

## Negative concord in Washo as negative agreement

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**Abstract.** Washo, a Native American isolate, displays negative concord morphology in the context of negation. Negative concord in Washo comes in the form of the morpheme *-ŋa*, which may be suffixed onto optionally many sentential elements in a single clause. Given the apparent lack of semantic contribution by this morpheme, I argue - building on accounts along the lines of Zeijlstra (2004) - that negative concord in Washo is best treated as the result of multiple agreement between an interpretable Neg feature high in the clause and optionally many uninterpretable Neg features present on the items it c-commands. Importantly, the Washo data shed light on an unexplored system of negative concord and the possible range of agreement phenomena that are sensitive to negation.

**Keywords.** Negative concord; negation; agreement; Washo

**1. Introduction.** This paper concerns itself with an unfamiliar type of negative concord found in Washo, in which the suffix *-ŋa* occurs on optionally many sentential elements within the scope of negation. The examples in (1-2) illustrate this distribution by showing that *-ŋa* may appear on the object *t'ágim* 'pinenuts' when the sentence is negated (1), and may not appear otherwise (2).<sup>1</sup> Negation in Washo is expressed by the suffix *-é:s*.

(1) mé:hu t'á:gim **-ŋa** ʔ-íʔiw **-é:s**-i  
 boy pinenuts-NC 3/3-eat-NEG-IND  
 'The boy didn't eat pinenuts.'

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(2) \*mé:hu t'á:gim **-ŋa** ʔ-íʔiw-i  
 boy pinenuts-NC 3/3-eat-IND  
 'The boy ate pinenuts.'

While *-ŋa* has been glossed informally as a “negative concord” morpheme in various works (i.a. Bochnak et al. 2011; Bochnak 2013; Hanink 2016, 2018), a dedicated investigation of the factors contributing to its licensing has not before been carried out. The aim of this paper is therefore twofold: to show that the suffix *-ŋa* i) is in fact a negative concord morpheme, but does not behave like one in the familiar sense of the term, and ii) is best treated as the realization of negative agreement. The Washo data therefore provide novel support for syntactic

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<sup>1</sup>GLOSSES: DEP: dependent mood; DS: different subject; IND: independent mood; INTR: intransitivizing prefix; NC: negative concord; NEAR.FUT: near future; NEG: negation; NMLZ: nominalizer; R: reduplication; OBL: oblique; PL: plural; REFL: reflexive; REST: restrictive; SUBJ: subjunctive. Symbols deviating from the IPA are: L: [ɭ]; M: [ɱ]; š: [ʃ]; y: [j]; Y: [j̥]. Unless otherwise indicated, the data here come from the author's own fieldwork.

accounts of negative concord in which dependent negative morphology is treated as a reflex of agreement (i.a. Zeiljstra 2004; Penka 2007; cf. Haegeman & Londahl 2010).

The outline of this paper is as follows. In §2, I provide background on Washo and describe the wide distribution of *-ŋa* in the language. In §3, I discuss previous approaches to the analysis of negative concord, which I then show to be problematic for the Washo facts. In §4, I present a preliminary, agreement-based analysis based on current understanding of the data, and briefly discuss a potential confound in §5. §6 concludes.

**2. Negative concord in Washo.** Washo is a highly endangered Native American language spoken around Lake Tahoe in the United States. While largely considered to be an isolate, it has also been linked to the proposed Hokan group (Campbell, 1997; Mithun, 1999). The neutral word order of the language is SOV, with phrases being largely head-final (aside from nominal phrases and their modifiers, which are neutrally word-initial). The uncited data in this paper come largely from my fieldwork with speakers from the Washo community in Nevada.

The distribution of *-ŋa* in Washo is highly flexible. For example, it can occur on any argument of the verb, including subjects (3), direct objects (4) (repeated from (1)), and indirect objects (5), as long as that argument is under the scope of negation:

(3) *subject:*

béverli-**ŋa** ʔ-í:bi-é:s-i  
 Beverly-NC 3-come-NEG-IND  
 ‘Beverly didn’t come.’

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(4) *direct object:*

mé:hu t’á:gim-**ŋa** ʔ-íʔiw-é:s-i  
 boy pinenuts-NC 3/3-eat-NEG-IND  
 ‘The boy didn’t eat pinenuts.’

