

Not Unavailable: Toward a complete analysis of double negation readings in Slavic languages

Clara McMahon (CUNY Graduate Center)

Presented at SynNYU 17 November 2023

Overview

1. A Brief Introduction to Negative Concord (NC)
2. Strict vs. Non-strict NC
 - 2.1. The status of negative markers
3. Double Negation (DN) Readings in Strict NC languages
4. Towards a Unified Analysis of DN Readings

A Brief Introduction to Negative Concord

A Brief Introduction to Negative Concord (NC)

NEGATIVE CONCORD LANGUAGE:

Russian (SN reading):

1. Я **не** делаю **ничего**.
Ya **ne** delaju **nichego**
I NEG do nothing
'I'm not doing anything.'

DOUBLE NEGATION LANGUAGE:

Standard English* (DN reading):

2. I didn't do **nothing**.

German (DN reading):

3. Hans sieht **nicht nichts**.
Hans sees NEG nothing
'Hans doesn't see nothing.'

– Zeijlstra (2008)

Strict vs Non-strict Negative Concord

Strict vs. Non-strict NC

POST-VERBAL NCI:

STRICT NC

Russian

4. Она **не** видела **никого**.

Ona **ne** videla **nikogo**

She NEG saw nobody

‘She saw nobody.’

NON-STRICT NC

Spanish

5. Greta **no** vio a **nadie**.

Greta NEG saw at nobody

‘Greta saw nobody.’

PRE-VERBAL NCI:

STRICT NC

Russian

6. **Никто** **не** спал.

Nikto **ne** spal

Nobody NEG sleep.pst.m

‘Nobody slept.’

NON-STRICT NC

Spanish

7. **Nadie** durmió.

Nobody sleep.pst

‘Nobody slept.’

The Status of Negative Markers

STRICT NC:

Czech

8. **Nikdo** nevolá
Nobody NEG-calls
'Nobody calls'

NON-STRICT NC:

Italian

9. **Nessuno** telefona
Nobody calls
'Nobody calls'

— examples from Zeijlstra (2007)

The Status of Negative Markers

STRICT NC

Czech

10. Milan moc **nejedl**

Milan much NEG.eat.PERF

\neg > **much**: 'Milan hasn't eaten much'

*much > \neg : 'There is much that Milan didn't eat'

NON-STRICT NC

Italian

11. Molto **non** ha mangiato Gianni

Much NEG has eaten Gianni

* \neg > much: 'Gianni hasn't eaten much'

much > \neg : 'There is much that Gianni didn't eat'

— examples from Zeijlstra (2008)

“The difference between strict and non-strict Negative Concord languages then reduces to the featural make-up of the negative marker”(Zeijlstra 2007).

Strict NC: The Agreement Approach

STRICT NC:

Russian

POST-VERBAL NCI

12. <NEG_[iNEG]> Она не_[uNEG] видела никого_[uNEG].
<NEG_[iNEG]> Она не_[uNEG] videla nikogo_[uNEG].
She NEG saw nobody
'She saw nobody.' (SN)

PRE-VERBAL NCI

13. <NEG_[iNEG]> Никто_[uNEG] не_[uNEG] спал.
<NEG_[iNEG]> Nikto_[uNEG] ne_[uNEG] spal.
Nobody NEG slept.
'Nobody slept.' (SN)

NON-STRICT NC:

Spanish

POST-VERBAL NCI

14. Greta no_[iNEG] vio a nadie_[uNEG].
Greta NEG saw at nobody
'Greta saw nobody.' (SN)

PRE-VERBAL NCI

15. <NEG_[iNEG]> Nadie_[uNEG] durmió.
Nobody slept
'Nobody slept.' (SN)

Ne in NCIs

NCIs in Russian are decomposable into *ne*, the scalar particle *i* (even), and a *wh*-stem (Haspelmath 1997; Watanabe 2004):

16. н-и-кто
n-i-kto
NEG even who
'nobody/anybody'

PROBLEM FOR THE AGREEMENT APPROACH: No variability in negation readings predicted if *ne/nie* is always semantically non-negative

Double Negation Readings in Strict NC Languages

Double Negation Readings in Strict NC

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES:

