Negation and restructuring in Niuean
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Overview: Researchers standardly make one of two assumptions about the negative marker nākai used in declarative verbal clauses in Niuean. Either nākai is taken to be a negative auxiliary that merges with an affirmative predicate (Polinsky 1995; Veselinova 2014), or it is taken to be a nonverbal particle situated above TP and below CP (Massam 2009). This paper takes a closer look at Niuean negation and develops an analysis of nākai as a negative verb, following Clemens’ (2014) X0-raising account of Niuean’s functional restructuring predicates (see also Massam 2013).

Data: The negative marker nākai (boxed) surfaces before the verb (underlined) and after TAM markers (1). Certain particles, including lā ‘just/yet’ (2) and the postverbal perfective marker tuai (3), can surface between nākai and the verb.

(1) Kua [nākai] gahua mitaki e tau hokohoko he tino haana.
    PFV NEG work MAN ABS PL nerves GEN body POSS

    ‘His nerves are not functioning well.’ (Sperlich 1997: 123)

(2) Kua motua tuai e futi ka e [nākai] lā hio ia e moamoa.
    PERF mature PERF ABS banana but ŁK NEG yet cut PASS ABS end

    ‘The banana has matured but the end has not been cut off yet.’
    (Sperlich 1997:225)

(3) Kua [nākai] tuai liu e tahi.
    PERF NEG PERF TURN ABS sea

    ‘The tide has not turned.’ (Seiter 1980:26)

The status of nākai: This paper analyzes nākai as a negative verb. While the verbal analysis is less obvious for Niuean than it is for closely related Māori and Tongan, the Niuean data are compatible with the leading analyses of negation in these languages (see Bauer 1993, Ball 2008, a.o.). Furthermore, the negative verb approach makes it possible to provide a uniform analysis of standard negation and the transparently verbal negative raising predicate nākai fakaai. This paper argues that the head of nākai fakaai is nākai, as opposed to fakaai, as has previously been assumed (Seiter 1980).

Analysis: Niuean has a class of predicates, e.g., līga ‘likely,’ and teitei ‘nearly,’ that can be classified as functional restructuring (FR) verbs, in part because of their lack of argument-sharing properties (Massam 2013). In the analysis adopted here, FR verbs merge with vP (see, e.g., Wurmbrand 2001) and the final V1 word order is achieved via a series of head movements from V0 to C0 (Clemens 2014). Like FR predicates, nākai is verbal but non-θ-assigning. However, nākai differs from other FR predicates in permitting certain particles to intervene between nākai and the lower verb (2-3). This difference is accounted for within the functional restructuring analysis above by stipulating that the lower verb is not attracted to the negative verb. Instead, the X0-movement of the main verb terminates at Pred0, and the negative verb moves through the remainder of the clause on its own (4). The result is the stranding of certain postverbal particles between the two verbs:
(4) $X^0$-raising restructuring analysis of negation

Discussion: The status of standard negation is particularly important to the standard XP-raising analysis of Niuean clause structure (e.g., Massam 2001, 2009, 2013), which is incompatible with a verbal approach. In the $X^0$/XP-raising account, the predicate undergoes phrasal movement to the specifier of TP and $T^0$ undergoes $X^0$-movement to the highest projection of the extended CP. If nākai is indeed verbal, it must be the head of its phrase, and hence the Head Movement Constraint (Travis 1984) would dictate that $T^0$ collect nākai as it moves up the clausal spine.