(5) *indirect object:*

adél-**ŋa** ʔitbamušéʔeš l-é:šil-ašaʔ-é:s-i  
 Adele-NC book 1/3-give-NEAR.FUT-NEG-IND  
 ‘I’m not going to give Adele a book.’

This suffix can also occur on non-arguments within the clause, for example on adverbs, as in (6), as well as on postpositional phrases, as in (7):

(6) *adverb:*

míʔle-w baŋáya-**ŋa** ʔ-é:-gapil-é:s-i  
 all-PL outside-NC 3-go-around-NEG-IND  
 ‘No one is walking around outside.’

(7) *postpositional phrase:*

hútiweʔ-ŋa dawyác’im-**ŋa** ʔáluʔ-**ŋa** gum-M-í:k’iʔ-ʔaŋaw-é:s-i  
 something-NC smoke-NC because.of-NC REFL-INTR-look-well-NEG-IND  
 ‘One can’t see anything well because of the smoke.’

Crucially, the appearance of this suffix is not limited to a single argument or constituent within the clause, as shown in examples (8-10):

- (8) damoʔmóʔmoʔ-**ŋa** t'elíliwhu-**ŋa** ʔ-í:gi-yé:s-i  
 woman.R-NC man.R-NC 3/3-see-NEG-IND  
 'The women didn't see the men.'
- (9) adél-**ŋa** ʔwáʔ-**ŋa** ʔ-áŋal-é:s-i  
 Adele-NC here-NC 3-reside-NEG-IND  
 'Adele doesn't live here.'
- (10) émli-**ŋa** adél-**ŋa** ʔitbamušéʔeš-**ŋa** ʔ-í:šil-ašaʔ-é:s-i  
 Emily-NC Adele-NC book-NC 3/3-give-NEAR.FUT-NEG-IND  
 'Emily is not going to give Adele a book.'

Finally, the negative concord suffix appears to be optional, in that negated sentences without any instances of *-ŋa* are perfectly acceptable (11a), and minimal pairs such as (11a-b) are judged by speakers to convey the same meaning:

- (11) a. daʔmóʔmoʔ pú:lul-a l-í:gi-yé:s-i  
 woman car-OBL 1/3-see-NEG-IND  
 'I don't see the woman in the car.'
- b. daʔmóʔmoʔ-**ŋa** pú:lul-a-**ŋa** l-í:gi-yé:s-i  
 woman-NC car-OBL-NC 1/3-see-NEG-IND  
 'I don't see the woman in the car.'

### 3. Negative concord and agreement.

3.1 NEGATIVE CONCORD. Canonically, negative concord describes the co-occurrence of a negative dependent with an independent expression of negation (see Giannakidou & Zeijlstra 2017 for a recent overview). Crucially, the joint appearance of more than one instance of morphological negation in negative concord languages does not give rise to multiple negation in meaning. This phenomenon is exhibited in many European languages, for example in Italian (12) and Polish (13), in which sentential negation co-occurs with n-marked negative elements:

(12) *Italian*

Gianni \*(**non**) ha visto **niente**  
 Gianni **not** has seen **n-thing**  
 'Gianni hasn't seen anything.'  
 Not: 'Gianni has not seen nothing.'

(13) *Polish*

Janek \*(**nie**) pomaga **nikomu**  
 Janek **not** help **n-person**  
 'Janek doesn't help anybody.'  
 Not: 'Janek doesn't help nobody.'

Giannakidou & Zeijlstra (2017: 8)

In (12) and (13), the presence of the negative dependents *niente* and *nikomu*, respectively, does not result in a double negative reading. This differs crucially from the behavior of a language like Dutch, where each negative element contributes its own negation:

(14) Jan belt **niet niemand**

Jan calls **neg n-body**

‘Jan doesn’t call nobody = Jan calls somebody’

Zeijlstra (2008: 2)

Negative dependents such as *niente* and *nikomu* in Italian (12) and Polish (13) are canonically referred to as *n-words* (Laka 1990; Giannakidou 2000), referring to the morphological shape in which they appear. Giannakidou (2006) offers the follow definition for such dependents:

(15) *n-words*

An expression  $\alpha$  is an *n-word* iff:

a.  $\alpha$  can be used in structures containing sentential negation or another  $\alpha$ -expression yielding a reading equivalent to one logical negation;

b.  $\alpha$  can provide a negative fragment answer.

