

Negation Strategies in Markodi: An Exploration of the Mavilan Tribe's Indigenous Mother Tongue

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Abstract

Negation is a fundamental linguistic feature that has been extensively researched, particularly the standard negation strategies. However, negation strategies in Markodi, the speech form of the Mavilan tribal community in Kerala, commonly regarded as a dialect of Tulu remains unexplored. This paper aims to comprehensively examine both standard negation and clausal negation in Markodi, with a special focus on prohibitive constructions, negative replies and negation of non-verbal predicates. By examining these various facets, the paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the negation system within this under-described speech form, while shedding light on the broader typological variations in negation strategies.

Keywords: Markodi, negation, prohibitive constructions, non-verbal predicates, South Dravidian

Introduction

The Mavilan community, a Scheduled Tribe inhabiting the Kannur and Kasaragod Districts of Kerala, has long been acknowledged for its tribal identity (Thurston & Rangachari, 1909). Despite this recognition, their classification shifted to a scheduled caste in 1956. Despite recommendations for scheduled tribe status in 1967, they remained classified as a scheduled caste until 2003. It was only in 2003, when the state passed the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act 2002 that they were recognised as a distinct tribal group by the state.

While their cultural heritage has since gained attention, the linguistic identity of the Mavilans has often been overlooked. Their speech form, often mistaken for Tulu, and the community's relatively higher population of 30,867 (Census, 2011) contributed to its exclusion from preservation efforts like SPPEL, the Government of India's initiative for protecting endangered languages. Classifying their speech through the Tulu-centric perspective has further led to its omission from linguistic databases such as Ethnologue and Glottologue. The present paper aims to provide a descriptive account of negation strategies in the speech form of Mavilans, commonly referred to locally as Markodi.

Anthropological Background and Linguistic Identity of the Mavilan Tribe

The Mavilan tribe, primarily settled in the Kasaragod and Kannur districts of Kerala, have historically been considered hunter-gatherers with Dravidian roots who have gradually transitioned into an agrarian lifestyle. Kurup (2000) believes that Mavilan was essentially a Dravidian tribe, and the people of this tribe were among the original inhabitants of Kerala. Referring to the Mavila forts in the Kasaragod region, Balan (2001) portrays Mavilans as having control over the land stretching from the seashore to the western Ghats before the advent of the Kadamba dynasty. Based on the myths circulating within the community, it is also suggested that the Mavilans served as soldiers under King Devarayar, the ruler of Tulunadu. Their livelihood was once largely reliant on forest resources, especially medicinal plants. The term 'Mavilan' is also etymologically linked to the medicinal plant '*Mavilavu*', which they traditionally sold.

The linguistic identity of the Mavilan tribe is deeply connected to their anthropological heritage. Their speech form, often documented as Tulu, is locally known as Markodi. Interestingly various interpretations exist regarding the term. While the Mavilan community exclusively speaks it, other communities find it difficult to perceive, leading them to associate it with something foreign or alien. Hence the term Markodi is commonly understood to mean 'alien' (Jayan, 2023). Another interpretation connects the term Markodi to the Mailvans' strong connection with betel leaves, which are crucial to their culture, including medicinal use, chewing, and ritual use. Etymologically, Markodi may also be derived from '*maratta kodi*', meaning 'betel leaves', symbolising the close connection between the language and the cultural practices.

Review of Literature

The first and most comprehensive publication on the Mavilan tribe comes from Karippath (2005). His doctoral dissertation, later published as '*Malayile Mavilanmar*', explored the tribal culture and folklore of the Mavilan community. Kunhambu's (2011) book '*Nikkerenna Putharu Ecche*', portrays the Mavilan tribe as a Tulu-speaking aboriginal. The book sheds light on their historical journey. Jayan (2016), in his conference paper titled "A Study on Mavilan Language", argues for the status of Markodi as a separate language rather than a dialect of Tulu. Abraham, L.'s (2018) doctoral dissertation, '*The Songs of Mavilan Tribe, an Ecocritical Analysis*' explores the Mavilan community's songs within the ecocriticism theoretical framework. Another recent research on the language of the Mavilans is a report titled '*A Sketch Grammar of Mavilan*' by Ravi Sankar S. Nair (2019) submitted to the Department of Linguistics, Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod, as a part of the 'Project for the Documentation of Endangered Languages'.

Methodology

The data for the study were primarily collected from members of the Mavilan community residing in the Kuttikkol Panchayath, Kasaragod. In addition to the primary resources, secondary resources such as journal articles were utilised to shape the paper. The method of data collection involved direct elicitation through a structured questionnaire. Native speakers of Markodi were interviewed, and their speech data were recorded for detailed analysis.

Negation in Markodi

All native morphological markers for negation in Markodi are suffixes, primarily used with verbs. Nouns in Markodi do not take negative prefixes or suffixes.

Standard Negation

Standard negation refers to the fundamental means by which a language negates declarative verbal main clauses. In Markodi, standard negation in such clauses is expressed using the negative auxiliaries *iddi* and *atti* which either function as the main verb or are affixed to lexical verbs to convey negation. Another Negation marker is the suffix *-a:*, which is attached to the finite form of verbs followed by the Person-Number-Gender (PNG) marker.