17. Крупные предприятия **не** появляются
Kрупnye predprijatija **ne** pojavljajutsja
Large factories NEG appear
из **ниоткуда**.
iz **niotkuda**
from nowhere
'Large factories don't come from nowhere.' (DN)
– Fitzgibbons (2010)

18. Он **не** отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**.
On **ne** otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto**
He NEG give.pst.m his life for nothing
'He didn't give up his life for nothing.' (DN)
'He didn't give up his life for anything.' (SN)
– McMahon & Pember (2022)

SMALL CLAUSES:

19. Ваня **не** считал Иру **никем**.
Vanya **ne** schital Iru **nikem**.
Vanya NEG consider.pst Ira.acc a-nobody
'Vanya did not consider Ira a nobody.' (DN)
– Fitzgibbons (2010)

Double Negation Readings with Constituent Negation in Strict NC

Russian:

20. Она **не** **несчастна**.
Ona **ne** **neshastna**.
She NEG NEG-happy.
'She is not unhappy.' (DN)

Polish:

21. Ona **nie** jest **nieszczęśliwa**.
She NEG is NEG-happy.
'She is not unhappy.' (DN)

Ukrainian:

22. Вона **не** є **нещасна**.
Bona **ne** ye **neschasna**.
She NEG is NEG-happy.
'She is not unhappy.' (DN)

Slovak:

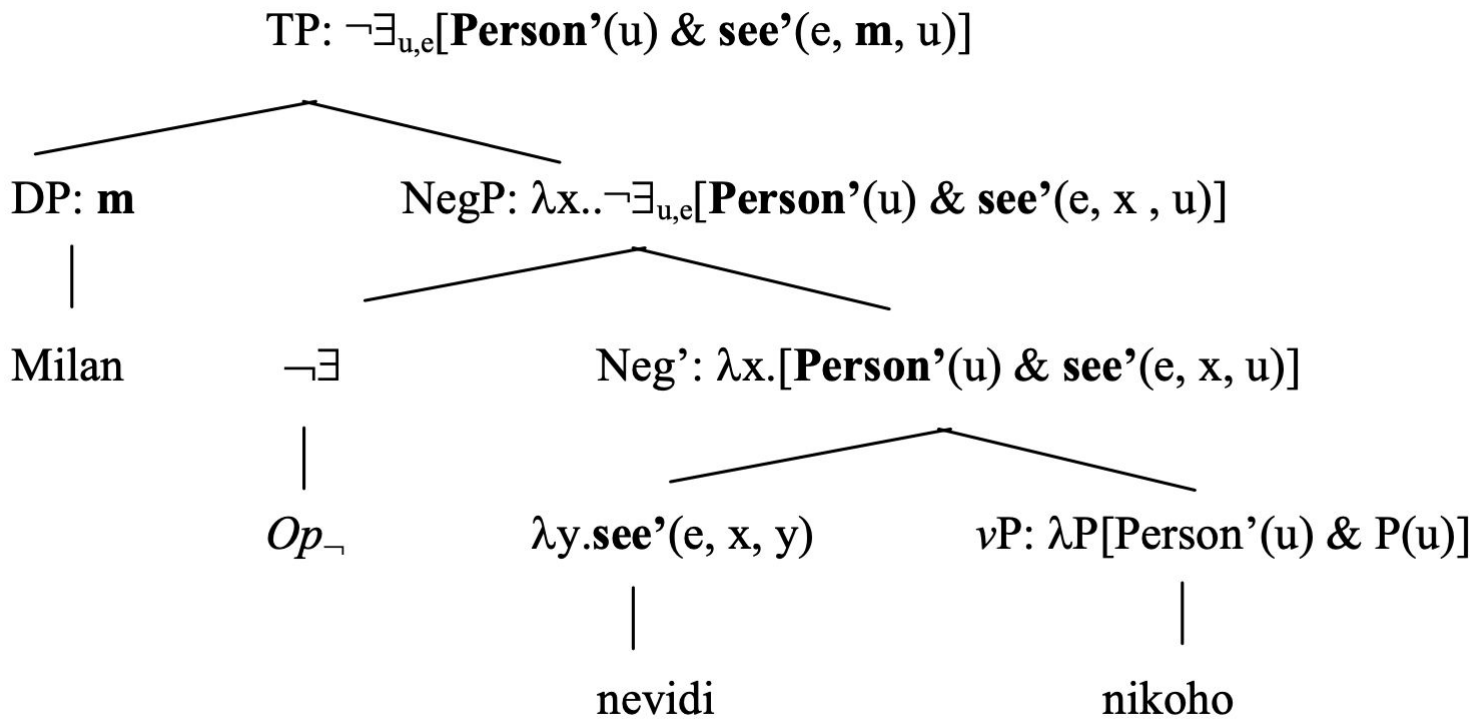
23. Ona **nie** je **nešťastná**.
She NEG is NEG-happy.
'She is not unhappy.' (DN)