Giannakidou (2006: 2)<sup>2</sup>

Based on this definition, *-ŋa* is *n-word-like* with respect to condition (a): the dependent morphology is negative, yet only a single logical negation results. In fact, given the type of data we find in Washo, it is difficult to imagine what it would mean *were -ŋa* contributing an additional negative meaning in examples such as (16) (repeated from (9)):

(16) Adél-ŋa wáʔ-ŋa ʔ-áŋal-é:s-i

Adele-NC here-NC 3-reside-NEG-IND

‘Adele doesn’t live here.’

I note here that condition (b) does not apply to Washo, which seems to lack fragment answers entirely – even the polar answers ‘yes’ and ‘no’ – and so I do not discuss this condition.

3.2 SEMANTIC ACCOUNTS. Broadly speaking, there are two types of non-negative approaches to negative concord that treat it as a largely semantic phenomenon (see Giannakidou & Zeijlstra 2017). The first treats *n-words* as indefinites (i.a. Ladusaw 1992, 1994; Acquaviva 1993, 1997; Giannakidou 1997; Richter & Sailer 1998); the second treats them as universal quantifiers (i.a. Szabolcsi 1981; Giannakidou 1997, 2000; Sells 2006).

Neither of these treatments extend to Washo, for several reasons. First, *n-words* in Washo are instead *n-morphemes*. As such, the negative dependents observed in the language are not lexical items in their own right; rather, they are functional morphemes that occur on independent lexical items whose forms are otherwise invariant. Second, the distribution of *-ŋa* is much more flexible in Washo than is generally found for *n-words* in more familiar negative concord languages, most crucially in that they are not limited to existential or universal meanings. The latter point can be seen, for example, from the fact that *-ŋa* does not have an effect on scope relations. The examples in (17)-(18) show that the *-ŋa* does not affect scope when it surfaces

<sup>2</sup>Cases in which only negation may license an  $\alpha$ -expression instantiate strict negative concord languages. Cases in which one  $\alpha$ -expression can license another are found in the so-called non-strict negative concord languages. Which class Washo falls into is pending further fieldwork, particularly in the domain of modified nominals.

on an indefinite, either in subject or object position:

(17) *Indefinite subject:*

a. t'ánu Ø-p'ím-eweʔ-é:s-i  
 person 3-go.out-hence-NEG-IND  
 'Someone didn't go out'

b. t'ánu-**ŋa** Ø-p'ím-eweʔ-é:s-i  
 person-NC 3-go.out-hence-NEG-IND  
 'Someone didn't go out'

∃ > ¬

(18) *Indefinite object:*

a. Michelle húp'iweʔ Ø-galá:m-é:s-i  
 Michelle thing 3/3-like-NEG-IND  
 'There's something Michelle doesn't like.'

b. Michelle húp'iweʔ-**ŋa** Ø-galá:m-é:s-i  
 Michelle thing-NC 3/3-like-NEG-IND  
 'There's something Michelle doesn't like.'

∃ > ¬

Similarly, parallel facts are observed in the domain of universal quantification (19-20):

(19) *Quantified subject:*

a. míʔleʔ ʔ-íhuk'-é:s-i  
 all 3-dry-NEG-IND  
 'Not everything is dry.'

b. míʔleʔ-**ŋa** ʔ-íhuk'-é:s-i  
 all-NC 3-dry-NEG-IND  
 'Not everything is dry.'

¬ > ∀

(20) *Quantified object:*

a. míʔleʔ l-éʔw-ašaʔ-é:s-i  
 all 1/3-eat-INT.FUT-NEG-IND  
 'I'm not going to eat everything.'

b. míʔleʔ-**ŋa** l-éʔw-ašaʔ-é:s-i  
 all-NC 1/3-eat-INT.FUT-NEG-IND  
 'I'm not going to eat everything.'

¬ > ∀

Nevertheless, the similarities that do exist between *-ŋa* and *n*-words suggest that this morpheme should be thought of as a type of negative concord, albeit one that is unfamiliar from the view of better-studied languages.

