Negative Concord in an English of the Southern US and Beyond

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Abstract: This study investigates Negative Concord cross-linguistically in the context of past proposals, beginning with a non-standard variety of American English. In using data from this non-Standard English, I hope to propose a new analysis of Negative Concord which avoids some of the pitfalls which past proposals suffer from. I then extend the analysis from this non-Standard English to other Negative Concord languages, and in doing so extend empirical coverage and naturally account for a long-standing puzzle in Romance Negative Concord data. Finally, I investigate Double Negation in this English, and arrive at a fully compositional analysis for Negative Concord and Double Negation which need not posit any ambiguity in so-called n-words.

1. Introduction

This study investigates Negative Concord (NC), and seeks to provide a comprehensive, cross-linguistic proposal for this phenomenon. Negative Concord is the appearance of multiple negatively marked elements in a clause all conspiring to form a single negation in the semantics.

(1) Nikto *(ne) zvonil (Russian)
N-body SNM called
'*No one called.*' (NOT '*No one didn't call.*')

In (1), both the negatively marked nominal *nikto* (which I refer to as *n-words*) and the sentential negative marker (SNM) show negation, yet oddly there is only a single negation available in the interpretation. This creates what can be called a Compositionality Problem.

(2) Compositionality Problem
How is it that multiple (seemingly) negative elements all conspire in a clause to account for only a single negation in the semantics?

Compounding the mystery is that cross-linguistically there is a fair deal of variation with how languages exhibit NC. For example, some languages allow n-words in subject position (such as Korean in (3)), while others disallow n-words in subject position (such as Bavarian in (4)).

(3) amwuto an o-ass-ta (Korean)
N-body SNM come.PAST.DECL
'*Nobody came.*'

(4) * Daß koa Texana nit groß ist, woaß ajeda (Bavarian)
That no Texan SNM tall is, knows everybody
'*Everybody knows that no Texan is tall.*'

Yet another manner in which languages differ with regard to NC is how they handle the insertion of SNMs in the presence of other negative morphology (i.e. n-words). In some languages, SNM insertion is mandatory, regardless of whether or not n-words are present, in other languages it is optional, and in rare cases it is disallowed.

(5) na-neun amwukesto *(an) meok-ess-ta (Korean)
I.TOP N-thing SNM eat.PAST.DECL
'*I didn't eat anything.*'

(6) ...daß da Hans koa Buach (nit) glesn hot (Bavarian)
…that the Hans no book SNM read has
'*… that Hans didn't read any book.*'

(7) Personne n'a (*pas) rien fait (French)
N.body has SNM N-thing done
'*Nobody has done anything.*'

Such variation implies that the root of NC is morpho-syntactic in nature, and this study seeks to provide a proposal in these terms.

2. Previous Proposals

There have already been several attempts in the literature at capturing the process(es) behind NC. The principle way in which competing proposals differ is their treatment of n-words. The Neg-Absorption account (Zanuttini 1991, Haegeman & Zanuttini 1996) takes the view that n-words are inherently negative. The 'n-word as NPI' approach (Laka 1990, Ladusaw 1992, Giannakidou 2000) and the 'NC as Agree' (Zeijlstra 2004, 2008) take the view that n-words are inherently non-negative, but they differ with each other in other respects. This section will examine each of these proposals in turn.

2.1. Neg-Absorption

The Neg-Absorption approach supposes that n-words are negative universal quantifiers. In order to account for the Compositionality Problem in (2), this approach proposes a mechanism of 'ab-

sorption', in which multiple negative elements factorize into each other, similar to Wh-absoprtion. This can be schematized as in (8).

(8) $\forall x\neg\ \forall y\neg\ (\forall z\neg) = [\forall x,y,(z)]\neg$

In practice, this would appear as in (9).

(9) a. Je n'ai jamais rien dit à personne (French)
I have never N-thing said to N-body
'*I have never said anything to anyone.*'

b. [∀x,y,t : *x* a thing, *y* a person, *t* a time], ¬[I said *x* to *y* at *t*]

However, some problems with the Neg-Absorption account are that it is an otherwise unattested phenomenon, that cannot be fully equated with multiple the wh-dependencies of Rizzi (1991). Furthermore, the process of Neg-Absorption has nothing to say about the cross-linguistic variation we see.

