Fluid Aspects of Negation in Central Pomo

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It is not unusual for languages to contain multiple markers of negation. In some languages, negation may be accomplished by either a negative particle or an affix, like English ***not*** *happy* and ***un***-*happy*. In others, multiple markers are used together, as in Mohawk ***iah te****-kenòn:wes* or French *je **ne** l'aime **pas*** 'I do**n't** like it'. Sometimes alternative markers appear in different grammatical contexts. Prohibitives, for example, used in negative commands, often have special forms, as in Mohawk ***tóhsa*** *sasa'nikónhrhen* 'do**n't** forget!'. Sometimes alternative markers carry different degrees of force, as in French *je **ne** l'aime **point*** 'I do**n't** like it **at all**'. In general, where different negative markers coexist within a language, they fill different functions: grammatical, semantic, and/or pragmatic.

1. Central Pomo *čʰów* and and *ţʰin*

Central Pomo, a language of the Pomoan family indigenous to Northern California, contains two negatives: *čʰɛ́w* and *ţʰin*. They do not contrast in morphological status: both are independent words. They do not appear in combination: each is a full negative in its own right. They are not distinguished by grammatical context: in many contexts, either would be grammatical. They do not differ in semantic force: additional adverbials are used for reinforcement or mitigation. They are not dialectal alternants: both are used by all speakers. Neither appears to be replacing the other: both appear pervasively in natural speech. Their robust coexistence implies some kind of difference in function.

Examples of the first negative particle, *čʰów*, are in (1) below. (Material cited here was drawn from spontaneous conversation. Speakers were Mrs. Frances Jack (FJ) of the Hopland rancheria, and Mrs. Salome Alcantra (SA) and Mrs. Florence Paoli (FP) of the Yokaya rancheria. The conversations were tape recorded then transcribed and translated with the help of Mrs. Jack.)

(1) Negative *čʰów*

SA: *čʰów=ya   ʔa·   mú·ţuya-l   č'áɫ   wa-q'.*
     not=EVID   1.AGT   3.PL-PAT   with   go-LEVEL.PRF
     'I did**n't** go with them.'

FP: *Mu·n*   *ʔe*   *t̪o·*   *č'al=ʔkʰe* *ʔel*
       3   COP   1.PAT   with=from the
       'But my sister

       čʰów   *ša-č'ó-ya-w*   *mu·l.*
       not   swinging-hit-DEFOCUS-PRF that
       did**n't** get whipped.'

FJ: *Míl=il*   *ya*   *hlí-w*   *mén=da*
       that=at   1.PL.PAT   go.PL-PRF   so=at
       'When we went over there

       ʔa·   *čá-n-ka-w*   *čʰów.*
       1.AGT   run-IMPRF-CAUS-PRF   **not**
       I did**n't** drive.'

Examples of the second negative particle *t̪ʰin* are in (2).

(2) Negative **_t̪ʰin_**

SA: *Mu̱l*   *má·t̪a*   *ʔel* *čanú*   *t̪ʰédu·* *čanó-n*   **_t̪ʰin._**
       that   lady   the   word   much   talk-IMPRF **not**
       'That lady doesn't talk very much.'

FP: *t̪áwhal* *yhé-t̪-a ʔ*   **_t̪ʰin_**=ka.
       work   do-MULTIPLE.EVENT-IMPRF.PL   **not**=INFERENTIAL
       'They must not be working.'

FJ: *Dóy* *ʔul*   *ʔa·*   *mét̪'*   *yhé-n*   *t̪ʰin.*
       long   already 1.AGT   such   do-IMPRF   not
       'I haven't made that stuff (acorn mush) for a long time.'

2. Central Pomo aspect

As can be seen from the glosses of verbs in (1) and (2) above, Central Pomo contains no past or present tense inflection, but it does exhibit a pervasive perfective/imperfective aspectual distinction. Some verb roots, like *yo-* 'go' and *qawí-* 'build', are basically perfective; they appear with the perfective suffix (*-w* after vowels, nothing after consonants except final glottalization of stops). Other roots, like *wa-* 'go' and *yhé-* 'do', are basically imperfective; they appear with imperfective suffixes (*-an* for singulars, *-ač* for plurals). Still others, like *téte-* 'tell', can appear with either.