UPDATED PROBLEM: Create a unified analysis for DN readings in Slavic languages that treats *ne/nie* the same across contexts

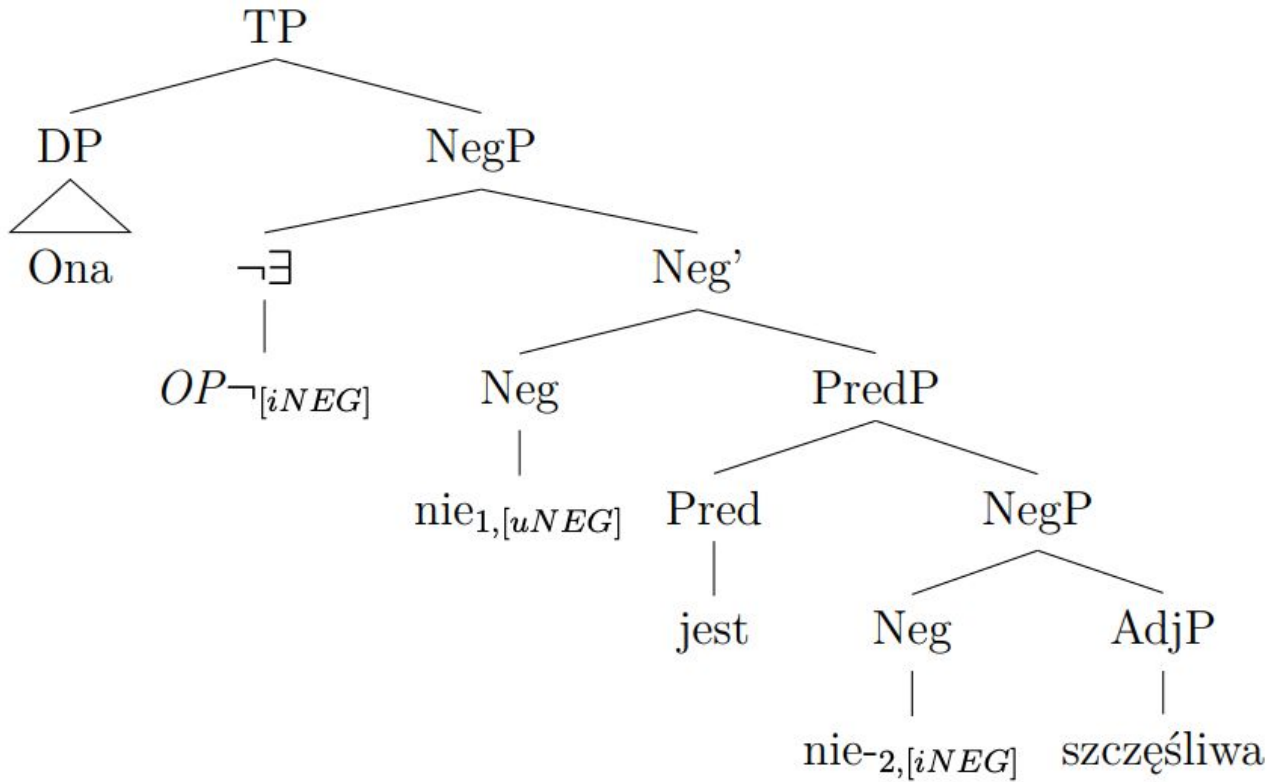
Towards a Unified Analysis of DN Readings

Potential Analysis One

- maintain a Zeijlstra-style, agreement-based approach
- posit two *ne/nie*'s
 - *ne/nie*1 is not semantically negative
 - *ne/nie*2 is semantically negative



