

Negation and ability verbs in Iquito: A case of semantic shift and grammaticalisation

Brianna Wilson (wilsonbr17@grinnell.edu)

This study investigates the interaction of negation with grammaticalisation in Iquito, an endangered Zaparoan language of the Peruvian Amazon with fewer than 10 remaining speakers. More specifically, it examines negation in complex clause structures involving ability verbs. My analysis provides an explanation for the curious distribution of two Iquito verbs, *pariini* and *pajiini*, and considers its typological implications for both semantic shift and grammaticalisation of future auxiliaries. In sum, it appears that in negated constructions the verb *pajiini* has undergone a semantic shift from ‘to learn’ to ‘to be able to’. Additionally, negated constructions also allow for possibility, deontic, and future readings of *pajiini*, which illustrates the importance of considering the effect of negation on grammaticalisation and modality.

To begin, in Iquito affirmative clauses there is one verb, *pariini*, that means ‘to be able to’, as seen in example (1) below.

- (1) *kí= pariini=íira naámi–ji asáani*
1SG= be.able.to.INF=GOAL downriver–from eat.INF
‘in order **to be able to** eat from this one’. (T.LII.LC8.0407, line 15)

However, in negated clauses (marked with the clause-initial negative particle *kaa*), speakers use either *pariini* or the *pajiini* to mean ‘to be able to’, as illustrated in (2a) and (2b), respectively. Furthermore, I find that the verb *pajiini* has multiple possible functions in negated clauses: ability, root possibility, future, and deontic modality (weak obligation and permission). None of these functions are available for *pajiini* in affirmative clauses, where it retains the meaning ‘to learn’ as in (3). While it is possible that examples such as (3) have an ability reading, native speakers consistently gloss affirmative *pajiini* with ‘learn’, whereas they gloss negated *pajiini* as an ability, future, or deontic (and never as ‘learn’).

- (2) a. *Ákari kaa kia= parii–yaa–∅ suwaa kajíini.*
Now NEG 2SG= be.able.to–IMPF–NPST well raise.INF
‘Now you **can’t** raise (animals) well.’ (T.LII.QCC.050720, line 14)
- b. *Ákari kaa pí= pajii–∅ iwaárika nu-asáani.*
Now NEG 1PL.INCL= be.able.to.IMPF–NPST ever.again 3SG–eat.INF
‘Now we **can’t** eat it ever again’. (T.JPI.HMS.0401, line 180)
- (3) *Naji iina=jinaji na= pajii–∅ siimána kuwiini.*
that.way DEM=from.that.way 3SG= learn.IMPF–E.C.TENSE shaman become.INF
‘From that they **learned** how to be shamans’. (T.HDC.SSQ.040804, line 95)

I propose that the distribution of *pariini* and *pajiini* and their interaction with negation can be accounted for based on two distinct processes: 1) semantic shift from ‘learn’ to ‘ability’, which is common cross-linguistically, and 2) stages of grammaticalisation from ability verb to future auxiliary, which is attested typologically, but extremely rare (Bybee et al. 1991). These processes have occurred only under negated constructions and only with the verb *pajiini*.

I first examine the meaning contrast between negated *pajiini*, ‘not able to’, with affirmative *pajiini*, ‘to learn/become accustomed to’. This shift from ‘learn’ to ‘ability’ is comparable to the lexical source of ability verbs in other languages (e.g. English ‘can’ from *cunnan* ‘to know’ (Bybee 2003); Chinese *hui* ‘to be able to’ from ‘to meet/understand’ (Xing 2003)). Although the most common source for ability verbs is a verb meaning ‘to know/know how to’ (Bybee et al. 1994), Iquito seems to be unique in that the shift has only occurred in negated constructions and

the lexical source ‘to learn’ is preserved in the affirmative.

In regards to the variety of uses of negated *pajini*, I argue that they are evidence of stages of grammaticalisation from ability verb to future auxiliary. According to Bybee et al. (1991), though uncommon, ability verbs are attested as a lexical source for the development of future auxiliaries, with an intermediary stage of root possibility: ability → root possibility → future. Given that negated *pajini* can express ability, possibility, deontics and future tense, there is evidence that it is undergoing grammaticalisation towards a future auxiliary, an example of which is shown in (4) below. Given that (4) could also be glossed with an ability reading, it is evident that the pure future reading is still in development. However, it is significant that speakers sometimes provide a gloss using solely a future auxiliary (and no ability verb).

- (4) *Kaa kia= pajii-∅ iwaárika iwaariini*
NEG 2SG= be.able.to.IMPF-NPST ever.again become.sick.INF
‘You **will not** get sick this way ever again’. (T.HDC.PNI.040706, line 128)

Iquito also challenges the cross-linguistic assumption proposed by Bybee et al. (1991) that a future auxiliary derived from an agent-oriented verb (e.g. ability, desire, obligation) may only have one agent-oriented meaning. In addition to (negated) ability, *pajini* can convey deontic modality (namely, weak obligation), thus having two agent-oriented meanings (Hallett 2006).

Lastly, although *pajini* is undergoing grammaticalisation to a future auxiliary, it is not the typical way of expressing the future. Iquito typically uses word order to convey future temporality (Beier et al. 2011), however, this default construction is not attested as compatible with imperfective aspect marking (Lai 2009). Therefore, constructions with *pajini* as a future auxiliary allow for the expression of future tense with imperfective aspect. Thus, I suggest that the future tense use of *pajini* may be a compensatory strategy for aspect marking constraints.

This paper provides a detailed case study of a typologically rare path of grammaticalisation to a future auxiliary. Moreover, it suggests evidence for mechanisms of semantic shift and grammatical change occurring only under negation. Finally, this work demonstrates the contributions of endangered languages to our understanding of linguistic structure and, thus, the need and value of continuing efforts in documentation. This research would not have been possible without the high quality work carried out by the Iquito Language Documentation Project (ILDLP) in the early 2000s, which made available the data for this work.

References

- Beier, Christine, Cynthia Hansen, I-Wen Lai & Lev Michael. 2011. Exploiting word order to express an inflectional category: Reality status in Iquito. *Linguistic Typology* 15(1). 65–99.
- Bybee, Joan. 2003. 19 Mechanisms of change in grammaticization: The role of frequency. *The Handbook of Historical Linguistics*. 602–622.
- Bybee, Joan, Revere Perkins & William Pagliuca. 1994. *The evolution of grammar: Tense, aspect, and modality in the languages of the world*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bybee, Joan L., William Pagliuca & Revere D. Perkins. 1991. Back to the future. In Elizabeth Closs Traugott & Bernd Heine (eds.), *Approaches to grammaticalization: Volume II. Types of grammatical markers*, 17–58. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Hallett, Taryne M. 2006. *Iquito directives*. The University of Texas at Austin MA thesis.
- Lai, I-Wen. 2009. *Time in the Iquito language*: The University of Texas at Austin dissertation.
- Xing, Janet Zhiqun. 2003. Grammaticalization of verbs in Mandarin Chinese. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 31(1). 101–144.