(3)   Perfectives   Imperfectives

      *yó-**w***   'go'   *wá-**n***   'go'
      *qawí-**w***   'build'   *čanó-**n***   'talk'
      *téte-**w***   'tell'   *úáúe-**n***   'tell'

Aspect may be altered by various derivational suffixes. The semelfactive suffix *-č*, for example, produces perfective aspect verbs: *yhé-n* 'do', *yhé-č'* 'happen'. In addition to the derivational suffixes, Central Pomo has developed a rich set of aspectual markers, largely from layers of perfective and imperfective suffixes: *yé-h-du-w-ad-an* 'go-PERFECTIVE-IMPERFECTIVE-PERFECTIVE-IMPERFECTIVE-IMPERFECTIVE' = 'go frequently'. The diachronic development of aspectual categories is discussed in Mithun 1991, 2000.

3. Aspects of negation: perfective *čhów* and and imperfective *thín*

The perfective/imperfective aspect distinction has been extended into the Central Pomo negative construction. The sentences in (1) above, with *čhów*, are all perfective; those in (2) above, with *thín* are imperfective. The aspect of the negation marker is not simply a copy of the verbal aspect. It is the negation itself that is qualified. One day the women were discussing the dangers of angering young men. Mrs. Jack warned that when people annoy you, you should refrain from bringing your frustration home. She used a perfective verb for 'tell', a single act to avoid, but the imperfective negative *thín* for habitual refraining.

(4) Perfective predicate, imperfective negation

FJ: *čá-l=yo-hi*   *mú·tuya-l*   *téte-**w***   ***thín.***
      house-to=go-and 3.PL-PAT   tell-**PRF** **not.IMPRF**
      'Don't come home and tell them.'

On another occasion, Mrs. Alcantra mentioned that a family had not taken advantage of their land, never building anything. She used a perfective verb for 'build', a single task, but the imperfective negative *ṭʰin* to focus on the long period over which they had repeatedly failed to accomplish it.

(5) Perfective predicate, imperfective negation

SA: *Shed   ʔ= ʔtí   qawí-w   ṭʰin.*
              be=even   build-**PRF**   **not.IMPRF**
        'They never even built a shed.'

As she mused about the English equivalent of a Central Pomo word, Mrs. Paoli uttered the sentence in (6) below, using a perfective verb 'hear' for an event that needed to occur only once, but the imperfective negative *ṭʰin* for the many missed occasions.

(6) Perfective predicate, imperfective negation

FP: *Masá·n=ya   muɫ   sín   ší-h-č'i-w   ʔa·   šó·-č'   ṭʰin..*
        White=TOP   that how name-PRF-IMPRF.PL-PRF   1.AGT   hear-**SML.PRF**   not.IMPRF
        'I never heard what the White people call it.'

   The opposite combination of aspects occurs as well. When Mrs. Alcantra remarked that she does not speak Kashaya, she used an imperfective verb for speaking (a habitual marked by two imperfective suffixes), but the perfective negative *čʰów*.

(7) Imperfective predicate, perfective negation

SA: *ʔa·   meṭ'   čanó-d-an   čʰó-w.*
        1.AGT   such   speak-**IMPRF-IMPRF**   **not-PRF**
        'I don't speak that [language].'

The reason behind her choice of the perfective negative *čʰów* is not obvious until the precise character of the Central Pomo perfective/imperfective distinction is understood. For many other languages, the distinction has been characterized as one between bounded and unbounded events. Perfective events are defined as those viewed as wholes, complete with beginning and end: 'I built it'. Since inclusion of the endpoint implies completion, perfectives are typically completive. Imperfectives capture only a portion of the activity: 'I am/was talking', 'I talk'. They are thus typically incomplete. The boundedness definition fits most aspectual choices in Central Pomo, but

it conflicts with an important set. States, such as *yá·q* 'know' or *č ʰá-w* 'sit, live', are classified as perfective.

