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Negation in Mauwake, a Papuan language

Abstract

This article describes negators and their use in Mauwake,¹ a Papuan language on the North Coast of the Madang Province in Papua New Guinea. Mauwake employs four negative adverbs. Two of them are almost synonymous but used in slightly different syntactic structures. In many environments there is a choice between two or more negators: the use of each is discussed. Negation strategies in other Papuan languages related to Mauwake are briefly touched on as well.

1. Negation strategies in Papuan languages

The simplest and cross-linguistically most common negation strategy, uninflected particles (Dahl 1979: 84, Payne 1985: 222, Miestamo 2003: 227–379), is also very common as the main negation strategy in Papuan languages. A language may have just one negator like Nek, which uses *nim* ‘no, not’ either pre-verbally or clause-finally.² Many languages have two negators, one for clausal negation and the other for a negative interjection: Bargam (Hepner), Maia (Hardin), Usan (Reesink 1987).

¹ Mauwake is a fairly rigid SOV language, as is common with Papuan languages. Within the noun phrase, all attributes follow the head noun, with the exception of possessives and nominal qualifiers. As is typical of SOV languages, Mauwake is almost totally a suffixal and postpositional language: all verbs have at least one suffix, and usually more, and noun phrases may take post-clitics

In content questions the question word is at the pattern-position, i.e. where the questioned element would be in a corresponding statement. In polar questions the question clitic *-i* comes as the last element of the clause. Questions with a negative alternative have the negation as the last clause following the question clause.

The data for this article were collected 1978–2001 while I worked among the Mauwake people under the auspices of SIL.

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² Katri Linnasalo, personal communication.

According to Wurm (1982: 63), verbal affixes are also a common negation strategy in the largest group of Papuan languages, the Trans-New Guinea Phylum. Sentani both adds a prefix to the verb and changes the verb inflection as well (Hartzler 1994).

Some Papuan languages use a combination of various strategies. Amele has two particles, *gee* for statements and *cain* for commands, but it uses verbal affixes as well. In the indicative verbs there is an intricate interplay of particles and affixes in the different tenses (Roberts 1987: 110). Hua uses a negative prefix 'a'- on verbs, and a negative particle 'a'a' 'no' as a complete sentence (Haiman 1980). Yimas has a very complicated affixal system, which is currently undergoing a change, plus two negative copulas used with non-verbal predicates (Foley 1991).

Lexical negators like 'nobody', 'none' etc. are quite rare in Papuan languages (Reesink 1987: 272). Mauwake does not have them; the only one that could be understood as such, since it has a negative meaning, is *eewuar* 'not yet', but even that still requires a verbal negator in the clause.

2. Negation adverbs in Mauwake

Negation is expressed through four adverbs:³ *me*, *weetak*, *wia*, and *marew*. They are morphologically free, and to some extent also syntactically: they have certain freedom as to where they can occur in a clause. Of the four negators, *me* is positioned before the negated element, while *marew*, on the contrary, follows the negated element; *weetak* and *wia*, when replacing full clauses, are free to be anywhere in a sentence,⁴ but as non-verbal negators they are clause-final. Roughly speaking, the most frequent negator *me* is basically a clause and constituent negator, *weetak* and *wia* are negative interjections or non-verbal predicate negators, and *marew* can negate non-verbal predicates and occasionally noun phrase constituents.

Weetak, *wia*, and occasionally *marew*, may be intensified by postposed *akena* 'truly', 'very'. *Me* can only be intensified as a verbal negator, in which case *akena* comes after the verb rather than after the negator.

³ They are particles instead of prefixes or suffixes because of (1) their movability/morphological freedom, (2) word stress, and (3) the fact that most of them can take some morphology of their own.

⁴ They usually occur as the first or last clause, sometimes as the only one, and only seldom sentence-medially.

- (1) *Weetak akena, i me kuum-e-mik.*⁵
 No truly 1P.NOM not burn-PA-1/3P
 ‘No, we did not burn it.’
- (2) *Me on-a-m akena.*
 not do-PA-1S truly/very
 ‘I really did not do it.’

In the following, I will deal with the negation *functionally*, taking different syntactic environments as a starting point and discussing the use of the negators in them.