2.2. N-words as Special NPIs

Those claiming that n-words are a more restricted class of NPIs note the similarities between sentences like (10), which contain an n-word, and (11), which contain an NPI.

(10) Gianni *(*non*) ha telefonato a *nessuno* (Italian)
Gianni SNM has telephoned to N-body
'*Gianni hasn't called anyone.*'

(11) I have*(*n't*) called *anyone* (Standard English)

In both (10) and (11), the n-word *nessuno* and the NPI *anyone* require negation to be present in a c-commanding position. However, many works which champion this view support the idea that one of the principle differences between NPIs and n-words is that the former are existential in nature, while the latter are universal (e.g. Zanuttini 1991 and Giannakidou 2006). This supposed distinction however is not fully motivated since it largely depends on (i) performance on the Almost test (which has been shown to be unhelpful in determining existentiality vs. universality by Penka 2006), (ii) dubious scope data (see Edmiston 2014), and (iii) the notion that while NPIs are licensed at a distance, n-words are not.

(12) a. O Pavlos dhen ipe [oti idhe kanenan/*KANENAN] (Greek)
The Paul SNM said.3SG that saw.3SG any-person/N-person
'*Paul didn't say he saw anybody.*'

Furthermore, proposals like these lack a disciplined means of predicting distribution, since n-words aren't always licensed under negation (13), and sometimes n-words are completely incompatible with SNMs (14), which is never the case with NPIs.

(13) Nessuno ha telefonato (Italian)
N-body has telephoned
'*Nobody has called.*'

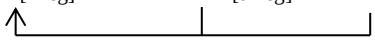
(14) * Il n'a pas rencontré personne (French)
He has SNM met N-body
'*He hasn't met anybody.*'

2.3. NC as Agree

A third type of proposal treats NC as the result of Chomskyian (1995, 2000, 2001) Agree, whose most salient proponent in the literature has been Zeijlstra (2004, 2008). This proposal treats n-words as non-negative indefinites, which bear [uNeg] features and probe upwards in search of [iNeg] features. Agree is multiple in nature (Hiraiwa 2001, 2005), and [iNeg] is either housed in a null operator (for strict NC languages) or on the SNM (for non-strict NC languages). An example of the proposal for strict NC languages is as in (15), in which the null operator is said to Merge arbitrarily above the highest n-word. In (16) is an example of a non-strict NC derivation.

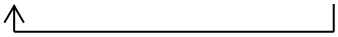
(15) a. Dnes nikdo nevola (Czech)
Today N-body SNM.calls
'*Nobody is calling today.*'

b. $[_{NegP}\ OP_{[iNeg]}\ [_{TP}\ nikdo_{[uNeg]}\ nevola_{[uNeg]}]]$



(16) a. Gianni non telefona a nessuno (Italian)
Gianni SNM calls to N-body
'*Gianni doesn't call anybody.*'

b. $[_{TP}\ Gianni\ non_{[iNeg]}\ telefona\ [_{vP}\ a\ nessuno_{[uNeg]}]]$



Some issues with this analysis however are dealt with in Haegeman & Lohndal (2010), and are related to Zeijlstra's use of Multiple Agree. Some theoretical issues that I hope to account for are that Zeijlstra's system is stipulatory in its placement of the negative operator for strict NC languages like Czech. The null operator appearing simply above the highest n-word is *ad hoc* and doesn't respect any hierarchy of projections. Finally, in examples like (15), Zeijlstra's account has both phrases (like n-work *nikdo*) and heads (like main verb *nevola*) probing, something which is typically disallowed in most disciplined Agree systems.

2.4. Conclusion

Having briefly surveyed other proposals, I can now draw up the hopes for my proposal to come. Ideally, my proposal will: (i) account for compositionality with independently motivated mechanisms, (ii) account for typological differences as a result of the proposal itself, (iii) account for distribution between n-words and NPIs, and (iv) avoid the theoretical issues of Zeijlstra's Agree-based account.

3. Proposal: NC in an English of the Southern US (ESUS)

3.1. General Proposal

One variety of NC English is an English of the Southern US (ESUS).