The Central Pomo perfective/imperfective distinction has a slightly different semantic basis than those of many other languages. Central Pomo perfectives are those actions or states portrayed without indication of internal temporal structure. Both single actions and unchanging states may thus be classified as perfective. Imperfectives, by contrast, are those depicted with internal temporal texture of some kind. Duratives, continuatives, progressives, habituals, and frequentatives are classified as imperfective. A difference in Central Pomo aspect sometimes corresponds to a lexical difference in English. The root *čanó-* with a perfective suffix is used for 'sing' (*čanó-w*). The same root is used with an imperfective suffix for 'talk' (*čanó-n*). Singing is portrayed as internally homogenous, while talking is seen as heterogeneous. Once the nature of the aspectual distinction is understood, the basis behind Mrs. Alcantra's choice of the perfective negative in (7) above becomes clear. The negative expresses a steady lack of knowledge.

Mrs. Paoli used a similar combination in (8), explaining her absence from a picnic. The verb 'to walk around' was imperfective, while the negative *č ʰów* was perfective, describing an unchanging incapacity.

(8) Imperfective predicate, perfective negation

FP: *ʔa·*   *ʔ=na*   *wá-q'*   *č ʰó-w*
     1.AGT   COP-CONTR   go-LEVEL   not-PRF
     'I didn't go

     ʔídaw   *ma·*   *wá-·ʔw-an= ʔk ʰe*   ***č ʰó-w***   *ʔi-n.*
     really   land   go-AROUND-**IMPRF**=INF   **not**-**PRF**   be-AS
     because I really can't walk around too well.'

The interplay of aspectual combinations can be seen in the exchange in (9) below. In Mrs. Paoli's question, the verb 'drink' is imperfective, depicting recurring multiple events. The negative is perfective, describing a steady state of abstinence. In Mrs. Jack's response, the verb 'drink' is perfective, referring to an individual session of drinking, while the negative is imperfective, highlighting repeated avoidance of such sessions.

(9) Interplay of aspect

FP: *q'-ó-t̠-an*   ***č ʰó-w***   *t̠'a·*   *muɫ?*
     drink-**MULTIPLE.EVENT-IMPRF** **not**-**PRF**   guess   that
     'She does**n't** drink, does she?'

FJ: *čʰów.*
        'No.

Meṭ' q'ó-w=ʔi   muɬ mén̓=ʔ̓tii   ṭʰédu·   q'ó-w   ṯ̓ʰín.
such drink-PRF=but   that such=but   much   drink-**PRF** **not.IMPRF**
She drinks, but **not** too much.'

4. The role of grammatical context

The choice of negative aspect is not an automatic consequence of grammatical context. Either could be used grammatically in most sentences. After Mrs. Jack commented on a dog that had just rushed by, Mrs. Alcantra replied that she had not seen the dog. She used the perfective negative for the single missed opportunity.

(10)   Perfective negative: single missed opportunity

SA: *čʰó-w   ʔa·   muɬ pʰ-wí-w.*
      not-IMPRF 1.AGT   that **visually-perceive-PRF**
      'I **didn't see** it.'

While recounting an experience from her childhood, Mrs. Jack remarked that she had never seen her older sister, because the sister had died before she was born. In the sentence in (11), nearly identical to that in (10), she used the imperfective negative, indicating innumerable missed chances.

(11)   Imperfective negative: recurring missed opportunities

FJ   *ʔa·   mú·ṯu   pʰ-wí-w   ṯ̓ʰín.*
     1.AGT   3.PAT   **visually-perceive-PRF**   **not.IMPRF**
     'I **never saw** her.' (She died before I was born.)

When Mrs. Paoli was nominated for an office, a certain man was disappointed. His displeasure on this single occasion was expressed with the perfective negative *čʰów.*

(12) Perfective negative: single occasion of displeasure

FP   *Míya·   má   **dá- ʔ-du-w**   *čʰó-w*.
       3.POSS   father   **want-RFL-IMPRF-PRF**   **not-PRF**
       'His father **didn't like** it.'

On another occasion, Mrs. Jack recalled that her own father had never liked public events. His assorted habitual dislikes were expressed with the imperfective negative *t̪ʰin*.