Czech tree from Zeijlstra (2008)



Polish: 'She is not unhappy.' (DN)

Review of Analysis One

PROS

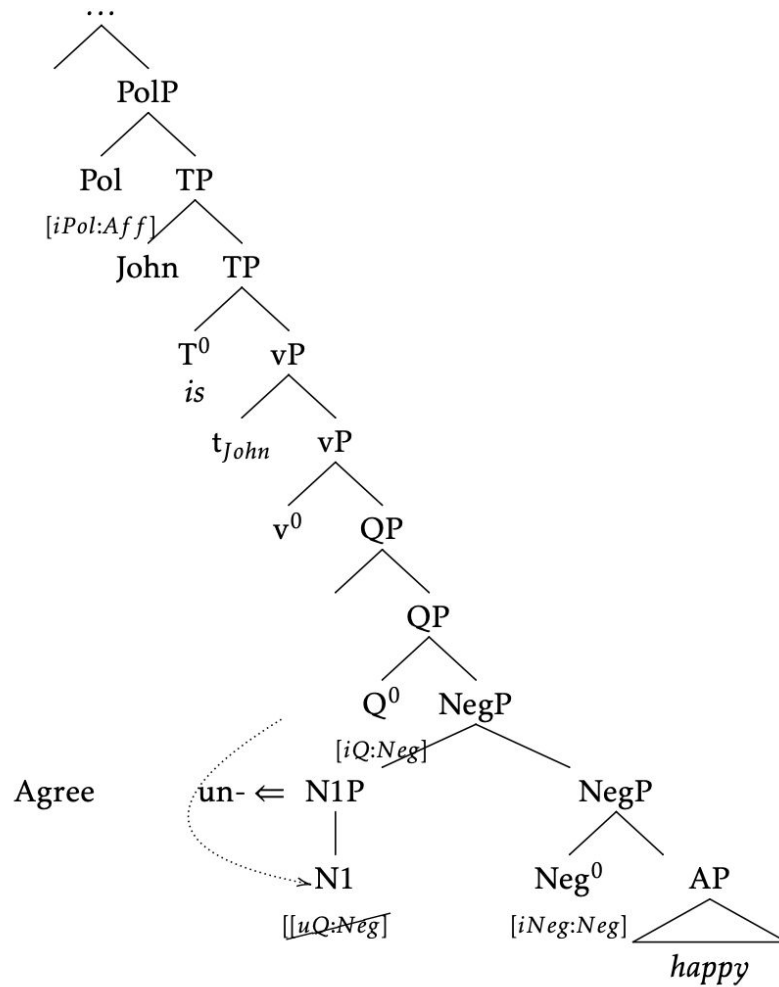
- accounts for differences between strict and non-strict NC languages
- can maintain an analysis that accounts for cross-linguistic data

CONS

- proliferation in the lexicon (of *ne/nie*)
- need to restrict where *ne/nie*_{iNEG} can appear
 - difficult to constrain to account for the rarity of DN readings in Slavic languages

Potential Analysis Two

- de Clercq (2013) provides a nanosyntactic account for constituent negation
 - ‘He isn’t happy’ (Pol-negation)
 - ‘He is unhappy’ (Q-negation)
- looks at English and some French
 - briefly mentions Czech, but no analysis provided
- “One of the bigger issues this approach raises is how it fares with respect to negative indefinites such as English *no*, *nothing* or for instance Czech n-words like *nikdo*” (de Clercq 2013).