3.3 NEGATIVE CONCORD AS AGREEMENT. In a different type of approach that is purely syntactic, Zeijlstra (2004) argues that negative concord is not a semantic phenomenon, but is instead the result of agreement (see also Penka 2007; Zeijlstra 2008). On this view, *n*-words are simply non-negative probes for Agree. According to Zeijlstra (2004), *n*-words are then a sub-

set of strong NPIs that must be licensed by negation *in the syntax*, and that enter the derivation as semantically non-negative indefinites. Adopting a Minimalist approach of feature checking (along the lines of Chomsky (1995, 2000, 2001)), Zeijlstra proposes that these indefinites carry an uninterpretable *u*NEG feature that must be checked against a higher, semantically negative element bearing an *i*NEG feature, which for Zeijlstra is a non-pronounced negative operator high in the clause (in Spec, NegP), rather than any overt realization of negation.

A crucial part of his analysis is moreover the adoption of Multiple Agree (Hiraiwa 2001), which accounts for the availability of multiple *n*-words in a given agreement domain (cf. Haegeman & Londahl 2010, who argue against the use of Multiple Agree in their account of West Flemish). In a nutshell, on this view, negative concord is reduced to multiple agreement between a negative operator and the negative items it c-commands (via Upward Agree; i.a. Merchant 2006, 2011; Baker 2008; Zeijlstra 2012).

3.4 SYNTACTIC LICENSING IN WASHO. It was shown above that the suffix *-ŋa* in Washo displays behaviors consistent with better known instances of negative concord in European languages. For example, it also behaves like a strong NPI, in that it is licensed only by negation and not by, e.g., questions (21) or conditionals (22):

(21) lák'aʔ(\*-ŋa) m-í:meʔ-gaʔlám-he:š-i  
 one-NC 2-drink-want-Q-IND  
 'Do you want to drink one?'

(22) mé:hu(\*-ŋa) wáʔ(\*-ŋa) ʔ-éʔ-i šáwlamhu Ø-wagayáŋa-hel-i-gi k'-éʔ-i  
 boy-NC here-NC 3-be-IND girl 3-talk.to-SUBJ-IND-NMLZ 3-be-IND  
 'If the boy were here, he would talk to the girl.'

Secondly, *-ŋa* neither contributes any additional meaning of its own, nor does it have an effect on scope relations, ruling out an interpretation-based account. Taken together, these behaviors suggest that the most promising analysis on the market for Washo is one involving agreement.

Further evidence for an agreement analysis comes from the syntactic licensing conditions of *-ŋa*. First, *-ŋa* is licensed only when in the scope of *syntactic* negation, which may come either in the form of sentential negation (23) (repeated from (2)), or constituent negation (24), both of which are realized by the suffix *-é:s*:

(23) *Sentential negation*  
 mé:hu t'á:gim-ŋa ʔ-íʔiw-é:s-i  
 boy pinenuts-NC 3/3-eat-NEG-IND  
 'The boy didn't eat pinenuts.'

(24) *Constituent negation*  
 demuc'úc'u-ŋa t'-íʔiw-é:s L-éʔ-i  
 candy-NC NMLZ-eat-NEG 1-be-IND  
 'I don't eat candy.' (= 'I am no candy eater.')

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Additionally, *-ŋa* is licensed only locally. This can be seen in the context of embedded clauses, which may not contain *-ŋa*-marked elements in the absence of clausemate negation. In

(25) for example, the subject of the embedded clause, ‘bird’, may not bear negative concord morphology despite the presence of sentential negation on the matrix verb, ‘dream’:

- (25) [ sísu\*-**ŋa** ʔ-íšim-aʔ ] di-suʔúš-é:s-i  
 bird-NC 3-sing-DEP 1-dream-NEG-IND  
 ‘I didn’t dream that the bird sang.’

Relatedly, when certain prepositional phrases are added post-verbally, as something like an after-thought following a prosodic break, the negative concord suffix is not licensed:

- (26) a. hútiweʔ-ŋa [ <sub>PP</sub> dawýác’im-ʔáluʔ-**ŋa** ] gum-Mí:k’iʔ-ʔaŋaw-é:s-i  
 something-NC smoke-because.of-NC REFL-look/appear-good-NEG-IND  
 ‘One can’t see anything because of the smoke.’  
 b. hútiweʔ-ŋa gum-Mí:k’iʔ-ʔaŋaw-é:s-i [ <sub>PP</sub> dawýác’im-ʔáluʔ(\*-**ŋa**) ]  
 something-NC REFL-look/appear-good-NEG-IND smoke-because.of-NC  
 ‘One can’t see anything...because of the smoke.’