3. Clausal / predicate negation

3.1 Verbal clauses

This type, also called *standard negation*, “appl[ies] to the most minimal and basic sentences” (Payne 1985: 198). Since most clauses in a language are verbal clauses, the most common type of negation also occurs in verbal clauses. The only verbal negator in Mauwake is *me* ‘not’, placed before the verb phrase.⁶

- (3) *Irak-owa maneka ewur me kerer-e-k.*
 fight-INF big quickly not appear-PA-3S
 ‘The big fight did not start quickly.’
- (4) *I me wia⁷ amukar-e-mik.*
 1P.NOM not 3P.ACC scold-PA-1/3P
 ‘We didn’t scold them.’

⁵ Abbreviations: ACC = accusative; NOM = nominative; C.FOC = contrastive focus; P = plural; DAT = dative; PA = past tense; DS = different subject following; PR = present tense; FU = future tense; QM = question marker; GEN = genitive; RDP = reduplication; I.FOC = irrealis focus; S = singular; IMP = imperative; SEQ = sequential action; INCH = inchoative; SIM = simultaneous action; INF = infinitive; SS = same subject following; LOC = locative.

⁶ A verb phrase in Mauwake consists of a verb or a verbal group plus an optional accusative or dative pronoun preceding it.

⁷ The third person accusative pronoun is homophonous with the negator *wia*.

- (5) *Maamuma nain me tuun-owa ik-e-mik*
 money that not count-INF be-PA-1/3P
 ‘They haven’t counted the money (yet).’

Since *me* is the only verbal negator, it is also used with negative imperatives:

- (6) *Ni iperuma fain me enim-eka.*
 2P.NOM eel this not eat-2P.IMP
 ‘Don’t eat this eel.’

According to Miestamo’s (2003: 71–76) classification the standard negation in Mauwake is symmetric: apart from the presence of the negative marker, the negative clauses are similar to the corresponding affirmatives. In the negated clauses there is no secondary modification like a different word order, neutralised tense distinction or addition of an auxiliary (Payne 1985: 229). The same kind of clausal negation occurs in transitive and intransitive clauses as well as in independent and dependent (medial and subordinate) clauses.

3.2 Non-verbal clauses: equative and descriptive

In equative and descriptive clauses, any of the four negators can be used to negate the non-verbal predicate. The negator *marew* is only possible if there is an adjective in the predicate,⁸ but with the three other negation particles there is no restriction like that.

- (7) *O somek mua weetak/wia.*
 3S.NOM song man no
 ‘He is not a teacher.’
- (8) *Awuliak nain eliwa weetak/wia.*
 sweet.potato that good no
 ‘That sweet potato is not good.’
- (9) *Yo (mua) maala marew.*
 1S.NOM (man) long no(ne)
 ‘I am not (a) tall (man).’

⁸ These clauses with *marew* are cases of constituent negation as well.

- (10) *Muuka nain me yena muuka akena-ke.*
 boy/son that not 1S.GEN son true-C.FOC
 ‘That boy/son is not my own/real son.’
- (11) *Biiris me eliwa, damo-damola-ko.*
 bridge not good RDP-bad-I.FOC
 ‘The bridge was not good, (it was) very bad.’

Trying to pinpoint meaning differences between the various negators is somewhat risky, but I am proposing the following. *Weetak* and *wia* behave like the logical clause negator: ‘it is not the case that (...)’ *Marew* mainly has the adjective in its scope, and it is neutral: not focused and non-contrastive. As the default verbal predicate negator *me* is neutral, but as a non-verbal predicate negator it is contrastive and can be focused (10).

3.3 Non-verbal clauses: existential and possessive

A negator functions as the predicate also in existential and possessive negation clauses. In both of these types the corresponding affirmative clause has the predicate *ik-* ‘be’.⁹ *Weetak*, *wia* and *marew* are possible negators in these clauses, but *me* is not. *Marew* often has the sense ‘none at all, not any’.

- (12) *Owowa mua marew.*
 village man no(ne).
 ‘There are no men in the village (at all).’
- (13) *Waaya wia, aara muutiw (ik-ua).*
 pig no, hen only be-PR/PA.3S
 ‘There aren’t any pigs, only hens.’
- (14) *Wi Yaapan emeria weetak.*
 3P.NOM Japan woman no
 ‘The Japanese didn’t have women/wives.’

