

Analyzing Predicate NCIs in Russian and Polish

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1 Introduction

- Negative Concord (NC): when multiple negative elements appear in one clause but result in a single semantic negation

EXAMPLE OF NC

Russian

- (1) Ona **ne** videla **nikogo**
She **NEG** saw **nobody**
'She saw nobody.' (SN)

- NC appears to challenge *semantic compositionality*
- COMPOSITIONALITY: the meaning of a complex expression is fully determined from its parts
 - Given a NC construction, there are multiple negative elements but they do not all appear to be contributing negation
 - It is unclear how a single negation results given these constructions
 - This motivates various syntactic accounts of NC (as discussed last week)
- Some important terms:
 - Negative Concord Item (NCI):
 - * require negation to license them, similar to NPIs
 - * e.g., Russian *nikto* ('nobody.NOM'), *nichego* ('nothing.GEN'), etc.
 - Negative marker:
 - * device to reverse the truth conditions of an affirmative
 - * e.g., Russian *ne* ('not'), Polish *nie* ('not')

1.1 Strict vs Non-strict NC

- Not all NC languages behave in the same way
- Some linguists propose a division between **strict** and **non-strict** NC languages (Giannakidou, 2006; Zeijlstra, 2007, 2008)
- I maintain this division between strict and non-strict NC in my research
- For this presentation, it is important to note that Slavic languages are considered strict NC

1.1.1 Non-strict NC

- In non-strict NC languages, NCIs need licensing
- Negative markers behave as licensors
- A single negation (SN) reading is available when a negative marker precedes a following negative concord item (NCI)

POST-VERBAL NCI

Spanish

- (2) Greta **no** vio a **nadie**.
 Greta **NEG** saw at **nobody**
 ‘Greta saw nobody.’ (SN)

- However, a different behavior is observed with pre-verbal NCIs
- In non-strict NC languages, when an NCI is pre-verbal, the negative marker is no longer present

PRE-VERBAL NCI

Spanish

- (3) **Nadie** durmió.
Nobody sleep.pst
 ‘Nobody slept.’ (SN)

- If the negative marker is added to a structure as in example (3), the sentence is either ungrammatical or has a DN reading
- Zeijlstra (2008) states that pre-verbal NCIs in Italian are judged ungrammatical with a following negative marker
- However, at least one native Spanish speaker reported to me that example (4) has a DN reading for her

Spanish

- (4) %**Nadie no** durmió.
Nobody NEG sleep.pst
 ‘Nobody didn’t sleep.’ (DN)

- Post-verbal NCIs make clear that NCIs require licensing by something higher in the syntactic structure
 - Zeijlstra (2007) analyzes negative markers in non-strict NC languages as semantically interpretably negative [iNEG]
 - NCIs on this analysis are semantically uninterpretablely negative [uNEG]
 - With post-verbal NCIs, the negative marker is able to license them

- The behavior of pre-verbal NCIs makes clear that negative markers can introduce a second negation
- This behavior supports the proposal that negative markers are semantically negative in non-strict NC languages
- However, pre-verbal NCIs still need licensing
 - One analysis: Zeijlstra proposes an abstract negative operator (NEG_{iNEG})
 - The abstract negative operator is deployed due to grammatical necessity
- Non-strict NC can be syntactically represented as follows under such an analysis:

POST-VERBAL NCI

- (5) Greta **no**_[iNEG] vió a **nadie**_[uNEG].
 Greta **NEG** saw at **nobody**
 ‘Greta saw nobody.’ (SN)

PRE-VERBAL NCI

- (6) <**NEG**_[iNEG]> **Nadie**_[uNEG] durmió.
 Nobody slept
 ‘Nobody slept.’ (SN)

- Non-strict NC has two mechanisms to introduce semantic negation: the negative marker itself and the abstract negative operator

1.1.2 Strict NC

- In strict NC languages, NCIs once again need licensing
- Negative markers are obligatory but under some analyses, they also need licensing
- With regard to post-verbal NCIs, strict NC languages behave like non-strict NC languages

Russian

- (7) Ona **ne** videla **nikogo**.
 She **NEG** saw **nobody**
 ‘She saw nobody.’ (SN)

- In contrast to non-strict NC languages, strict NC languages always require the negative marker—even when an NCI is in a pre-verbal position

Russian

- (8) **Nikto** **ne** spal.
Nobody **NEG** sleep.pst.m
 ‘Nobody slept.’ (SN)

