SIL-Mexico Branch Electronic Working Papers #004: The Negation System of Loxicha Zapotec

Daniel G. Birtles
Cheryl A. Black

Contents

1 Introduction

This paper documents a preliminary investigation of the negation system of Loxicha Zapotec, spoken by about 75,000 speakers in Oaxaca, Mexico from San Andres Paxlan to Pochutla to Puerto Escondido to San Agustín Loxicha.[1]

As discussed in Black (2000:149-169), Zapotec languages are Negative Concord languages, meaning that multiple instances of negation in a sentence simply result in a single negative reading. This is similar to Spanish but the opposite of English, where each additional negative in a sentence reverses the polarity. For example, *I didn't see nothing* really means 'I did see something' in standard English, whereas in a Negative Concord language it means the same as 'I didn't see anything'.

Further, Zanuttini (1991) and Ladusaw (1992) have shown that Negative Concord languages require the negation to be marked either on the verb or before it, or both. It is not enough for a complement alone *in situ* to be negative. Zapotec languages in general go beyond this restriction and require all negative words or phrases to be fronted (Black 2000). In Loxicha Zapotec, most negative words or phrases are fronted from their normal VSO position as expected, but negative direct and indirect objects may remain *in situ*, as long as the negation is also marked on the verb.

Another unique feature of the negation system in Loxicha Zapotec is that verbal negation is marked by both a proclitic and an enclitic, similar to the French *ne...pas*. This is in contrast to the normal case for Zapotec of simply having a negative enclitic.

---

[1]The data used in this paper were collected by the first author and his wife, Evangeline, under the auspices of SIL from 2000-present, and are primarily from speakers in the town of San Agustín Loxicha. There is some variation across the language, as shown by Beam de Azcona (2004) for Santa Catarina Coatlán-Loxicha Zapotec. (The research that Beam de Azcona did was on a separate but related language which was or is considered to be a salvage project.)

Section 2 documents these negative clitics, na...ta, and shows that while the clitics normally occur on the verb, it is also possible for multiple words to be bracketed by the negative clitics. Section 3 then describes the various negative indefinites and shows that they are normally fronted as expected, but this is not required for direct or indirect objects. Section 4 then deals with other ways of expressing negation, such as the negative existential verb, negative conjunction and negative interrogative.

2 The discontinuous negative clitics

The most commonly used markers of negation in Loxicha Zapotec are the two clitics na= and =ta which seem to form a discontinuous morpheme expressing negation na...ta. Section 2.1 shows these clitics as they occur most frequently: attached to the verb. Section 2.2 then gives examples of these negative markers surrounding multiple words, giving evidence for their clitic nature.

2.1 Negation on the verb

Negation is usually marked on the verb using the discontinuous negative morpheme na...ta as shown in (1).

(1)   **Na**=n-gax=**ta**   na.
      NEG=H-lie.down=NEG 1SG
      I am not lying down.

There are several other forms of the final part of this morpheme as shown in (2)

(2)   a.   **Na**=xovi=**t**   na.
           NEG=P.fly=NEG 1SG
           I will not fly.

      b.   **Na**=kani=**d**   na.
           NEG=P.dance=NEG 1SG
           I will not dance.

      c.   **Na**=nd-la=**da**   yi.
           NEG=H-fall.down=NEG rain
           It is not raining.

It is not clear exactly what determines the allomorphy seen above; a particular allomorph does not always go with a certain verb (as shown by (3-4)) nor a certain pronominal subject (as seen in (1-2)), nor does there appear to be a phonological rationale for the choice of /t/ or /d/. It is possible that the final /a/ is a separate durative morpheme.[2] However, pending further research, we leave the final /a/ as part of the negative morpheme when it occurs.

---

[2]Beam de Azcona (2004) analyzes the final clitic =di' as a durative morpheme indicating action at a point in time, which is not always used in a negative situation in Santa Catarina Coatlán-Loxicha Zapotec.

The examples in (3)-(4) show that the initial clitic na= is not required. When the initial clitic na= is omitted, the negative reading is weaker. (3a) gives the normal negative verb form and (3b) gives the weaker negative, with a first person singular subject.

(3) a. **Na**=ya=**t**   na.
         NEG=P.go=NEG 1SG
         I am (definitely) not going.

     b. Ya=**t**   na.
         P.go=NEG 1SG
         I am not going.

