"Privative case" : displacement & renewal in the negative domain

Josh Phillips
Yale University

The PRIVATIVE is a nominal 'case', reported in many Australian languages (cf. Dixon 2002: 84), that is generally taken to indicate the absence of the noun that it marks in some context (fulfilling a function similar to *without* or *-less* in English). Two examples of canonical uses of a privative are given in (1) below.

(1) a. *mirtawa mayi-**majirri***   Nyangumarta [nna] (Sharp 2004)
   woman   vegetable-**PRIV**

   'The woman is without food.'

   b. *mungka-**majirri**, karru-**majirri**-pa, paru-**majirri**; jungka jakun*

   tree-**PRIV**   stream-**PRIV**-CONJ spinifex-**PRIV** ground only

   "There were no tree, creeks, or spinifex; only the ground (in that country.)'

I provide a semantics for the basic meaning of privatives as a quantifier over the domain of properties of individuals $D_{\langle e,t\rangle}$. Additionally I show the development of non-canonical uses of the privative, where this marker quantifies over properties of eventualities. This semantic change is modelled as a generalisation of the domain over which the form can quantify. This diachronic pathway instantiates a subpart of the 'negative existential cycle' (**NEC**, Croft 1991, Veselinova 2013) where "special" existential negators are recruited into the negative domain of a language, their functional domain expands and they finally come to displace a "standard" (clausal) negator. I offer a formal semantic treatment of this reported cyclic change and situate it in broader conversations about semantic change and grammaticalisation.

I. A semantics for privative case. Shown in (1), PRIV can be broadly understood as predicating the absence of some object relativised to the discourse context. Following Francez's (2011) treatment of existential predication-as-generalised quantifier I propose that the privative marker instantiates a standard **no** (negative quantifier) relation, shown in (2a).

(2) a. **no**$(P,Q) =_{\text{def}} P \cap Q = \varnothing$ (cf. Barwise & Cooper 1981: 169)
   b. $[\![\text{PRIV}]\!] = \lambda P_{\langle e,t\rangle}\lambda Q_{\langle e,t\rangle}.\mathbf{no}(P,Q)$

Importantly, the second argument of **no** in a privative predication (a locus/restrictor, often referred to as the *coda* phrase, *e.g.* Francez 2007, McNally 1997) can be syntactically explicit (1a) or derived from context indexically (1b). The meaning of a PRIV-marked NP is derived in (3) below.

(3) a. $[\![mungka\text{-}majirri]\!]^c = \lambda Q_{\langle e,t\rangle}.\mathbf{no}(\lambda x[\mathbf{Tree}(x)], Q)$ [Nyangumarta from (1b) above]
   mungka-majirri 'tree-PRIV' is a generalised quantifier: it asserts that there exists nothing in the intersection of the set of trees $\lambda x.\mathbf{Tree}(x)$ and some other property Q (*cf.* Francez's *contextual domain* d_α (2011:1838)).

   b. $[\![mungka\text{-}majirri]\!]^c = \mathbf{no}(\lambda x[\mathbf{Tree}(x)], \lambda y[\mathbf{loc}(st_c, y)])$
   In the absence of an explicit "*coda*" for the privative (*i.e.* 'subject' NP of whom the privative-property is being predicated), the utterance context provides an additional restriction as the second argument to **no**. This restriction is a function that returns the 'set of things related[...]to the spatiotemporal parameters of utterance' [Francez (2007:72), *viz.* the contextually salient location being predicated of, some 'country' in the past per Sharp's translation in (1b)]: $d_{st_c} = \lambda y_e.\mathbf{R}(\text{'that country'}, y)$

II. The expansion of PRIV in Yolŋu. Comparative data from several Australian language groups suggest a diachronic trajectory where erstwhile privative markers develop additional uses, finally becom-

ing clausal negators. I present data that exemplify this domain expansion. The uses of *-miriw* 'PRIV' reported in Djambarrpuyŋu ([djr] Yolŋu: Northern Australia) in (4) below are not predicted by the basic meaning of PRIV described above: here they attach to verb stems and negate *properties of events*. Other described Yolŋu varieties do not report the availablity of these uses (cf. McLellan 2002).