When there are several negated items, it is possible to keep repeating the same negator (15) or to use different ones (16). Both have been observed with good speakers.

⁹ A possessive clause also requires a dative pronoun to indicate possession.

- (15) *I muuka marew a, i wiipa marew a.*
 1P.NOM son no oh 1P.NOM daughter no oh
 ‘We have no son, and we have no daughter.’
- (16) *Urupa weetak, soomia wia, epira marew.*
 cup no spoon no plate no(ne)
 ‘There were no cups, no spoons, no plates.’

Since there is more than one alternative to choose from, a formal distinction can be made between (17) and (18) below, which have a different meaning. Example (18) is a Mauwake equivalent for the common Tok Pisin idiom *nogat tok*.

- (17) *Yo opora weetak/wia.*
 1S.NOM talk no
 ‘I have no talk. (= I don’t have anything to say.)’
- (18) *Yo opora marew.*
 1S.NOM talk no(ne)
 ‘I have no talk. (= It is OK / I don’t have anything against it.)’

4. Constituent negation

Unlike a number of other Papuan languages, including Usan (Reesink 1987: 271), Mauwake is able to negate various constituents in a clause and even inside a noun phrase. The constituent negator is *me*, and it precedes the negated constituent, which often receives extra stress. In examples (19) to (23) different clause constituents are negated:

- (19) *Me yos-ke uruf-a-m, mua nain-ke uruf-a-k.*¹⁰ (Subj NP)
 not 1S.NOM-C.FOC see-PA-1S man that-C.FOC see-PA-3S
 ‘I didn’t see it, that man did.’ (Or: ‘It wasn’t I who saw it...’)
- (20) *I me uurika ikiw-iyān, ikoka iw-iyān.* (Adv: Temp)
 1P.NOM not tomorrow go-FU.1P later go-FU.1P
 ‘We’ll not go tomorrow, we’ll go later.’

¹⁰ Also standard negation can have just the subject in its scope, but that requires both extra strong stress and contrastive focus marking: *Is-ke me kuum-e-mik*. ‘It wasn’t we who burned it.’

- (21) *Me Lasen-pa ep-a-k, ona manina-pa or-o-k.* (Adv: Loc)
 not Lasen-LOC come-PA-3S 3S.GEN garden-LOC come.down-PA-3S
 ‘He didn’t come from Lasen, he came down from his garden.’
- (22) *Nepa opaimika me baliwep miim-a-mik.* (Adv: Manner)
 bird talk not well hear-PA-1/3P
 ‘They did not hear (understand) Tok Pisin well.’
- (23) *Me emeria nefar maak-i-mik.* (Obj NP)
 not woman 2S.DAT tell-PR-3P
 ‘We are not telling your wife (but you).’

The only elements inside a noun phrase that can be negated separately apart from the whole phrase, are an adjective and the quantifiers *unowa* ‘many’ and *unowiya* ‘all’. Both *me* and *marew* are possible as negators.

- (24) *No mua eliw marew.*
 2S.NOM man good no(ne)
 ‘You are not a good man.’ (Or: ‘You are a no-good man.’)
- (25) *Aakisa unow marew ik-e-mik.*
 now many no(ne) be-PR/PA-1/3P
 ‘Now we are not many.’

Those cases of constituent negation where *me* precedes a verb can only be distinguished from clausal negation in spoken language on the basis of the extra stress, but in written language the two look alike. Example (26) is similar to (6), but the verb is contrasted and emphasized. The extra stress is marked on the second syllable of the verb.

- (26) *Ni iperuma fain me enim-eka, wafur-eka.*
 2P.NOM eel this not eat-2P.IMP throw-2P.IMP
 ‘Don’t eat this eel, throw it (away).’

5. Negative interjections

A negative interjection is used as a one-word reply to a question or a statement. It stands by itself as a complete expression or is pre- or postposed and syntactically independent of the rest of the sentence. Two of the Mauwake negators are used as negative interjections: *weetak* and *wia*.

They are synonymous and usually interchangeable, but in a few environments one or the other is preferred.

As an answer to an affirmative polar question, command or statement, *weetak* (or *wia*) occurs sentence initially and is separated by the rest of the sentence by a pause. The negator can also occur alone.