(4) shows the same verb pair but with a third person subject. Although the final negative clitic on the same verb has changed to the =dallomorph with the change in subject, this is not always the case.

(4) a. **Na**=ya=**d**   xa'.
         NEG=P.go=NEG 3
         He is (definitely) not going.

     b. Ya=**d**   xa'.
         P.go=NEG 3
         He is not going.

This might be similar to the use of contractions in English. Consider the weaker negative reading in *He isn't going* versus *He is not going*.

2.2 Negation on a phrase

There are a number of examples where the discontinuous marking of negation brackets more than just the verb. Some of these are auxiliary-verb constructions, as in (5).

(5) **Na**=nd-li ley'=**ta**   na.
     NEG=H-do bless=NEG 1SG
     I do not bless (something).

Some examples mark negation around a verb and an adjective. (6a) gives an example of a positive verb adjective construction, then (6b) shows how the negative clitics bracket both the verb and the (intensified) adjective. Note that in each case the word for heart is clearly part of the subject.

(6) a. N-cho nabil=toz lazo' konej.
         H-enter sad=very   heart rabbit
         The rabbit's heart is very sad.

b. **Na**=yo　　nabil=toz=**ta** lazoˈ-a　　konej lud.
NEG=P.enter sad=very=NEG　heart-2FAM rabbit small
Don't let your heart be so sad, little rabbit.

   Some examples consist of a verb and a body part word. (7a) shows that in this situation the final negative clitic may appear on the verb as usual, before the body part word, while (7b) demonstrates that the negative clitic may also come after the body part. The difference in these two examples is mainly due to the fact that the body part word is part of the subject in (7a), while it is compounded with the verb in (7b).

(7)　　a.　**Na**=n-za=**da**　　yek-na.
NEG=H-turn=NEG head-1SG
I (my head) did not feel dizzy.

     b.　**Na**=n-xob　yek=**ta**　　goˈ　　na.
NEG=H-bow head=NEG 2RES 1SG
You do not honor me.

   Other examples involve a verb and a noun object. The difference between (8a) and (8b) is that incorporation of the noun object has taken place in (8b).

(8)　　a.　**Na**=ko=**t**　　　　na　bin.
NEG=P.put.in=NEG 1SG seed
I will not plant. (I don't plan to this year.)

     b.　**Na**=ko　　　bin=**ta**　　na.
NEG=P.put.in seed=NEG 1SG
I will not plant. (I don't want to.)

   The difference between (9a) and (9b) is due to verb-noun compounding or more lexical incorporation in (9b).

(9)　　a.　**Na**=ta=**t**　　　　na　di ˈs　tach　la　　ni-n.
NEG=P.give=NEG 1SG word P.wash 2FAM feet-1SG
I do not give you permission to wash my feet.

     b.　Nek tib　men　　**na**=nd-yo=di ˈs=**ta**　　xaja md-yo=di ˈs xa ˈ re ˈ.
not　one person NEG=H-speak=word=NEG like　C-speak-word 3　　there
No one speaks words like he did.

   The final example is most interesting. Whereas (10a) shows the basic negative construction of the verb meaning 'be', (10b) shows that the final negative clitic may attach to the quantifier of the object noun phrase, breaking up the phrase consisting of the number rop 'two', the possessed noun x-kab 'POS-thoughts' and the second person respect pronoun goˈ as the possessor. Note that this is an imperative construction, so there is no overt subject pronoun, but we assume that the subject pronoun would follow the final negative clitic as shown in parentheses, thus the object noun and its possessor would follow the subject in the normal position. The reason for negating the number

is clear, as the speaker wanted to emphasize that the hearer's thoughts or mind should be single, not double.[3]

(10) a. Tib xod   **na**=ˈak=**ta**   taˈ-y   ngud xyle.
          one branch NEG=P.be=NEG P.give-3IN round fruit
          A branch cannot be fruitful.

      b. **Na**=ˈak rop=**ta** (goˈ)   x-kab   goˈ, neka zyeb goˈ.
          NEG=P.be two=NEG (2RES) POS-thoughts 2RES neither P.fear 2RES
          Don't (you) be double-minded, neither should you be afraid.

Each of these types of examples can be accounted for under the same basic phrase structure analysis presented for Quiegolani and Mitla Zapotec in Black (2000:149-169) if we assume either lexical compounding or incorporation with the verb has taken place before verb movement to the position of the negative head.