(13) Imperfective negative: habitual displeasure

FJ: *Hínt̪il   ma·   yhé-t̪-a ʔ-ya-w*
      Indian   things   do-M.E-IMPRF.PL-DEFOCUS-PRF
      'Indian celebrations,

      kʰé   me·né-m-a-w
      dance   kicking-set-COOP-DEFOCUS-PRF
      powwow dances,

      ma·   wáyya   ma·   yhé-t̪-a ʔ-ya-w
      things   sacred   things   do-M.E-IMPRF.PL-DEFOCUS-PRF
      sacred doings,

      *met̪'   **dá- ʔ-du-w**   *t̪ʰin*.
      such   **want-RFL-IMPRF-PRF**   **not.IMPRF**
      he **didn't like** those things at all.'

5. The negation of adjectives

There remains one set of constructions in which the expected negative choice is surprising. Given that states are classified as perfective in Central Pomo, we might predict that adjectives would be negated with the perfective *čʰów*. In fact, adjectives and other modifiers are usually negated with the imperfective *t̪ʰin*.

(14) Negation of adjectives: *t̪ʰin*

FJ: *q'ó= ʔti   **q'dí**   **t̪ʰin**=ka   mul   má·t̪a   ʔel   ʔe.*

what=even **good**   **not**=INFER   that   woman   the   COP
'She's just **not** any **good** at all, that woman.'

FP: ***Yá=ǩʰe***   *ší*   ***t̲ʰin***   *ʔe*   *muɬ.*
      1.PL=OBL   name   **not.IMPRF**   COP   that
      'That's **not our** word.'   ('The word *síya* for 'chair' is not ours; it's from Spanish.')

SA: ***Spanish***   ***t̲ʰin***   *ʔe*   *muɬ.*
                    not.IMPRF   COP   that
      'They're **not Spanish**.'

The reason behind the choice of the imperfective *t̲ʰin* becomes clear once the origin of the perfective marker *čʰów* is considered. Its source is a stative verb *čʰó-* 'be nonexistent or absent', still used with this meaning. As a state, it appears with the perfective suffix *-w*.

(15) Source of *čʰó-w*: stative verb 'not exist', 'be absent'

SA: *Bá-t̲o*   *lów-mu ʔ=kʰe*   ***čʰó-w.***
      INDEF-PAT   talk.PL-COMITATIVE.APPLICATIVE=INF   **not-PRF**
      '**There's no**body to talk to.'

FJ: *Bé=da=kay*   *ʔ=ma*   *ča*   *qawí-m-a-w=ǩ_e*   *ma·* ***čʰó-w.***
      this=at=too   COP=FAC   house   build-COOP-DEFOC-PRF=INF   land **not-PRF**
      'Here, too, **there's no** land to build houses on.'

FP: *Báya·*   ***čʰó-w***   *t̲'a·*   *št̲'ó.*
      man   nonexistent-PRF   guess now
      'She's got **no** man now, I guess.'

To distinguish the negation of a property from the negation of the existence of an entity, the negative *t̲ʰin* is used. The distinction can be seen by comparing the two remarks in (17) below, uttered by Mrs. Paoli on separate occasions.

(16) Negation of existence versus property

FP: *Maṭúl-ay*   *čʰó-w.*
old.lady-PL **not-PRF**
'**There aren't any** old ladies.'

FP: *Maṭúl*   *t̞ʰin= ʔti.*
old.lady **not.IMPRF**=even
'She'**s not** really an old lady.'

6. The fluidity of negative aspect

Although the distinction between the two Central Pomo negatives is essentially semantic, namely perfective versus imperfective aspect, speakers can exploit the difference for pragmatic purposes. This option became apparent as Mrs. Jack and I were transcribing tapes of conversations. I would play an intonation unit, then she would repeat it slowly for me to write, then she would render it in English. Every so often she would use a different negative than the original speaker: sometimes she would repeat an original *čʰów* as *t̞ʰin*, sometimes vice-versa. Of course the full context was always clear. When questioned, she would reply that either was acceptable.

    A single speaker may even shift negatives from one moment to the next. Mrs. Alcantra and Mrs. Paoli were remarking that people disputing land could not take it with them to the grave. Mrs. Alcantra first used the imperfective negative *t̞ʰin*, then Mrs. Paoli echoed nearly the same sentence with the perfective negative *čʰów*. Mrs. Alcantra then repeated the sentence with the perfective *čʰów*.