Review of Analysis Two

PROS

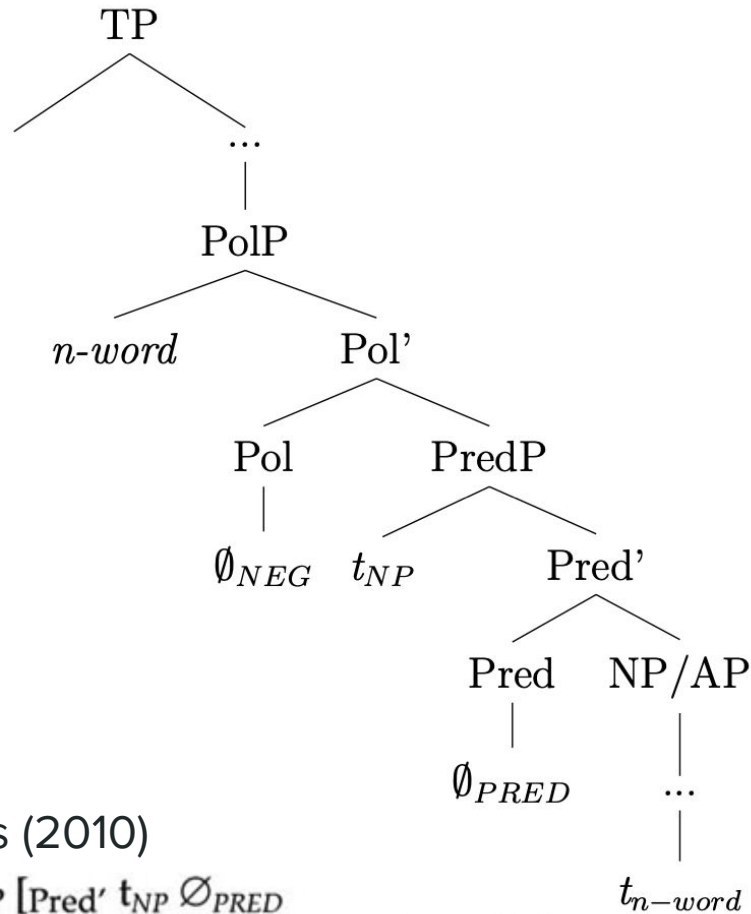
- can unify analysis of certain DNs in Slavic languages with similar DNs in English
- accounts for constituent negation DN readings, which are typically not included in accounts of negative concord

CONS

- doesn't unify all available DNs in Slavic languages (i.e. PPs and SCs with constituent negation)
 - doesn't explain why a given NCI, which typically has an SN, may have a DN in PPs or SCs

Potential Analysis Three

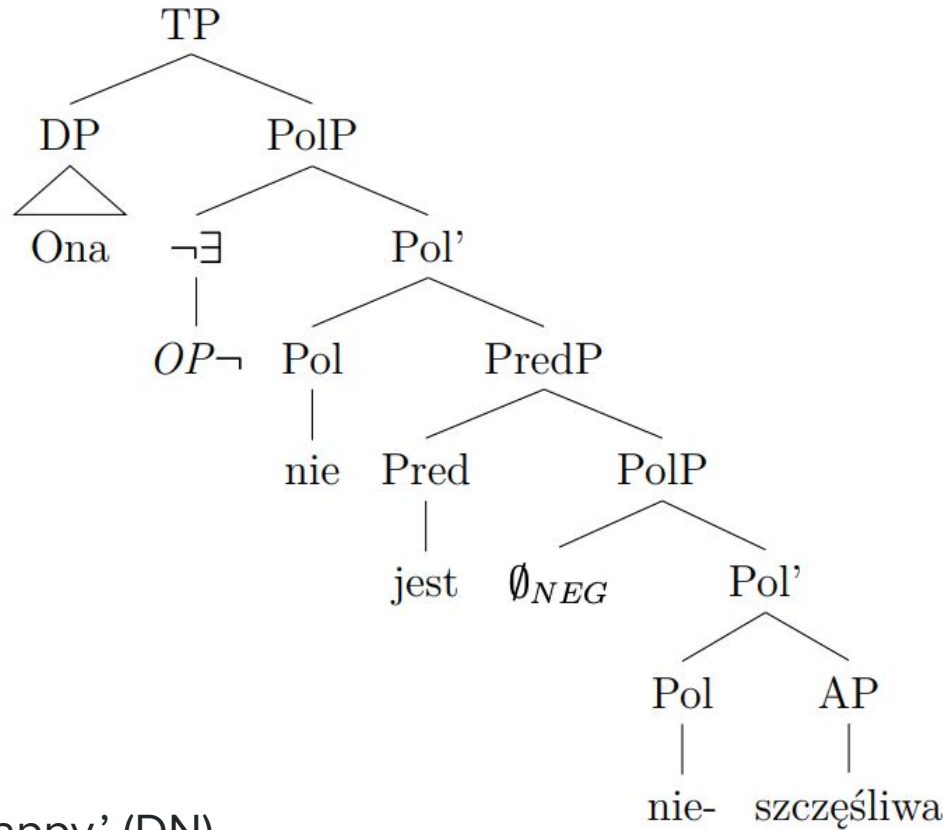
- Loosely adapted from Fitzgibbons (2010)
 - uses agreement and features, but compatible with non-agreement approaches:
NCIs are strong NPIs (Déprez 2016), DNs sensitive to locality conditions (Blanchette 2013)
- Two different licensors
 - *Ne* as a licensor: associated with TP
 - \emptyset_{NEG} as a licensor that can only appear in “TP-less environments”(Fitzgibbons 2010).
- Captures similarity between SCs, PPs, and AdjP DN readings