Lastly, Washo has a small class of verbs that are semantically, but not syntactically negative. When these verbs are used, *-ŋa* is licensed only when the negative marker *-é:s* is present. Note that in such cases, the resulting meaning of the verb is still positive:

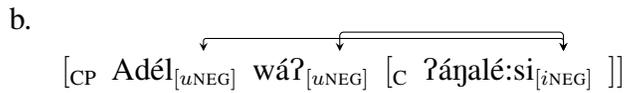
- (27) adél(\*-**ŋa**) l-ášaš-i  
 Adele-NC 1-not.know-IND  
 ‘I don’t know Adele.’  
 (28) adél-**ŋa** l-ášaš-é:s-i  
 Adele-NC 1-not.know-NEG-IND  
 ‘I know Adele.’

In sum, the licensing factors governing the distribution of *-ŋa* are syntactic, rather than semantic, in nature; the data suggest that *-ŋa* is i) clause-bound; ii) licensed by syntactic negation only, and iii) optional (cf. e.g., the West Flemish polarity-agreeing verbal prefix *en-* that may occur along with sentential negation (Haegeman 1998; Haegeman & Londahl 2010)).

**4. Towards an analysis.** The appearance of the suffix *-ŋa* in Washo appears to be an instance of negative concord licensed by syntactic negation. Building on proposals along the lines of Zeijlstra (2004, 2008), I therefore propose that *-ŋa* is best understood as the realization of multiple, negative agreement.

The core of the proposal has two ingredients. First, every element may come endowed with an unvalued, uninterpretable neg feature *uNeg*. Second, this feature can be checked by agreeing upward with the syntactic negation c-commanding it, which bears a matching interpretable feature *iNeg*. As for Zeijlstra, the availability of Multiple Agree (Hiraiwa 2001) explains why the appearance of *-ŋa* is so free: optionally many instances of a *uNeg* feature may be checked in the same clause by a single goal bearing a matching interpretable feature. These aspects of the analysis are schematized in (29b) for an example like (29a) (repeated from (9)):

- (29) a. adél-ŋa wáʔ-ŋa ʔ-áŋal-é:s-i  
 Adele-NC here-NC 3-reside-NEG-IND  
 ‘Adele doesn’t live here.’

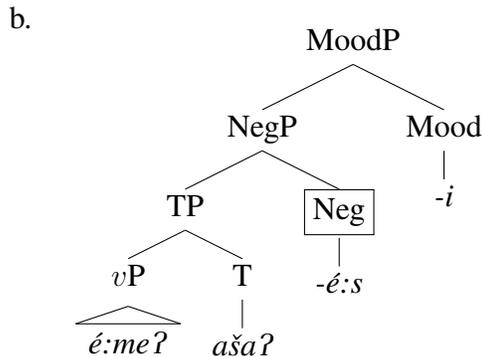


Note that this implementation of the analysis differs crucially from Zeijlstra (2004), according to which the sentential elements bearing *uNEG* are necessarily indefinite: In Washo, *uNEG* is free to occur on anything.

Unlike Zeijlstra moreover, the negative element I assume to bear *iNeg* is (sentential) negation itself. This is sufficient in the general case, as Washo is an SOV language, and the negative suffix is high enough in the clausal periphery such that the c-command condition for Agree will be met. The structure of a clause such as (30a), for example, is schematized in (30b). The negative suffix is hosted by its own projection, NegP, which intervenes between TP and MoodP, the clausal anchor in Washo (see Bochnak (2016); Hanink & Bochnak (2018) for more on MoodP in Washo).<sup>3</sup> This ordering is consistent with the morphology of the language, in accordance with the Mirror Principle (Baker 1985).

- (30) a. l-é:meʔ-ašaʔ-é:s-i  
 I-drink-NEAR.FUT-NEG-IND  
 ‘I’m not going to drink.’

