how the interpretation of the sentence changes each time, as we position the negative morpheme at various places in the sentence. Basically, the negative morpheme ‘*má*’ scopes over the word or the morpheme, which it follows or is attached to as a suffix, respectively. As such, it has a narrow scope in the grammar – scopes over the element or word in question only.

If suffixed to the verbal stem, ‘*-má*’ negates the verbal action in question. Like as in (60), when ‘*-má*’ is suffixed to the verbal stem *bring*, it negates the action of bringing. Similarly, if the negative suffix ‘*-má*’ is suffixed to the verbal stem ‘read’, it negates the action of reading the book, now as in (61), and not the earlier action of bringing.

When ‘*ma*’ follows a nominal element, the latter gets negated, irrespective of the fact that the concerned nominal is the subject or the object in the given sentence. In (62), ‘*má*’ is placed after ‘book’ and the sentence is interpreted as ‘there was certainly an action of bringing something, but definitely not ‘books’’. On the hand, if we move the negative morpheme further and place it just after the subject *Sitá*, the sentence is now interpreted as ‘Sita did not bring the book bur rita brought it’. Here, the use of ‘*hebejekYm*’ is optional in such a sentence, that is to say, irrespective of the presence or absence of ‘*hebejekYm*’ in the sentence, the sentence would mean the same as in (63).

(60)	sita	la	rita	hitap	pori-pan	bəα-mα-pən
	sita	and	rita	book	read-perf.rls	bring-neg.rls- rls.perf
	Sita and Rita have read, not brought the book.					
(61)	sita	la	rita	hitap	pori-mα-pən	bəα-pən
	sita	and	rita	book	read-neg.rls-perf.rls	bring-rls.perf
	Sita and Rita have not read , (but) brought the book.					

(62)	sita	la	rita	hitap-əm	ma	bəa-pən
	sita	and	rita	book-acc	neg	bring-rls.perf
	Sita and Rita have not brought the book .(but something else, other than book.)					
(63)	sita	ma	hebejekəm	rita	hitap-əm	bəa-pən
	sita	neg.rls	but	rita	book-acc	bring-rls.perf
	Sita not, but Rita have brought the book.					
(64)	ma	sita	la	rita	hitap-əm	bəa-pən
	neg	sita	and	rita	book-acc	bring-rls.perf
	No, Sita and Rita have brought the book.					

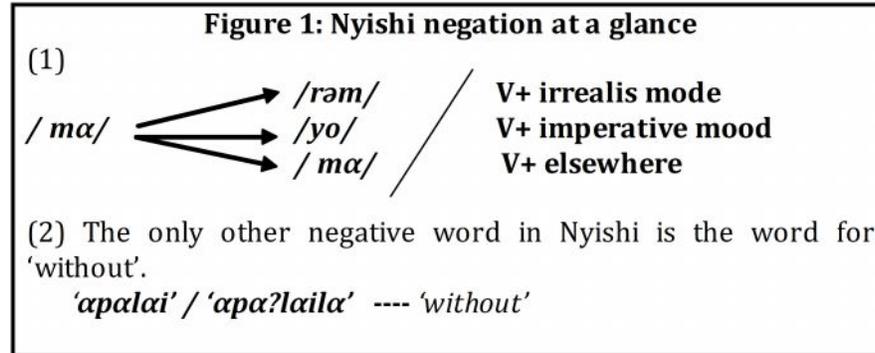
In all these cases, the negative morpheme, whether it functions as a negative suffix as in (61) or as a negative word as in (62), always follows the constituent it scopes over, thus, has a narrow scope over it. Finally, as in (64), when ‘*má*’ is placed in the sentence initial position, the sentence gives the meaning in affirmation, that is, it means ‘Sita and Rita have definitely brought the book’, and there is possibly no chance of denying the fact. Thus, ‘*má*’ scopes over the entire sentence in this case, negating the proposition.

12. Conclusions

The semantic diversity of ‘*má*’ in Nyishi is such that a single morpheme can negate anything and everything in the grammar. It can negate any activity or proposition in the language. It is the same morpheme ‘*má*’, which functions as a negative suffix and as a negative word, as per the need, thus having a wide and varied semantic range. Thus the morpheme ‘*ma*’ has three allomorphs, as illustrated in figure [1].

The only other negative morpheme in the grammar happens to be for the word ‘*without*’, beside the special case of ‘*never*’.

Negation in Nyishi can be summed up in the following way: there are two basic negative morphemes:



Thus it is the negative morpheme 'ma' that functions as the standard negative marker, negating words and constituents as a negative word; negating tense, aspect and mood as negative affix, and also negating comparisons and quantifiers, as a negative particle. Thus, the negative morpheme '-ma' is a poly-functional morpheme in the Nyishi.

Notes

¹ Abraham (2007) illustrates the phonological and lexical similarities of the pronominals of as many as seven Tani languages, including Nyishi, Tagin, Galo. (pp. 188-189.)