Small Clauses: Fitzgibbons (2010)

[TP ... [PolP *n-word* Ø_{NEG} [PredP [Pred' t_{NP} Ø_{PRED} [NP/AP...t_{n-word}]]]]]

~~uF_{NEG}~~ iF_{NEG}



Polish: 'She is not unhappy.' (DN)

Review of Analysis Three

PROS

- unifies DN readings across Slavic languages
- treats *ne/nie* the same in all contexts

CONS

- two different abstract operators
- doesn't unify with similarities to other languages such as English

Acknowledgments:

I am grateful to the following native speakers for their judgments:

Valeriia Modina

Russian judgments

Yana Miroshnychenko

Ukrainian judgments

Martin Alldrick

Slovak judgments

Przemysław Megger

Polish judgments

I would like to thank my advisor, **Christina Tortora**, for her support and guidance.



References:

- Blanchette, F. (2013). Negative Concord in English. *Linguistic Variation*, 13(1), 1–47.
- Blanchette, F. (2017). Micro-syntactic variation in American English Negative Concord. *Glossa*, 2(1):65.
- Blanchette, F., Nadeu, M., Yeaton, J., and Déprez, V. (2018). English negative concord and double negation: The division of labor between syntax and pragmatics. In *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America*, volume 3(1):53:1–15.
- de Clercq, K. (2013). *A unified syntax of negation*. PhD thesis, Universiteit Gent, Ghent, Belgium.
- den Dikken, M. (2010). On the functional structure of locative and directional PPs. In Cinque, G. and Rizzi, L., editors, *Mapping Spatial PPs The Cartography of Syntactic Structures, Volume 6*, pages 74–126. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Déprez, V. (2016). What is negative in Haitian Creole? A reply to Homer 2013. Unpublished manuscript.
- Fitzgibbons, N. (2010). Freestanding n-words in Russian: A syntactic account. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics*, 18(1):55–99.
- Giannakidou, A. (2006). N-words and negative concord. In Everaert, M. and van Riemsdijk, H., editors, *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax*, volume 3, pages 327–391. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Koopman, Hilda. (2010). Prepositions, postpositions, circumpositions, and particles: The structure of dutch PPs. In Cinque, G. and Rizzi, L., editors, *Mapping Spatial PPs The Cartography of Syntactic Structures, Volume 6*, pages 26–73. Oxford University Press, New York.
- McMahon, C., Coolidge, M., Kinney, J., and Segall, D. (2021). Not unlike a positive: Flexible negation with negative concord. Unpublished manuscript, Boston University, Boston, MA.
- McMahon, C. and Pember, K. (2022). Rethinking strict negative concord: An investigation into double negation readings in Russian. Unpublished manuscript, Boston University, Boston, MA.

- Tessler, M. H. and Franke, M. (2019). Not unreasonable: Why two negatives don't make a positive. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/tqjr2>.
- Zanuttini, R. (1997). *Negation and clausal structure : A comparative study of Romance languages*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Zeijlstra, H. (2004). Sentential Negation and Negative Concord. PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.
- Zeijlstra, H. (2007). Negation in natural language: On the form and meaning of negative elements. *Language and Linguistics Compass*.
- Zeijlstra, H. (2008). Negative concord is syntactic agreement. Unpublished manuscript, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.
- Zeijlstra, H. (2009). On French negation. In Iksoo Kwon, H. P. and Spence, J., editors, *Proceedings of the 35th annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, page 447–458.