(4) a. *yolŋu   wäŋa nhänha-**miriw***   Djambarrpuyŋu [djr] (Wilkinson 1991: 448)
    person place see.INFL-**PRIV**

    'person who doesn't see places'

  b. *djamarrku̱i̱-y' marrtji lakaram   ba̱datju-na-**miriw***
    children-ERG   go.INFL speak.INFL make mistake.INFL-**PRIV**

    'The children were speaking without making mistakes'

Adapting the formalism in (2) such that *-miriw* is now able to range over properties of **eventualities** ($D_{\langle\varepsilon,t\rangle}$, *cf.* Davidson 1980), the meaning of (4a) is analysed as (5):

(5) $\llbracket yolŋu\ wäŋa\ nhänha\text{-}miriw\rrbracket = \textbf{no}(\lambda e_{\varepsilon}.\textbf{see}(\text{place})(e), \lambda e'_{\varepsilon}.\boldsymbol{R}(\delta_{\text{person}}, e'))$
    The intersection between the set of *eventualities of seeing places* and a *contextually determined domain of eventualities* $\lambda e'.\boldsymbol{R}(\delta_{\text{person}}, e')$ — perhaps those that might be predicated of the disposition of a (blind) person (δ_{person}) — is empty.
    Note that this semantics is identical to that spelled out in (3), except that it ranges over $D_{\langle\varepsilon,t\rangle}$ rather than $D_{\langle e,t\rangle}$

III. Displacement & renewal. Additional data from the negative domains of Yolŋu and the related subfamily Arandic show how existential negators continue to generalise, eventually taking scope over entire propositions (i.e. $D_{\langle s,t\rangle}$ – properties of worlds): the functional domain of clausal negators.

In contemporary Arandic varieties, clausal negation appears to involve obligatory nominalisation of verb forms (Henderson 2013:411-26). Clauses are negated by way of a complex suffix *-etye=akenhe* 'NEG' which replaces other tense and modal inflections (shown in (6)). The first formative *-etye* also appears in other deverbal nominal constructions, suggesting a "nominal negator" (PRIV) origin for =*akenhe*. Additionally, a new PRIV form *-kwenye* has entered the language. Arandic languages' use of suffixation as a negation strategy diverges sharply from those of languages elsewhere in the continent, highly suggestive of these uses' *innovation* early in this subfamily's history.

(6) *Re=atherre untyem-eke~untyeme an-err-eme angk-err-**etye**«arlke»**akenhe***   E. Arrernte [aer]
    3d.NOM   facing.away-DAT~RED   sit-d-PRES speak-RECIP-**NEG**«ALSO»

    'The two of them are sitting down and not talking to each other.'   (Henderson 2013: 417)

IV. Consequences. Analysing privative markers as quantifiers sheds light on the behavior of these markers as they encroach into the space of standard negators. Moreover, modelling the NEC as diachronic generalisation in a negative operator's domain of quantification provides a natural language-based argument for treating clausal negation as a modal (quantificational) operator (e.g. Wansing 2001). This formal treatment of the NEC provides additional evidence for broader generalisations about the functional pressures that underpin grammaticalisation pathways (e.g. Deo 2017, Traugott 1980), particularly the loss of *discretionary indexical content* (cf. Perry 2012:68ff) in linguistic markers over time. The loss of strict indexicality further evinces predictions made in the grammaticalisation literature, uniting the NEC with cyclic change exhibited in other domains. This work contributes to the growing interest in the enterprise of formal diachronic semantics, exemplifying how these two formerly distinct lines of inquiry have important implications for one another.

Sel. References. Croft 1991 *The Evolution of Negation* • Dixon 2002 *Australian Languages* • Francez 2007 *Existential Propositions* • Henderson 2013 *Topics in Eastern & Central Arrernte* • Veselinova 2013 *Negative Existentials* • Wilkinson 1991 *Djambarrpuyŋu.*