(17) I *ain't* say *nothin'* to *nobody* (= '*I didn't say anything to anybody*') (ESUS)

In (17), in addition to the SNM *ain't* are the n-words *nothin'* and *nobody*. To account for the Compositionality Problem in (2), I claim that n-words are non-negative indefinites which merge unvalued for anti-veridicity (I will use the terms *anti-veridical* and *negative* interchangeable for convenience). I claim that the anti-veridical feature is furnished by a negative operator, which bears anti-veridical valuation. The anti-veridical feature then values the indefinite negative in the way of Pesetsky & Torrego (2007). I adopt a reverse Agree, as seen in Wurmbrand (2012).

(18) A feature F: __ on a head α is valued by a feature F: val on β, iff:
(i) β asymmetrically c-commands α AND
(ii) There is no γ, γ distinct from β, with a valued interpretable feature F such that γ c-commands α and is c-commanded by β

I follow Laka (1990) in claiming that negation Merges either above or below TP. In ESUS, negation Merges below TP, while in languages like Czech (see section 4), negation resides above TP.

(19) a. $[_{TP}[_{NegP}\ OP_{[iNeg:Neg]}\ [_{AuxP/vP}\ \ldots]]]$ → ESUS type Low Negation
b. $[_{NegP}\ OP_{[iNeg:Neg]}\ [_{TP}[_{AuxP/vP}\ \ldots]]]$ → Czech type High Negation

The derivation occurs as in (20), with n-words being valued by the operator.

(20) a. I ain't give nothin' to nobody
b. $[_{TP}$ I $[_{T'}$ ain't $[_{NegP}\ OP_{[iNeg:Neg]}\ [_{vP}$ nothin'$_{[indef:\underline{Neg}]}$ to nobody$_{[indef:\underline{Neg}]}]]]]$

That the negative operator is housed below TP can be seen by the fact that ESUS does not allow n-words in the usual subject position of [spec, TP]. This is because the n-word will not be able to find valuation when it probes upward in search of its anti-veridical feature.

(21) a. * No one ain't goin' to the store
b. [$_{TP}$ No one$_{[indef:__]}$ [$_{T'}$ ain't [$_{NegP}$ OP$_{[iNeg:Neg]}$ [$_{vP}$ going…]]]]

However, if the n-word remains in its base-generated position in [spec, *v*P], then the sentence again becomes licit (compare (22) against (21)).

(22) (There) ain't no one goin' to the store (= '*No one is going to the store'*)

3.2. N-words vs. NPIs

While n-words show a sensitivity to anti-veridicity, nominal NPIs such as *anything* are licensed by – among other things – non-veridicity, as seen in questions or conditionals (valued non-veridical features are represented as [iNV:NV]).

(23) a. [$_{TP}$ I [$_{T'}$ ain't [$_{NegP}$ OP$_{[iNeg:Neg]}$ [$_{vP}$ see *nobody*$_{[indef:\underline{Neg}]}$]]]] indef. →*nobody*

b. [$_{CP}$ If$_{[iNV:NV]}$ [$_{TP}$ you [$_{vP}$ see *anybody*$_{[indef:\underline{NV}]}$]]] indef. → *anybody*

But if n-words and nominal NPIs (henceforth simply *NPIs*) are both the product of valuation of (non/anti)veridicity, then I must account for why NPIs are seemingly licensed at a distance while n-words are not (cf. (12)). Examine the following data from ESUS, which seeming shows this.

(24) a. Ain't no one say [that you were *anywhere* near the accident]
b. * Ain't no one say [that you were *nowhere* near the accident]

But looks can be deceiving, as we can assume that negation plus a non-factive verb select for a complementizer with *non-veridical* features. This can be easily seen if we restate (24)a as (25).

(25) Ain't no one say *whether* you were *anywhere* near the accident

The complementizer *whether* is a prototypical case of non-veridicity, since it neither implies that the embedded proposition is true nor false. So the derivations in (24) are as in (26).