- In Russian, the word order with the pre-verbal NCI is often preferred

Russian

- (9) Ya **nichego ne** delaju.
 I **nothing NEG** do
 ‘I don’t do anything.’ (SN)

- The lack of a subject/object asymmetry in strict NC motivates an analysis where both the negative marker and NCIs are not semantically interpretable negative (both have [uNEG] features)
- Instead, negation is introduced only with the abstract negative operator
- For Zeijlstra (2007), the status of the negative marker is the crucial difference between strict and non-strict NC
- An analysis of strict NC along these lines can be syntactically represented as follows:

POST-VERBAL NCI

- (10) <NEG_[iNEG]> Ona **ne**_[uNEG] videla **nikogo**_[uNEG].
 She NEG saw nobody
 ‘She saw nobody.’ (SN)

PRE-VERBAL NCI

- (11) <NEG_[iNEG]> **Nikto**_[uNEG] **ne**_[uNEG] spal.
 Nobody NEG slept.
 ‘Nobody slept.’ (SN)

- Following this analysis, in strict NC languages, double negation (DN) readings are predicted to not exist in a single clause

1.1.3 Negative Markers in Russian

- The morphological composition of Russian negative markers and NCIs is also relevant to the prediction that DN readings should not exist in a single clause
- NCIs in Russian are decomposable into *ne*, the scalar particle *i* (even), and a wh-stem (Haspelmath, 1997; Watanabe, 2004)

- (12) n- i- kto
 NEG even who
 ‘nobody/anybody’

- If *ne* is not interpretable semantically negative, and negation is always introduced with *ne*, DNs cannot be accounted for within a single clause in Russian
- This morphological decomposition of NCIs is common and may extend to other languages (Lahiri, 1998)

1.2 Summary of Predictions

- Non-strict NC languages may have either a SN or a DN reading given a single clause
 - Effects of word order
- Predictions I am concerned with:
 - PREDICTION ONE: All negative elements in strict NC languages require licensing
 - PREDICTION TWO: Strict NC languages should not have DN readings given one CP-layer

2 Double Negation Readings in Slavic Languages

- PREDICTION TWO is not borne out
- DN readings are available in strict NC languages
- However, DN readings are highly constrained in where they can appear
- One account of DN readings in Russian is provided in Fitzgibbons (2010)

2.1 Fitzgibbons (2010)

- Fitzgibbons (2010) discusses negative elements in Russian that appear to be self-licensing (appear to violate PREDICTION ONE)
- She calls these elements *freestanding*
- Instead of analyzing them as self-licensing, she proposes that freestanding NCIs are licensed by an abstract negative operator (maintaining PREDICTION ONE)
- When a negative marker appears with these freestanding NCIs, DN readings are available

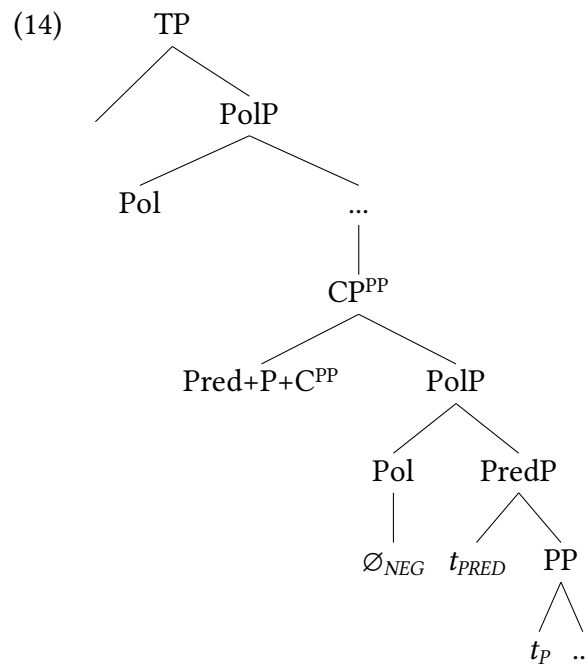
2.1.1 Prepositional Phrases

- Fitzgibbons (2010) observes that certain prepositional phrases containing NCIs in Russian can appear without a negative marker
- If a negative marker is added given a freestanding NCI in a PP, a DN reading is available (contra PREDICTION TWO)

RUSSIAN

- (13) Krupnye predprijatija **ne** pojavljajutsja **iz niotkuda**.
 Large factories NEG appear **from nowhere**
 ‘Large factories don’t come from nowhere.’ (DN)
 Fitzgibbons (2010)