- (1) *e:ni amma:lu*
 I Ammalu
 ‘I am Ammalu.’
- (2) *e:ni amma:lu att̃i*
 I Ammalu NEG
 ‘I am not Ammalu.’
- (3) *e-kki aja-na terivu*
 I-DAT he-ACC know
 ‘I know him.’
- (4) *e-kki aja-na terij-a:ŋdi*
 I-DAT he-ACC know-NEG
 ‘I don’t know him.’
- (5) *aji pat̃ta-t̃ti ill-e*
 He house-LOC be-PNG
 ‘He is at home.’
- (6) *aji pat̃ta-t̃ti id̃di*
 he house-LOC NEG
 ‘He is not at home.’
- (7) *jikke kalppugina att̃i*
 child play-INF NEG
 ‘The child is not playing.’
- (8) *aji e:pa:la angadikki po:-v-a:ŋdi*
 he always market go-FUT-NEG
 ‘He will not always go to the market.’

Negation in Non-declaratives

It is typologically common for negation strategies in imperatives to differ from those used in standard negation, which holds true in Markodi. The negation in imperative construction in Markodi relies solely on prohibitive markers to convey negative commands. Unlike in declarative

sentences, where standard negation strategies apply, imperatives are marked by specific markers such as *-a*: (singular), *-e*: (plural) and *-o:ɖɪɪ* (prohibitive).

- (9) *i:jjɪ icciki pall-a*
you here come-IMP.SG
'You come here.'
- (10) *i:jjɪ icciki par-o:ɖɪɪ*
you.SG here come-PROH
'You don't come here.'
- (11) *ɳikke:ri icciki pall-e*
you.PL here come-IMP.PL
'You come here.'
- (12) *ɳikke:ri icciki par-o:ɖɪɪ*
you.PL here come-PROH
'You don't come here.'
- (13) *i:jjɪ po:l-a*
you.SG go-IMP.SG
'You go.'
- (14) *i:jjɪ po:v-o:ɖɪɪ*
you.PL go-PROH
'You don't go.'

Non-Verbal Negation

Non-verbal negation refers to negating a simple declarative sentence where the predicate is not a lexical verb. In Markodi, non-verbal predication is possible with or without a copula. The methods used to express non-verbal negation vary across languages. Some languages apply the same negation strategy in non-verbal predications as in standard negation, while others use distinct approaches. In Markodi, existential constructions feature an overt copula, while negative existential constructions are formed using standard negation. Markodi may or may not use an overt

copula in other non-verbal predicate constructions. The negation strategy employed in non-verbal predications mirrors standard negation.

- (15) *d̥e:veri i||eri*
God COP
'God exists'
- (16) *d̥e:veri iḍḍi*
God NEG
'Go does not exist.'
- (17) *s:te ti:ccari*
Seetha teacher
'Seetha is a teacher'
- (18) *s:te ti:ccari aṭṭi*
Seetha teacher NEG
'Seetha is not a teacher'
- (19) *puṣṭakam me:ṣe-tta miṭṭi iṇḍi*
book table-GEN above COP
'The book is on the table'
- (20) *puṣṭakam me:ṣe-tta miṭṭi iḍḍi*
book table-GEN above NEG
'The book is not there on the table'

The predicate in non-verbal predication can be an adjective, as in the examples below.

- (21) *aṭṭi eḍḍaṭṭi*
she good
'She is good'
- (22) *aṭṭi eḍḍaṭṭi aṭṭi*
she good NEG
'She is not good'

Conditional Negative Marker

The conditional negative marker in Markodi is *-tta*. This can be seen in the examples (23) and (24).

(23) *i:jjĩ po:ji-tta e:ni po:-v-ε*
you go-COND.NEG I go-FUT-PNG
'If you do not go, I will go'

(24) *i:jjĩ e-kkĩ paĩçe iṭṭe:-tta ṅinna-nĩ e:ni ṅo:-pp-ε*
you I-DAT money give-COND.NEG you-ACC I beat-FUT-PNG
'If you do not give me the money, I will beat you.'

Non-Clausal Negation- Negative Replies

Negative auxiliaries used in the standard negation are employed in Negative replies.

(25) *aji partṭena?*
He come-PST-IP
'Did he come?'

(26) *iḍḍi*
NEG
'No.'

(27) *aṭṭi ravi aṭṭ-a:?*
that Ravi NEG-IP
'Isn't that Ravi?'

(28) *aṭṭi*
NEG
'No.'

(29) *a:ṇḍi*
yes
'Yes.'

Infinitive forms of the verb take both the negative auxiliaries *iddi* and *atti* to denote two different meanings.

(30) *kunnu-gu|u kalppugina iddi*
child-PL play.INF NEG
'The children are not playing'

(31) *kunnu-gu|u kalppugina atti*
child-PL play.INF NEG
'The children are not playing'

The first sentence implies a lack of interest in playing, while the second sentence implies that the children are not involved in playing; instead, they are doing something else.

Conclusion

The paper provides a descriptive account of negation in Markodi, exploring how negative markers function across various sentence types, including declarative, imperative and interrogative sentences, with illustrative examples. Given the limited research on Markodi, this study significantly enhances our understanding of its grammatical structure and contributes valuable insights into its linguistic features.

Acknowledgement

This paper largely results from the author's doctoral research, funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) under its Doctoral Fellowship Scheme. However, the facts, opinions and conclusions expressed in this paper are solely the author's responsibility and do not necessarily reflect the views of ICSSR.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 24:9 September 2024

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