(26) a. Ain't no one say [that$_{[iNV:NV]}$ you were anywhere$_{[indef:\underline{NV}]}$ near…]

b. * Ain't OP$_{[iNeg:Neg]}$ no one say [that$_{[iNV:NV]}$ you were nowhere$_{[indef:\underline{Neg}]}$ near…]

The derivation in (26)b is not licit due to the intervening non-veridical feature on the complementizer. This can be further shown to be the case in (27), in which the defective embedded TP has no CP layer, and therefore cannot house an intervening non-veridical feature on C, giving the appearance of an n-word licensed at a distance.

(27) I don't OP$_{[iNeg:Neg]}$ want [$_{TP}$ to go *nowhere*$_{[indef:\underline{Neg}]}$]
(=*'I don't want to go anywhere'*)

Data from Greek show the same thing, with NPIs only licensed under non-factive complementizers like *oti*, and not under factive complementizers like *pu* (which presumably house veridical features which block (non/anti)veridical valuation), showing that it is in fact the complementizer which counts.

(28) a. O Pavlos dhen ipe [oti idhe kanenan] (Greek)
The Paul SNM said.3SG that saw.3SG any-person
'*Paul didn't say he saw anybody.*'

b. * Dhen lipame [pu pligosa kanenan/KANENAN]
SNM be-sorry.1SG that hurt.1SG any-person/N-person
'*I don't regret that I hurt anybody.*'

Similar to the ESUS data in (27), Greek also allows n-words at a distance across a subjunctive clause boundary, as seen in (29). This is expected since subjunctives are known as lacking certain features (such as veridicity), so they cannot act as interveners.

(29) O Pavlos dhen theli [na dhi KANENAN]
the Paul SNM want.3SG SUBJ see.3SG N-person
'*Paul doesn't want to see anybody.*'

Therefore, we see that despite appearances, both n-words and NPIs are actually clause-bound – except across defective TPs and subjunctive C's – which is what we would expect if they were the result of the same process, as I claim.

3.3. SNMs as Dummy Negation

We saw in (5-7) that there is variation with how languages deal with SNMs. I claim that SNMs are the product of late insertion, as the morphophonological realization of negative operators. This late insertion serves to do two things. The first thing is to ensure that negation is realized in the event that n-words are not present. That is, SNMs are inserted as the "discharge" of negative valuation in the event there are no n-words to take on negative morphology. The second thing that SNM insertion serves to do is act as a scope marker to ensure that negation scopes over at least *v*P (cf. Haegeman & Zanuttini 1996).

The use of SNMs as a scope marker can be seen in the different behavior of languages like ESUS and West Flemish. In ESUS, n-words are allowed below *v*P (e.g. as in (17)), so insertion of the SNM *–n't* is mandatory on modals/auxiliaries to ensure negation above *v*P. West Flemish however, does not allow n-words below *v*P, requiring instead that all n-words scramble out of *v*P. Thus, whenever n-words are present, the usually scope-marking SNM becomes redundant, and therefore optional (see section 4.2 for a formalized constraint dealing with the optionality in SNM insertion).

(30) … da Valère ***niemand***$_i$ **(nie)** **t**$_i$ kent (West Flemish)
that Valère N-body SNM knows
'*that Valère doesn't know anybody*.'

3.4. Conclusion

We have seen through data in ESUS, that NC is the result of indefinites being placed below c-commanding anti-veridical features. Furthermore, the placement of these anti-veridical features, as housed on negative operators, is crucial in n-words not being allowed to appear in the standard subject position of [spec, TP]. Also, NPIs are licensed in the same manner, though their licensing is dependent on non-veridicity rather than anti-veridicity. This predicts that NPIs and n-words should have the same licensing domains, as was shown in spite of appearances. Finally, SNMs are the product of late insertion, dependent on the presence of other negative morphology (i.e. n-words) and the (in)ability of that negative morphology to appear below *v*P.

4. Extension to and Evidence from Other Languages

4.1. Czech – A High Negation NC Language

Recall that per Zeijlstra's (2008) analysis, Czech is a strict NC language, which means that the negative feature is housed in a null operator above the highest n-word (which includes SNMs in Zeijlstra's proposal). However, the scope data in (30) tell us that this cannot be the case.

