

A Unified Syntactic Analysis of Double Negation in Slavic Languages

Clara McMahon (CUNY Graduate Center)

Presented at the Chicago Linguistic Society (CLS)

27 April 2024

Overview

- Defining Negative Concord
 - Strict vs. Non-strict NC
- Double Negation (DN) Readings in Slavic Languages
- A Unified Syntactic Analysis of Double Negation in Slavic Languages

Defining Negative Concord

Defining Negative Concord

Russian

1. Ya **ne** delaju **nichego**.
I NEG do nothing
'I'm not doing anything.' (SN)

Strict vs. Non-Strict Negative Concord

STRICT NC

Russian

POST-VERBAL NCI

2. Ona **ne** videla **nikogo**.

She NEG saw nobody

‘She saw nobody.’ (SN)

PRE-VERBAL NCI

3. **Nikto** **ne** spal.

Nobody NEG sleep.pst.m

‘Nobody slept.’ (SN)

NON-STRICT NC

Spanish

POST-VERBAL NCI

4. Greta **no** vio a **nadie**.

Greta NEG saw at nobody

‘Greta saw nobody.’ (SN)

PRE-VERBAL NCI

5. **Nadie** durmió.

Nobody sleep.pst

‘Nobody slept.’ (SN)

Strict Negative Concord

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

Russian

6. Ya **nichego ne** delaju.

I nothing NEG do

'I am not doing anything.' (SN)

Strict NC has a lack of a subject/object asymmetry

A Syntactic Analysis of Strict NC

Zeijlstra (2004, 2007) analyzes the negative marker and negative concord items in strict negative concord languages as not semantically negative

Instead, negation is introduced with an abstract negative operator

A Syntactic Analysis of Strict Negative Concord

POST-VERBAL NCI

Russian

7. $\langle \text{Op}^{-1}_{[\text{iNEG}]} \rangle$ Ona **ne**_[uNEG] videla **nikogo**_[uNEG].
She NEG saw nobody
'She saw nobody.' (SN)

PRE-VERBAL NCI

Russian

8. $\langle \text{Op}^{-1}_{[\text{iNEG}]} \rangle$ **Nikto**_[uNEG] **ne**_[uNEG] spal.
Nobody NEG slept.
'Nobody slept.' (SN)

Negative Concord Items (NCIs) in Russian

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

9. n-i-kto
NEG-even-who
'nobody/anybody'

PREDICTION: No DN readings should be available given multiple negative elements in a single clause in Slavic languages (strict NC), given current syntactic analyses

Double Negation Readings in Slavic Languages

PROBLEM: DN readings are rare but available in Slavic languages. I propose that there are three contexts where DN readings are available in these languages.

Context 1: Small Clauses (SCs)

Russian

10. Vanya **ne** schital Iru **nikem**.
Vanya NEG consider.pst Ira.acc a-nobody
'Vanya did not consider Ira a nobody.' (DN)

example from Fitzgibbons (2010)

Serbian

11. Marija ga **ne** posmatra kao **nikoga**.
Mary him.cl NEG observe as nobody
'Mary doesn't see him as a nobody.' (DN)

Context 2: Prepositional Phrases (PPs)

Russian

12. Krupnye predprijatija **ne** pojavljajutsja
Large factories NEG appear
iz **niotkuda**.
from nowhere
'Large factories don't come from nowhere.' (DN)
example from Fitzgibbons (2010)

Ukrainian

13. Yiyi **ne** karali **ne za shcho**.
She.acc NEG punish.pst.pl for nothing
'She wasn't punished for nothing.' (DN)

Polish

14. Duże fabryki **nie** biorą się **z-nikąd**.
Large factories NEG take REFL from-nowhere
'Large factories don't come from nowhere.' (DN)

Serbian

15. Marija **nije** platila 1000 dolara **ni za šta**.
Mary NEG.is paid 1000 dollars for nothing
'Mary didn't pay \$1000 for nothing.' (DN)

Freestanding neg-words

Russian

16. Vanya schital Iru **nikem.**
Vanya consider.pst Ira.acc a-nobody
'Vanya considered Ira a nobody.' (SN)

Polish

17. Duże fabryki biorą się **z-nikąd.**
Large factories take REFL from-nowhere
'Large factories come from nowhere.' (SN)

Context 3: Constituent Negation

Russian

18. Ona **ne neshastna**.
She NEG NEG.happy
'She is not unhappy.' (DN)

Ukrainian

19. Vona **ne ye neshchasna**.
She NEG is NEG.happy
'She is not unhappy.' (DN)

Slovak

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

Polish

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

Serbian

22. Marija **nije nesrečna**.
Mary NEG.is NEG.happy
'Mary is not unhappy.' (DN)

GENERALIZATION: DN readings appear in Slavic languages with negative elements that appear in TP-less environments

GOAL: Create a unified analysis for DN readings in Slavic languages that treats *ne/nie* the same across contexts and accounts for this generalization