Jacobsen (1973)



Note that there is no evidence for the subject moving higher than Spec, TP in Washo (cf. Arregi & Hanink 2018), though one potential issue for this assumption comes from *wh*-movement. Washo is an optional *wh*-movement language, and so we might expect *wh*-words that have undergone movement to be outside the scope of negation. The behavior of *-ŋa* with respect to  $\bar{A}$ -movement requires further investigation.<sup>4</sup>

**5. Ruling out other licensing factors.** In the remainder of this paper, I offer a brief discussion regarding the issue of ruling out other factors that might contribute to the licensing of the negative concord suffix in Washo. The reason for this discussion is that the interaction of nega-

<sup>3</sup>As pointed out by Zeijlstra (2008), Jespersen’s Generalization predicts that every language in which the negative marker is a head should exhibit negative concord. Washo is in line with this generalization.

<sup>4</sup>Relative clauses in Washo, however, are always internally-headed (Jacobsen 1998; Hanink 2016, 2018).

tion with other (semantic/pragmatic) factors can be notoriously difficult to understand, e.g., the seemingly superfluous VP-final *nie* in Afrikaans, which Merchant (2017) treats as a negative-isotope VP-level clitic; the augment morpheme across Bantu, which may or not be sensitive to negation (i.a. Mzolo 1968; Halpert 2012); the genitive of negation in languages such as Russian (see i.a. Brown 2010; Partee & Borschev 2002), where the optional genitive case marking of sentential elements under the scope of negation has been argued to be sensitive to semantic or pragmatic factors.

Based on such complications, one factor that remains to be understood in Washo is whether *-ŋa* contributes some semantic meaning that is not immediately obvious in a fieldwork setting. A good contender for such a contribution might come, for example, from focus, a domain with which negative concord has been closely tied before (e.g., Watanabe (2004) on Japanese). Preliminary work suggests that focus does not play a role, however. First, the negative concord suffix is not obligatory in clear focus contexts involving negation, such as in (31):<sup>5</sup>

- (31) a. Lisa dewYúli ʔ-í:gi-yé:s-i t'áš-k'eŋ ʔ-í:gi-yi  
 Lisa ghost-NC 3-see-NEG-IND shirt-REST 3-see-IND  
 'Lisa didn't see a ghost, she just saw a shirt.'
- b. Lisa dewYúli-ŋa ʔ-í:gi-yé:s-i t'áš-k'eŋ ʔ-í:gi-yi  
 Lisa ghost-NC 3-see-NEG-IND shirt-REST 3-see-IND  
 'Lisa didn't see a ghost, she just saw a shirt.'

Second, there are specific contexts in elicitation that do not lend themselves to a focus interpretation. One such context is given in (32), where the context involves a first mention of a particular 'big rock', backgrounding it. For this reason, focus-marking should not be expected on 'big rock' in the follow-up utterance. Nevertheless, *-ŋa* appears:

- (32) *Context:* you go walking, and someone asks if you saw the big rock by the lake.  
 déʔek t'íyeliʔ-ŋa l-í:gi-yé:s-i  
 rock big-NC 1-see-NEG-IND  
 'I didn't see the big rock.'

Third, *-ŋa* is never licensed without negation in non-negative focus contexts, as in (33), which contains the focus-sensitive restrictive suffix *-k'eŋ*, which means something like 'only':

- (33) Ryan-k'eŋ ʔáŋ(\*-ŋa) ʔ-í:gi-yi  
 Ryan-REST Ang-NC 3-see-IND  
 Intended: 'Only Ryan saw the Ang (=mythical bird monster).'

The upshot of this is that focus does not seem to be at play, though that does not necessarily rule out the contribution of other semantic or pragmatic factors to the licensing of *-ŋa*. More fieldwork is needed to determine whether such other factors exist. Importantly however, the syntactic licensing conditions for negative concord remain. If there are in fact other factors governing the appearance of *-ŋa*, the only aspect of the analysis presented in §4 that would change would be the optionality of this morpheme.

<sup>5</sup>I thank Ryan Bochnak for helping me to collect these data during my absence from the field.

**6. Conclusion.** The negative concord suffix *-ŋa* in Washo presents a novel type of negative agreement marking that is best captured by an agreement analysis invoking Multiple Agree, along the lines of the proposal put forward by Zeijlstra (2004). The Washo data presented in this paper are important in two ways. First, they expand our understanding of the possible range of agreement phenomena, as they present a hitherto unfamiliar system of negative agreement. Second, they show with direct evidence that agreement analyses of negative concord are on the right track, at least for certain languages.

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