(31) Milan moc nejedl (Czech)
Milan much SNM.eat.PERF
NOT > much: '*Milan hasn't eaten much.*'
* much > NOT: *'There is much that Milan didn't eat*.'

According to Zeijlstra's proposal, negation should Merge above the highest n-word, *nejedl*, but that would bring about a scope reading of *much > NOT*, which is the opposite of what we see. If however, we remind ourselves that negation Merges above TP in some languages (cf. (19)), then we can extend my proposal from section 3 and the data in (31) fall into place.

(32) $[_{NegP}\ OP_{[iNeg:Neg]}\ [_{TP}$ Milan moc nejedl]] → NOT > much

Now, adopting my proposal of upward probing indefinites and having negation Merge above TP predicts that n-words should be licit in [spec, TP], unlike ESUS (cf. (21)). This prediction is borne out.

(33) a. Nikdo nevola
N-body SNM.calls
'*Nobody calls.*'

b. $[_{NegP}\ OP_{[iNeg:Neg]}\ [_{TP}\ Nikdo_{[indef:\underline{Neg}]}\ nevola]]$

4.2. A Common Puzzle from Negative Concord in Romance

It is a commonly studied puzzle in certain Romance languages like Spanish, that preverbal n-words seem to act like universal negative quantifiers, as in (34)a, while post-verbal n-words seem to act like NPIs, as in (34)b.

(34) a. *Nadie* (*no) comió (Spanish)
N-body (*SNM) ate

b. *(no) comió *nadie*
SNM ate N-body
'*Nobody ate.*'

To account for this, I follow Zubizaretta (1998) in claiming that Spanish has an XP-V-S-O word order, in which XP is represented by focus elements or topics. The idea behind the word order is that subjects remain in-site in [spec, *v*P], with the verb, which has raised to T, bearing verbal agreement which has the categorical status of pronouns in non-pro-drop languages (Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 1998). Since the verbal agreement has pronoun status, it checks the EPP feature on T, and the *v*P-internal subject has no impetus to move to [spec, TP].

Now, it is a well-known fact that pre-verbal n-words in Spanish are contrastively focused (Franco & Landa 2006). I claim that it is a focus feature associated with negation (or a negation feature associated with focus per Frascarelli 2000) which causes pre-verbal n-words to undergo A-bar movement above TP, while at the same time being focused negative by the negative operator. Post-verbal n-words on the other hand lack this focus feature, and therefore do not undergo A-bar movement, but remain in-situ. The derivations can be seen in (35).

(35) a. $[_{NegP}\ Nadie_{i[indef:\underline{Neg}][\sout{uFoc}]}\ OP_{[iNeg:Neg][iFoc]}\ [_{TP}\ comió\ [_{vP}\ \sout{nadie}_{i[indef:\_\_][uFoc]}]]]$

b. $[_{NegP}\ No\ OP_{[iNeg:Neg]}\ [_{TP}\ comió\ [_{vP}\ nadie_{[indef:\underline{Neg}]}\ ]]]$

Insertion of the SNM *no* is barred from sentences with pre-verbal n-words, since there is already negative morphology (in the form of the n-word) above *v*P, and SNM insertion would be redundant (though some varieties of Spanish do allow additional insertion of *no* in sentences like

(34)a). However, if all n-words are post-verbal and there is no negative morphology above the inflected verb, then insertion of the SNM is mandatory in order to assert negation's scope. This leads to the following constraint in NC languages.

(36) Constraint on negation's scopal dominance in NC languages:
NC languages tend strongly to assert negation over *v*P; if all n-words are *v*P-internal, then SNM insertion is mandatory. If there are n-words above *v*P, then SNM insertion is either optional (as in (30)) or disallowed (as in (34)a).

In fact, this constraint in which negation needs to assert itself above *v*P in NC languages is very strong. In a language like French for example, the pre-verbal negative particle *ne* has often been taken as a negative scope marker (see Godard 2004). The disappearance of this particle in spoken French has coincided with other phenomena which suggest that French may be on its way to losing NC status. So it seems that the link between negation's assertion of scope above *v*P is linked with NC status in general.