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| (27) <i>Owora-ko</i> | <i>aaw-o-n-i?</i> | – <i>Weetak/Wia</i> | (<i>me aaw-e-m</i>). |
| betelnut-I.FOC | get-PA-2S | – No | (not get-PA-1S) |
| ‘Did you get betelnut?’ | | – ‘No (I didn’t get any).’ | |

When the question itself is negative, in present-day language use the one-word answer is ambiguous and needs a statement to clarify it. Traditionally an answer to a question affirmed or negated the affirmative or negative *quality* of the question:

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| (28) <i>Auwa</i> | <i>me</i> | <i>ekap-o-k-i?</i> | – <i>Weetak</i> , | (<i>ekap-o-k</i>). |
| my.father | not | come-PA.3S-QM | – No, | (come-PA-3S) |
| ‘Didn’t father come?’ | | | – ‘Yes, (he did)’ | |

But Mauwake is changing to become more like English¹¹ in that the negative answer stands for a negative statement and disregards the negative quality of the question:

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| (29) <i>Auwa</i> | <i>me</i> | <i>ekap-o-k-i?</i> | – <i>Weetak</i> , | (<i>me</i> <i>ekap-o-k</i>). |
| my.father | not | come-PA.3S-QM | – No, | (not come-PA-3S) |
| ‘Didn’t father come?’ | | | – ‘No, (he didn’t)’. | |

6. Contrasted clause

When an affirmative clause is followed by a negative one, and the two only differ by the contrasted element, the whole clause apart from the contrasted element is replaced by *weetak* or *wia*. Both verbal (30) and non-verbal (31) contrasted negative clauses are formed in this way. A full clause is also possible but not as natural.

¹¹ A similar change is taking place in Tok Pisin, probably because of English influence. Although English is the school language, it is more likely that the change in Mauwake is coming via Tok Pisin which is widely used in the community.

(30) *Kedem keker op-a-k ne Yoli weetak.*
 Kedem fear hold-PA-3S and/but Yoli no
 ‘Kedem was afraid but Yoli wasn’t.’

(31) *Mera papako unowa, papako weetak.*
 fish some many some no
 ‘Some fish there are many, some not.’

7. Counter-expectation/frustration

Both the negative interjections, *weetak* and *wia*, can be used to express that some action did not have the expected result. A full clause may follow (32), but more commonly the negation is by itself and the clause is only implied (33). When the counter-expectation clause starts a new sentence and begins with *ne* ‘and/but’,¹² the negator is always *wia*, and an explanatory clause follows (34).

(32) *Wafur-a-k na weetak, ufer-a-k.*
 throw-PA-3S but no miss-PA-3S
 ‘He threw (a spear) but missed (the pig).’

(33) *Akup-a-mik akup-a-mik (na) wia/weetak.*
 search-PA-1/3P search-PA-1/3P (but) no
 ‘We searched and searched but couldn’t find it.’

(34) *Ne wia, iperowa-ke senam kekan-e-mik.*
 and/but no, middle.aged-C.FOC too.much be.strong-PA-1/3P
 ‘But no, the middle-aged men insisted (on doing otherwise).’

8. Negative alternative

Weetak and *wia* are also used when an affirmative question is followed by a negative alternative.

(35) *Sira nain piipua-inan-i e weetak?*
 habit that leave-FU.2S-QM or no
 ‘Will you stop that habit or not?’

¹² The basic meaning for *ne* is ‘and’, but it can also be weakly contrastive. *Na* in examples (32) and (33) is a strong ‘but’.

9. Negation adverbs used as verb roots

Both *weetak* and *marew* can be suffixed with the different subject medial verb ending *-eya*,¹³ and the resulting meaning for *weetak-* is ‘there is not’, and for *marew-* ‘lack’.¹⁴

- (36) *Madang ikiw-owa miiw(a)aasa weetak-eya fan ik-ua.*
 Madang go-INF land.canoe no-DS.2/3S here be-PR/PA.3S
 ‘He would go to Madang but since there is no car he is here.’

- (37) *Maa pela marew-eya fofa er-a-m.*
 thing leaf no(ne)-DS.2/3S market go-PA-1S
 ‘I had no greens and went to the market.’