- Fitzgibbons (2010) proposes that PPs have a CP^{PP} layer in their extended projection
- This CP^{PP} layer results in intervention effects
- The NCI in the PP is licensed by an abstract negative operator: \emptyset_{NEG}
 - Fitzgibbons (2010) proposes that \emptyset_{NEG} is available in TP-less environments



(Fitzgibbons, 2010)

2.1.2 Small Clauses

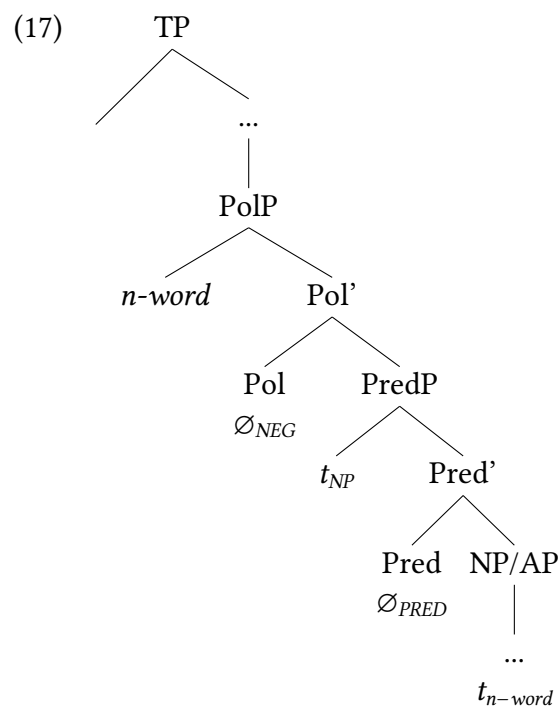
- Fitzgibbons (2010) further observes that NCIs in small clauses (SCs) can also be freestanding
- When a negative marker is added in the matrix clause, Fitzgibbons (2010) reports that the sentence is ambiguous between a DN and an SN reading
 - However, at least one native speaker reports only getting the DN reading for such a structure
 - Crucially, the DN reading is available (contra PREDICTION TWO)

RUSSIAN

- (15) Vanya schital Iru **nikem**.
 Vanya consider.PST.M Ira.ACC **a-nobody.INS**
 ‘Vanya considered Ira a nobody.’ (SN)

- (16) Vanya **ne** schital Iru **nikem**.
 Vanya **NEG** consider.PST.M Ira.ACC **a-nobody.INS**
 ‘Vanya did not consider Ira a nobody.’ (DN)
 Fitzgibbons (2010)

- \emptyset_{NEG} once again can license freestanding NCIs in small clauses
 - \emptyset_{NEG} is available in TP-less environments
 - small clauses do not contain a TP layer
 - Fitzgibbons (2010) proposes that \emptyset_{NEG} has an interpretable negative feature that allows it to license NCIs with uninterpretable negative features
- Fitzgibbons (2010) models freestanding NCIs in small clauses as follows



(Fitzgibbons, 2010)

3 Interim Summary

- PREDICTION ONE appears to be violated in some cases, but can be maintained if freestanding NCIs are still licensed
- PREDICTION TWO cannot fully be maintained
 - There are some cases of DN readings in strict NC grammars
- Fitzgibbons (2010) proposes two contexts where DN readings are available in Slavic languages: with certain PPs and with SCs

- I will focus on the claim about SCs
- I will present data from Russian and Polish to demonstrate that this is not about SCs, but about predicates more generally

4 Predicates Are Freestanding

- Fitzgibbons (2010) places \emptyset_{NEG} scoping over the entire SC
- This syntactic position predicts that there should be no asymmetry with the behavior of subjects and predicates of SCs regarding NC
- Fitzgibbons (2010) argues that NCIs are licensed by movement to the specifier position of PolP
 - both subjects and predicates should be candidates to function as freestanding NCIs, since either could move to this position
- However, there is in fact an asymmetry in the behavior of subject and predicate NCIs of SCs in Russian and Polish
- Predicate NCIs are freestanding
 - When a negative marker is added in the matrix clause, a DN reading is available
- In contrast, subject NCIs of SCs cannot be freestanding
 - Instead, they participate in NC in the typical way
 - NCIs as subjects of SCs enter into concord with a negative marker in the matrix clause
 - They lead to single negation readings