(17) Shift in negative aspect

SA: *Mú.ṭu-ya*   *muɬ*   **š-dé-n-ma-w=ʞʰe**   *t̞ʰin.*
3-PL   that   **dragging-carry-IMPRF-COOP-PRF=INF**   **not.IMPRF**
'They **won't take it** with them.'

FP: *Ya*   **š-dé-n-ma-w=ʞʰe**   *čʰó-w.*
1.PL **dragging-carry-IMPRF-COOP-PRF=INF**   **not-PRF**
'We **won't take it** with us.'

SA: *Mú.ṭu-ya*   *ʔ=muɬ*   **š-dé-n-ma-w=ʞʰe**   *čʰó-w.*
3-PL   COP=that **dragging-carry-IMPRF-COOP-PRF=INF** **not-PRF**

'They **won't take it** with them.'

The fluidity of negative choice is a result of the semantic relationship between the two aspects. The use of the perfective is an unmarked choice; that of the imperfective is marked. Perfective verbs portray events without internal temporal structure, but the events need not actually be homogeneous; the speaker has simply chosen not to specify internal texture. Imperfective verbs represent a choice on the part of the speaker to specify such structure. Mrs. Paoli and Mrs. Jack were discussing a woman who had brought her children to the community with the intention of returning home after a short time. Mrs. Paoli first used an imperfective negative to highlight the long period over which the woman continually failed to leave. Mrs. Jack then summed up the result as an established fact with a perfective.

(18)   Repeated failure versus established fact

FP: *t̠é=ʔti*   *wá-q'*   *t̠ʰín*.
       ever=even   go-level.PRF   **not.IMPRF**
       'She **never** did leave.'

FJ: *t̠é=ʔti*   *hlá-·ʔ-č'i-w*   *čʰó-w*.
       ever=even   go.PL-RFL-IMPRF.PL-PRF   **not-PRF**
       'They **never** moved away.'

FP: *t̠é=ʔti*   *hlá-·ʔ-č'i-w*   *čʰó-w*.
       ever=even   go.PL-RFL-IMPRF.PL-PRF   **not-PRF**
       'They **never** moved away.'

A similar fluidity can be seen in negations of the verb *yáq'* 'know'. This verb often appears with the perfective negative *čʰów*, depicting a steady, homogeneous state of ignorance. Looking at an old photograph, Mrs. Paoli used the perfective *čʰów*.

(19)   Perfective negative with 'know': steady state

FP: *Men*   *t̠'a·*   *mú·tu*   **yáq'**   *čʰó-w*.
       so   guess   3.PAT   **know**   **not-PRF**
       'I **don't know** her.'

On another occasion, she was describing an incident in which a man ran over a child while backing out of his driveway. Here she used the imperfective *t̬ʰin* with the same verb, a choice that heightened the dynamic immediacy of the moment as the man was backing up.

(20)   Imperfective negative with 'know': dynamic immediacy

FP: *tí̬-to*   *hlaw*   *t̬'a·*   *wa-n*   **yáq'**   **t̬ʰin**   *ʔe*   *muɬ.*
      EMP-PAT   behind   guess   go-IMPRF **know.PRF** **not.IMPRF** COP   that
      'He **didn't know** he had a child walking behind him.'

Alternations of this kind are not unusual.

7. Conclusion

The two Central Pomo negative particles thus do in fact serve distinct semantic functions: *čʰów* is perfective, while *t̬ʰin* is imperfective. Their patterns of use are somewhat obscured by the exact nature of the perfective/imperfective distinction in the language. Central Pomo perfectives portray events without internal temporal structure; imperfectives specify temporal texture. The perfective negative *čʰów* is thus used for either a single missed opportunity or a steady, homogeneous absence. The imperfective negative *t̬ʰin* highlights the internal temporal texture of repeated missed opportunities or abstinence. Within a given situation, speakers may chose whether or not to specify such temporal structure, treating an event as a single, established fact, or highlighting the immediacy of an event. The markedness relation thus results in a useful stylistic device, one not commonly expected in the domain of negation.

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