Weetak and *marew* can also be suffixed with the inchoative suffix *-ar* ‘become’, which is used to verbalize non-verbs. The negative verbs formed in this way take normal verb inflection.

- (38) *O epa oko ikiw-ep miira marew-ar-e-k.*
 3S.NOM place other go-SS.SEQ face no(ne)-INCH-PA-3S
 ‘He went to another place and we don’t see him (lit: he has no face).’

10. Double negation within a clause

There are two kinds of double negation in Mauwake. In both cases the negation is cancelled and the result is affirmative. In the first case a negative verb occurs with a clausal negative:

- (39) *Maamuma me marew-ar-e-mik.*
 money not no(ne)-INCH-PA-1/3P
 ‘We/They did not lack money.’

In a conversation, the negation in the previous speaker’s sentence is challenged with another negation:

- (40) A: *Yo episowa weetak.* B: *Weetak wia.*
 I tobacco no. no no

¹³ This is not regular verbalization, as no other forms of the verbs are possible.

¹⁴ In several contexts, but not all, they are synonymous.

‘I have no tobacco.’

‘Don’t say you don’t have any.’

11. Emphasizing negation

A negative statement can be emphasized by adding the intensifier *akena* ‘very’, as in examples (1) and (2), or by adding a negative interjection as a tag after the statement.

- (41) *Maa unowa me amis-ar-e-mik, weetak.*
 thing many not knowledge-INCH-PA-1/3P no
 ‘We don’t know many things, no.’

A negative interjection is intensified by just repeating it: *Weetak, weetak* or *Wia, wia* ‘No, no’.

12. Negation on sentence level

Basically the scope of negation is within a clause, but sometimes the scope may change. Negative spreading is fairly common in Papuan languages that have a medial verb system. The negation may spread forwards or backwards, or both, depending on the language. In Mauwake both forward and backward spreading are possible across medial clause boundaries with the same subject medial verbs, especially if the verbs form a logical sequence, “expectancy chain”. In (42) and (43) both the verbs are in the scope of negation, and the negator could be in either of the clauses.

- (42) *Nain yo me ep-ap nefa aaw-e-m.*
 but 1S.NOM not come-SS.SEQ 2S.ACC get-PA-1S
 ‘But I didn’t come and get you.’

- (43) *Nainiw ekap-ep maa me sesek-a-mik.*
 again come-SS.SEQ thing not sell-PA.1/3P
 ‘They didn’t come again and sell things.’

Different subject marking disallows spreading of the negation in either direction. Each clause has its own polarity. Thus in (44) only the clause in the middle is in the scope of negation.

- (44) *Soomarem-ika-iwkin me wia far-eya nefa ma-ikuan (...)*
 walk-be-DS.2/3P not 3P.ACC call-DS.2/3S 2S.ACC say-FU.3P
 ‘When they walk past and you don’t call them, they will say about you...’

In finite clauses the scope of negation does not extend across clause boundaries.

- (45) *Nainiw ekap-e-mik nain maa me sesek-a-mik.*
 again come-PA-1/3P but thing not sell-PA-1/3P
 ‘They came again but did not sell things.’

Negative transportation is not possible in Mauwake: subordinate and main clauses are negated separately.

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Appendix: Table of negation adverbs in Mauwake

	<i>me</i>	<i>marew</i>	<i>weetak</i>	<i>wia</i>
SYNTACTIC BEHAVIOUR:				
Negates verbal predication	+	–	–	–
Negates equative and descriptive predication	+	+	+	+
Negates existential and possessive clause	–	+	+	+
Negates a constituent in clause	+	–	–	–
Negates a constituent in noun phrase	+	+	–	–
Functions as negative interjection	–	–	+	+
Functions in counter-expectation clause	–	–	+	+
Functions in contrasted clause	–	–	+	+
Functions in negative alternative clause	–	–	+	+
Used for negative emphasis after negated clause	–	–	+	+
MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES:				
NEG + Intensifier <i>akena</i> ‘very’	–	+	+	+
NEG + Irrealis Focus marker <i>-ko</i>	+	–	–	–
NEG + Medial verb ending <i>-eya</i>	–	+	+	–
NEG + Inchoative suffix <i>-ar</i> ‘become’	–	+	+	–