PREDICATE NCI
Russian

- (18) Vanya schital Iru **nikem**.
Vanya consider.PST Ira.ACC **a-nobody**.INS
'Vanya did not consider Ira a nobody.' (SN)
Fitzgibbons (2010)

PREDICATE NCI WITH NEG IN MATRIX CLAUSE
Russian

- (19) Vanya **ne** schital Iru **nikem**.
Vanya **NEG** consider.PST Ira.ACC **a-nobody**.INS
'Vanya did not consider Ira a nobody.' (DN)
Fitzgibbons (2010)

SUBJECT NCI

Russian

- (20) Vanya **ne** schital **nikogo** velikim.
 Vanya **NEG** consider.PST **nobody.GEN** great
 ‘Vanya did not consider anyone great.’ (SN)

PREDICATE NCI

Polish

- (21) Maria **nie** uważa go za **nikogo**.
 Mary **NEG** consider him.ACC as **nobody.GEN**
 ‘Mary doesn’t consider him a nobody.’ (DN)

SUBJECT NCI

Polish

- (22) Maria **nie** uważa **nikogo** za wspaniałego.
 Mary **NEG** consider **nobody.GEN** as great
 ‘Mary doesn’t consider anybody great.’ (SN)

SUBJECT AND PREDICATE NCI

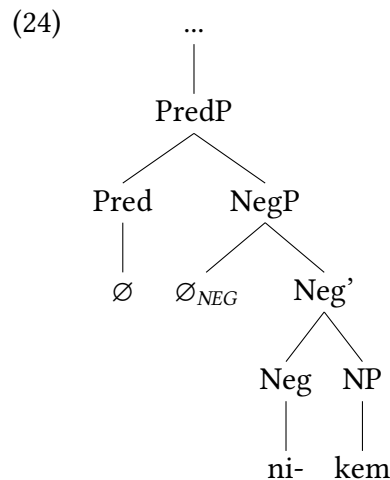
Polish

- (23) Maria **nie** uważa **nikogo** za **nikogo**.
 Mary **NEG** consider **nobody.GEN** as **nobody.GEN**
 ‘Mary doesn’t consider anybody nobody.’ (DN)

- This data demonstrates that the placement of \emptyset_{NEG} in previous work is too high with respect to the SC
- \emptyset_{NEG} crucially should not scope over subjects of SCs to account for the asymmetry between subjects and predicates of SCs

5 Discussion

- I propose that Pred can take NegP as a complement
 - \emptyset_{NEG} is able to appear in a specifier position of NegP
- This placement of \emptyset_{NEG} as syntactically lower than PredP captures the asymmetry between subject and predicate NCIs of SCs
 - \emptyset_{NEG} now only scopes over the predicate of the SC



- I suggest that Fitzgibbons (2010) is incorrect to attribute this freestanding behavior of predicate NCIs to SC environments
- Instead, I propose that this behavior arises from the predicate itself (PredP)
- DN readings appear with predicates outside SCs as well
- \emptyset_{NEG} being associated with PredP more generally unifies the behavior of predicates of SCs with other predicate NCIs

Russian

(25) Vanya byl **nikem**.
 Vanya be.PST a-nobody.INS
 ‘Vanya was nobody.’ (SN)

Russian

(26) Vanya **ne** byl **nikem**.
 Vanya NEG be.PST a-nobody.INS
 ‘Vanya was not nobody.’ (DN)

- Additionally, placing NegP syntactically lower than PredP more accurately accounts for word order across Slavic languages
 - While the predicate relator is null in Russian, it is pronounced in other Slavic languages
 - My proposal has the correct word order for these cases and can account for the behavior of predicate NCIs across Slavic languages¹
- If predicate NCIs in general are freestanding, it may be possible to unify two contexts discussed in McMahon (2024): SCs and Constituent Negation (CN) contexts
- McMahon (2024) discusses both contexts that allow for DN readings in Russian presented in Fitzgibbons (2010)
 - I demonstrate that a third context allows for DN readings across Slavic languages
 - *un-* prefixes in Slavic languages are frequently homophonous with the negative marker, suggesting they are the same negative element bearing a [uNEG] feature

¹I have considered data from Russian and Polish, but I predict that this behavior will generalize across strict NC languages.