3 Negative phrases

In addition to the discontinuous negative clitics, Loxicha Zapotec has various ways of expressing negative phrases. Section 3.1 exemplifies negative indefinite nominal phrases meaning 'nobody' and 'nothing', as well as documenting the use of neka acting as a negative determiner to negate a nominal phrase. Section 3.2 then covers the negative indefinite adverbial phrases meaning 'never' and 'nowhere'.

3.1 Negative nominal phrases

Examples of negative nominal phrases meaning 'nobody' are given in (11). Note that in (11a) the negative phrase is the subject and it is fronted before the verb. This seems to be required in Loxicha Zapotec for subjects. In (11b) the negative phrase is the direct object and in (11c) it is the indirect object. These examples verify that negative phrases with these grammatical functions need not be fronted. In either case, the verbal negation discussed in section 2 is still present.

(11) a. **Nek tib men**   na=li=da   gan yed   lo-n.
          not   one person NEG=P.do=NEG gain P.come face-1SG
          No one will be able to come to me.

      b. Na=tab=ta   na   **nek tib men** juaˈn m-daˈ xaˈ lo-n.
          NEG=P.lose=NEG 1SG not   one person that   C-give 3   face-1SG
          I will not lose a single person that he gave to me.

---

[3]Quiegolani Zapotec also allows the negative to be marked on the number instead of the verb when that is what is being negatively emphasized in the sentence. This is shown in the following example from Black (2000:297):

(i)   Led   Rafayel   y-rup-**t**   Lawer   w-tsoow   mezh.
      FM   Ralph   P-two-NEG Larry   C-make   table
      It wasn't together that Ralph and Larry made a table (i.e., Ralph made it alone.)

c. Tak le' Xud xa' na=n-yab=ta kwent lo **nek tib men**.
because FM father 1SG NEG=H-ask=NEG account face not one person
My Father does not ask for accounts from any one.

Examples of negative nominal phrases meaning 'nothing' are given in (12). Here the negative phrase is the direct object. (12a) shows that this negative phrase can remain *in situ*, but (12b) verifies that it can optionally be fronted. Again, the negative clitics are still present on the verb.

(12) a. Na=li-t na gan li-n **nek tib jua'n** lo miska na.
NEG=P.do=NEG 1SG gain P.do-1SG not one thing face very.same 1SG
I cannot do anything on my own.

b. **Nek tib jua'n** na=li=t na gan li-n lo miska na.
not one thing NEG=P.do=NEG 1SG gain P.do-1SG face very.same 1SG
I cannot do anything on my own.

Neka, which is used as a negative conjunction meaning 'neither' (see section 4.3), can also be used as a type of negative determiner to negate a nominal phrase, as shown in (13). In these examples, the negative phrase is the subject and must be fronted as shown, still co-occurring with the negated verb as well.

(13) a. **Neka tmi** jua'n li men gan chop ayo' wiz na=gal=ta.
neither money that P.do people gain two hundred day NEG=P.suffice=NEG
Not even the money that a man would earn in two hundred days would suffice.

b. **Neka wez Jesus** na=nd-li=d lezo' xa' Jesus.
neither brother Jesus NEG=H-do=NEG heart 3 Jesus
Not even Jesus' brothers believed in him.

3.2 Negative adverbial phrases

The meaning of the negative adverb 'never' can be expressed in three different ways: using a negative nominal phrase nek tib gob 'not one time', as seen in (14a), using the negative adverb tera 'not yet', as shown in (14a-b), or by using the positive adverb tiptane 'always' in conjunction with the negative-marked verb, as exemplified in (14c).

(14) a. **Nek tib gob tera** ak na' mos che'n tib men.
not one time not.yet P.be 1EX slaves of one person
We were never slaves of any one.

b. **Tera** yolo xa' Xud na.
not.yet P.know 3 father 1SG
They never knew my Father.

   c. **Tiptane na**=yek=**ta**   lezoꞌ xaꞌ.
       always   NEG=P.thirst=NEG heart 3
       They will never be thirsty.

The meaning of the negative adverb 'nowhere' is expressed by the adverbial phrase neꞌ teꞌ 'no place'. (15a) gives an example with the phrase fronted together, and (15b) shows that the negative neꞌ may be fronted while the noun teꞌ 'place' remains *in situ*.