4.3. Conclusion

Extension of my proposal to other languages has been shown to expand empirical coverage for languages like Czech, handling scope data which Zeijlstra's proposal could not. It also serves as a natural explanation for the puzzle from Romance NC as seen above. Furthermore, revisiting the goals from section 2.4, this proposal has successfully (i) accounted for compositionality with the independently motivated mechanism of Agree/Valuation, (ii) accounted for typological differences as a result of the proposal itself, with the placement of negation accounting for the (dis)allowance of subject n-words, and the constraint in (36) accounting for SNM insertion, (iii) accounted for the distributions of n-words and NPIs, showing that they are in fact the same, and (iv) avoided the theoretical issues of Zeijlstra's Agree-based account with a strict hierarchy of projections and only phrases probing out heads, rather than both acting as probes.

5. Double Negation in ESUS

Though ESUS is an NC language, there are two ways in which ESUS can express Double Negation (DN). The first is with the insertion of a second SNM (37), and the second is with Informational focus (Kiss 1998) on an n-word (38) (See Edmiston (2014) for discussion on how different types of focus affect n-words differently).

(37) ? I ain't *not* talk to no one (= *'I didn't NOT talk to anyone'*→'*I talked to some one'*)

(38) I ain't talk to NOBODY (= '*I didn't talk to NOBODY'*→*'I talked to SOMEONE'*)

But if n-words like *nobody* participate in DN when focused, then it seems that they can contribute negation at least sometimes. We therefore have a sort of reverse Compositionality

Problem since I stated above that n-words were non-negative indefinites. So how is it they can contribute negation when focused?

I believe that the solution can be found in the Alternative Semantics of Rooth (1985, 1996). Alternative Semantics has is that when an item φ is focused, a list of salient alternatives to φ is introduced by a focus operator F. Furthermore, the proposition containing the focused element (i.e. $[[\varphi]]^{o}$) is stressed as true, while the propositions containing all members of the alternative set (i.e. $[[\varphi]]^{f}$) are understood as not true. (39) contains an example.

(39) a. I THINK she has a chance

b. $[_{s}$ think $_{F(\{think\}, \{know\},etc.\ C)}$ $[_{s}\ \lambda e_1\ [_{s}$ I e_1 she has a chance]]]

That is, the appropriateness of the focused element *think* is stressed above all other members in the alternative set. However, when a focused element appears below negation, the process is reversed, and the proposition of $[[\varphi]]^{o}$ is stressed as false, with it understood that some element in $[[\varphi]]^{f}$ must be true.

Now, we can take the original denotation of n-words to be the least member of a set, or the set containing no elements, i.e. the empty set ø. Therefore, focusing n-words – as they occur under negation – has the effect of stating that the empty set is false, and that some salient alternative must be true. (40) is an example in which we can take the alternatives in the set to be Bill = b, Donald = d, and Tom = t.

(40) a. He didn't greet NO-ONE

b. $[_{s}$ No one $_{F(\{ø,\ \{b\},\ \{d\},\ \{t\},\ \{b,\ d\},\ \{d,t\}\ldots\}\ C)}$ $[_{s}\ \lambda e_1\ [_{s}$ he didn't greet $e_1]]]$

That is to say, the empty set ø denoted by *no one* is negated, while it must hold true that *he* met some alternative from the list, Bill, Donald, Tom, or some mixed set thereof. This is not actual double negation, rather the negation of the empty set, i.e. ¬ ø rather than ¬ ¬.

Though negation of the empty set has the same truth conditions as double negation, i.e. that *somebody* was met and not *nobody*, no extra negation comes from the n-word *nobody*. This is in perfect alignment with my proposal that n-words are actually non-negative indefinites valued for anti-veridicity, and as such a reverse Compositionality Problem is avoided.

6. Conclusion

In this study, I have briefly surveyed previous proposals on NC, and outlined some of their drawbacks. In doing so, I established the goal of presenting a proposal which avoided these same drawbacks. I believe that I have at least to some extent been successful in avoiding these pitfalls, while at the same time also extending empirical coverage with the scope data from Czech and the Romance NC puzzle discussed in section 4. Finally, in providing an analysis of DN that is based on Alternative Semantics, I have been able to provide a fully compositional analysis of NC, which avoids any negative/non-negative ambiguity in n-words.

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