- However, they result in DN readings with another negative marker

Russian

- | | |
|---|---|
| (27) Ona ne ne -shastna
She NEG NEG -happy
'She is not unhappy.' (DN) | (28) Ona ne ne -zrelaya
She NEG NEG -mature
'She is not immature.' (DN) |
|---|---|

Ukrainian

- | | |
|---|--|
| (29) Vona ne ye ne -shasna
She NEG is NEG -happy
'She is not unhappy.' (DN) | (30) Vona ne ye ne -zriloju
She NEG is NEG -mature
'She is not immature.' (DN) |
|---|--|

Slovak

- | | |
|---|---|
| (31) Ona nie je ne -šťastná.
She NEG is NEG -happy
'She is not unhappy.' (DN) | (32) Ona nie je ne -vyspelá.
She NEG is NEG -mature
'She is not immature.' (DN) |
|---|---|

Polish

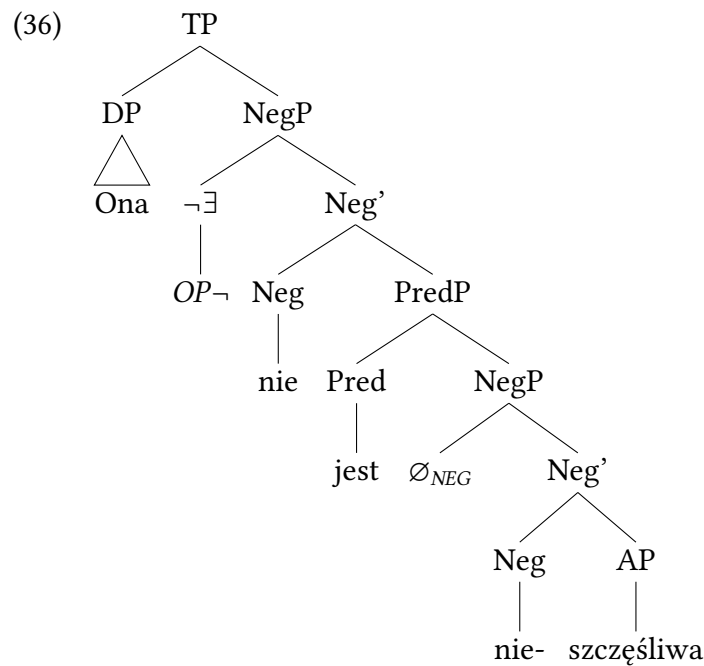
- | | |
|---|---|
| (33) Ona nie jest nie -szczęśliwa.
She NEG is NEG -happy
'She is not unhappy.' (DN) | (34) Ona nie jest nie -dojrzała.
She NEG is NEG -mature
'She is not immature.' (DN) |
|---|---|

Serbian

- (35) Marija **ni-je ne**-srećna.
Mary **NEG-is NEG**-happy
'Mary is not unhappy.' (DN)

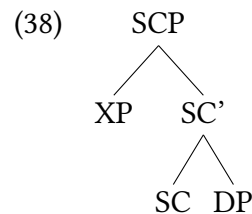
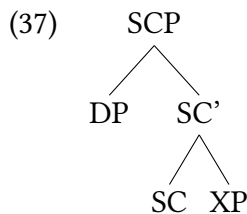
- Both SCs and CNs:

- involve PredP
- It may suffice to say that DN readings result from predicates and certain prepositional phrases in Slavic languages



‘She is not unhappy’ (Polish)
(McMahon, 2024)

- Alternatively, if only predicative ‘nobody’ is freestanding, perhaps this anomalous behavior is due to this single lexical item
- This potentially has consequences for predication more generally
 - den Dikken (2006) claims that predication is non-directional
 - * proposes structures for SCs where the subject is higher than the predicate, or the predicate is higher than the subject
 - * states that this should not matter



Two structures from den Dikken (2006)

- The asymmetry between subject and predicate NCIs in SCs in Slavic languages suggests that there could be consequences for the relationship between predicates and subjects
- Although I think both structures proposed in den Dikken (2006) could be used, they may require extra syntactic assumptions to work

6 Conclusion

- In strict NC languages, NC typically occurs given any number of negative elements and one CP-layer
- However, some contexts behave anomalously
 - freestanding NCIs
 - DN readings sometimes available
- Contra Fitzgibbons (2010), I demonstrate that predicates behave anomalously (not SCs)
- I propose an abstract negative operator that appears as the complement to Pred
- This placement of the abstract negative operator explains the asymmetry between subject and predicate NCIs of SCs
- This abstract negative operator, associated with PredP, also explains other freestanding predicates (in contrast to typical strict NC behavior)

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