(15)   a. **Neꞌ teꞌ**   tyob yek na na=n-geno=t na.
         no   place P.sit head 1sg neg=H-have=neg 1sg
         I don't have any place to lay my head.

     b. **Neꞌ** na=n-geno=d   maꞌ   **teꞌ**.
         no   NEG=H-have=NEG animal place
         The animals don't have a place

The usage of these negative phrases in Loxicha follows the requirement noted by Zanuttini (1991) and Ladusaw (1992) for Negative Concord languages: negation is always marked either on the verb or on a fronted phrase, or both. The fact that negative direct and indirect objects are allowed to remain *in situ* shows that Loxicha Zapotec has a looser requirement on fronting than either Quiegolani Zapotec or Mitla Zapotec (Black 2000). This, however, can be treated as simply a parameter in the Negative Criterion.

4 Stand alone negative words

These are several other words that express a type of negation in Loxicha Zapotec. These do not need to co-occur with a negative verb. Section 4.1 covers the negative existential verb ngenta. Section 4.2 then exemplifies the negative word pa which expresses doubt. Section 4.3 turns to the negative conjunction neka 'neither', and finally a negative interrogative construction with xa=naꞌ 'why=NEG' is shown in section 4.4.

4.1 Negative existential verb

The negative existential verb ngenta is made up of the three morphemes n-gen=ta 'H-have=NEG'. As a verbal element, it can express negation on its own or it can appear with other negative phrases (16c).

(16)   a. **N-gen**=**ta**   kwan n-geno goꞌ.
         H-have=NEG thing H-have 2RES
         You don't have anything.

     b. Leꞌ belꞌ **n-gen**=**ta**   cho siꞌn li-y.
         FM flesh H-have=NEG what work P.do-3IN
         The body is useless.

    c. Nek tib men **n-gen꞊ta**   tya.
        not   one person H-have=NEG there
        No one is there.

    d. Leʼ lo x-kiʼs   xaʼ **n-gen꞊ta**   mod   kab ro men.
        FM face Pos-word 3   H-have=NEG method P.say no person
        Regarding his word, there is no way for people to deny it.

While, the examples in (16) show the commonly used form of the negative existential verb, it is also possible to have the initial negative clitic present, as in (17).

(17)   **Na꞊n-gen꞊ta**   xa.
       NEG=H-have=NEG 3
       There is no one here.

This full form is stronger language but perfectly acceptable, while the shorter form is softer, like a contraction (see also (3-4)).

4.2 Pa - expressing doubt

The word pa does not need to occur with negation on the verb to give a negative reading. However, the meaning is more one of being doubtful about the situation rather than a full negative. Compare (18a) with pa to the full negative reading in (18b).[4]

(18) a. **Pa**   gal   juaʼn reʼ wa reta men tos reʼ.
         doubtful P.suffice thing here P.eat all   people many here
         I doubt that there is enough food for this many people to eat.

     b. **Na꞊gal꞊ta**   juaʼn reʼ wa reta men   tos reʼ.
         NEG=suffice=NEG thing here P.eat all   people many here
         There is not enough food for this many people to eat.

More examples with pa 'doubtful' are given in (19).

(19) a. **Pa**   li   lezoʼ goʼ-y.
         doubtful P.do heart 2RES-3IN
         I doubt that you believe it.

---

[4]Pa seems to only be used for 'I doubt' or 'it is doubtful that...' For other persons, the negative verbal phrase Na꞊li꞊d lezoʼ 'NEG=do=NEG heart' meaning 'not believe' is used, followed by the subject pronoun, as in:

(i)   **Na꞊li꞊d**   lezoʼ xaʼ gal   juaʼn   reʼ   wa   reta   men   tos   reʼ.
       NEG=do=NEG heart   3   P.suffice thing   here   P.eat   all   people   many   here
       He/she doubts that there is enough food for this many people to eat.

b. Mbiˈ ya   **pa**   ak xaˈ tib xaˈ mtelˈ Dios.
   man there doubtful P.be 3   one 3   sent   God
   The man there I doubt is the one God sent.

Note that like most other expressions of negation, pa appears before the verb. Since no verbal negation is required, this position still allows these constructions to fulfill the requirement noted for Negative Concord languages by Zanuttini (1991) and Ladusaw (1992).

4.3 Negative conjunction

The negative conjunction neka 'neither' can be used to conjoin clauses, as shown in (20).

(20) a. **Neka** na = ke = t   na   yalke yek la.
          neither NEG=hit=NEG 1SG guilt   head 2FAM
          Neither do I blame you.

      b. Per tiptane na = n-gon = ta   goˈ   xomod ni   xaˈ,
          but always NEG=H-hear=NEG 2RES how   H.speak 3

          neka ng-yo lo   goˈ xaˈ,
          neither H-know face 2RES 3

          neka n-geno goˈ x-kiˈs   xaˈ lenˈ   lezoˈ goˈ.
          neither H-have 2RES POS-word 3   inside heart 2RES
          But you have never heard his voice, neither have you seen him,
            nor do you have his words inside of you.

      c. ¿Cho kwaˈn n-dli n-gole lu   tes n = ak = ta   lu   Crist,
          What thing   H-do H-call 2FAM if   NEG=H.be=NEG 2FAM Christ

          neka n = ak la   Elias,
          neither H-be   2FAM Elijah

          neka n-ak diˈs yed   taˈ x-kiˈs   Dios?
          neither H-be word P.come P.give POS-word God
          What are you called if you are not the Christ, neither are you Elijah
            nor one who brings God's word (a prophet)?

This same negative conjunction is also used with nominal phrases, as shown in (21). The pattern seems to be that the first item in a long list does not need neka. The middle items are preceded by either neka or nek, a shortened version of neka.[5] Then the final item is preceded by nde neka 'and neither'.

(21) a. Na = n-cho = las = ta   na   nzob **neka** ya   **nde neka** libr.
          NEG=H-enter=heart=NEG 1SG corn neither wood and neither book
          I don't want corn nor wood nor books.

---

[5]It is possible to say neka for each item in a list, but it sounds slow, prolonged and labored.

b. Na=n-cho=las=ta   na nzob **nek** ya **nek** libr
NEG=H-enter=heart=NEG 1SG corn neither wood neither book

nde neka mached.
and neither machete
I don't want corn nor wood nor books nor a machete.

4.4 Negative interrogative

There is also a negative form of the interrogative meaning 'why?' to express the question 'why not?': xa=naꞌ 'why=NEG', as exemplified in (22):

(22) Mbeꞌ, ¿**xa=naꞌ** li-a   za we-a   na kon lu?
moon why=NEG P.come.down-2FAM then P.take-2FAM 1SG with 2FAM
Moon, why don't you come down and take me with you?

5 Conclusion

We have seen that Loxicha Zapotec marks negation on the verbal head via discontinuous negative clitics *na...ta*, similar to the French *ne...pa*. These clitics do not appear strictly on the verb, but can surround additional material that can be analyzed as either lexically compounded or syntactically incorporated with the verb. Loxicha Zapotec also has a negative existential verb which can alternatively fill the head position.

There are also various negative phrases to express the notions of negative indefinite nominal phrases and adverbial phrases. These must be fronted if they do not co-occur with a negative verb, but only subjects must front if a negative-marked verb is present. Negative direct and indirect object are allowed to remain *in situ*. This is a looser requirement than that found in other Zapotec languages.

The negation system of Loxicha Zapotec conforms to the restriction of head-marked negation or higher for Negative Concord languages noted by Zanuttini (1991) and Ladusaw (1992). With a simple parameter change, it will also conform to the phrase structure analysis for negation in Zapotec given in Black (2000).

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this paper:

Abbreviation	Explanation
C	completive aspect
CAUS	causative
H	habitual aspect
P	potential aspect
FM	focus marker
NEG	negative clitic
POS	possessive prefix for alienably possessed nouns

Abbreviation	Explanation
1SG	first person singular pronoun
1EX	first person plural exclusive pronoun
2FAM	second person familiar pronoun
2RES	second person respect pronoun
3	third person pronoun
3IN	third person inanimate pronoun

References

Beam de Azcona, Rosemary G. 2004. *A Coatlán-Loxicha Zapotec Grammar.* Ph.D. dissertation. Berkeley, CA. University of California at Berkeley.

Black, Cheryl A. 2000. *Quiegolani Zapotec syntax: A principles and parameters account.* Publications in Linguistics 136. Dallas, TX: SIL International and the University of Texas at Arlington.

Ladusaw, William A. 1992. "Expressing negation." *SRC Working Papers* 92:92-103. Santa Cruz: University of California.

Zanuttini, Raffaella. 1991. *Syntactic properties of sentential negation. A comparative study of romance languages.* Ph.D. dissertation. Philadelphia. University of Pennsylvania.