A Unified Analysis of Double Negation in Slavic Languages

Proposal

I propose two separate abstract negative operators that are employed when grammatically necessary to account for DN readings in all three contexts

Negative operator one: **Op \neg**

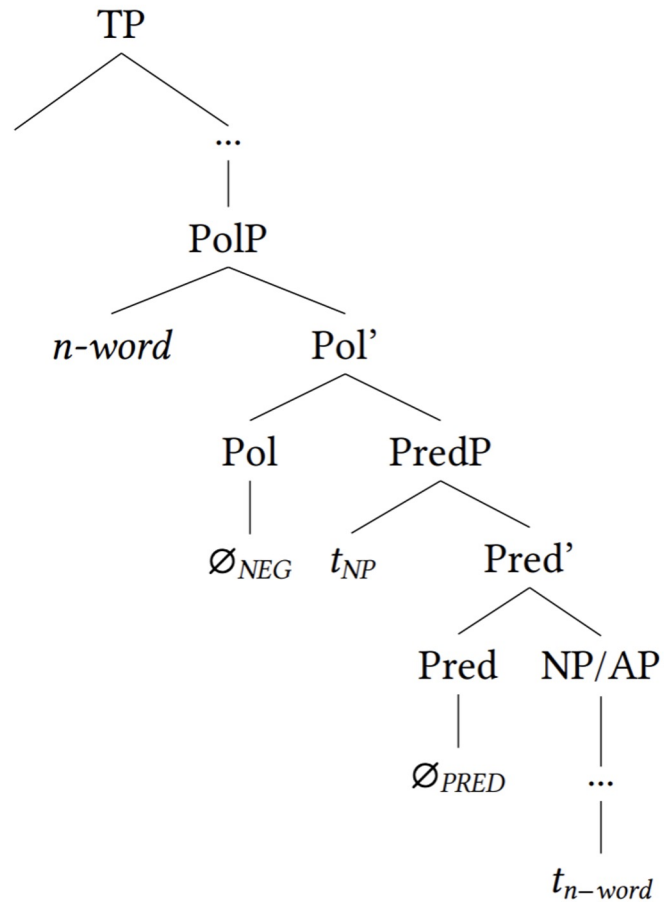
adopted from Zeijlstra (2004, 2007)

associated with TP

Negative operator two: **\emptyset _{NEG}**

adopted from Fitzgibbons (2010)

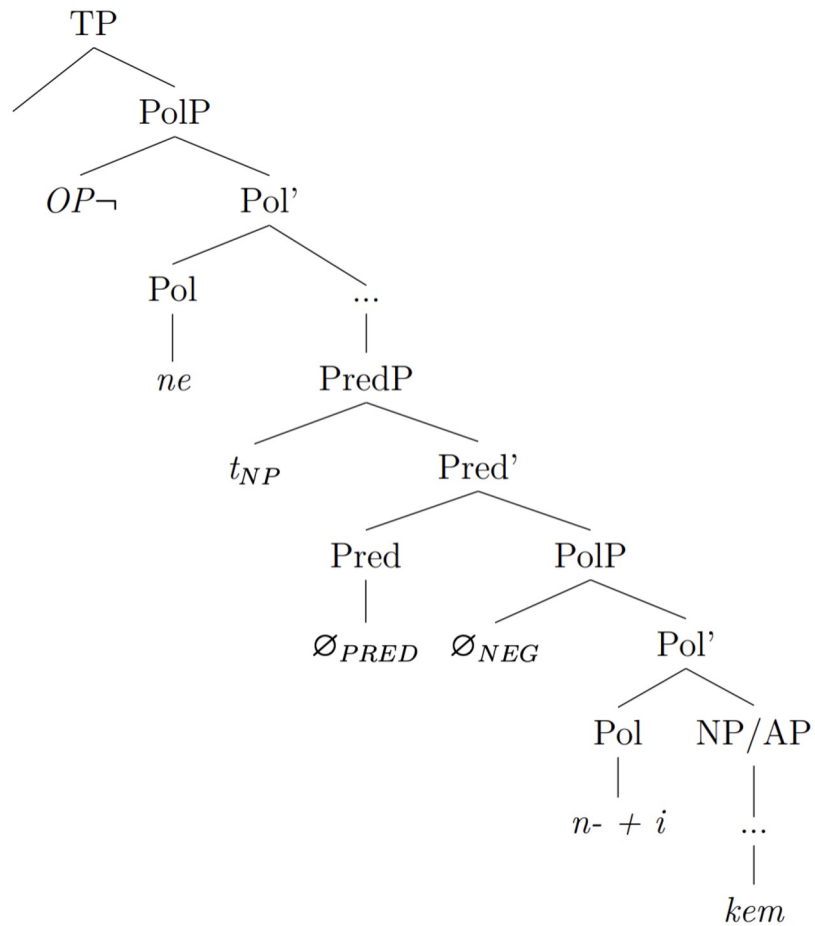
associated with TP-less environments



Fitzgibbons (2010)

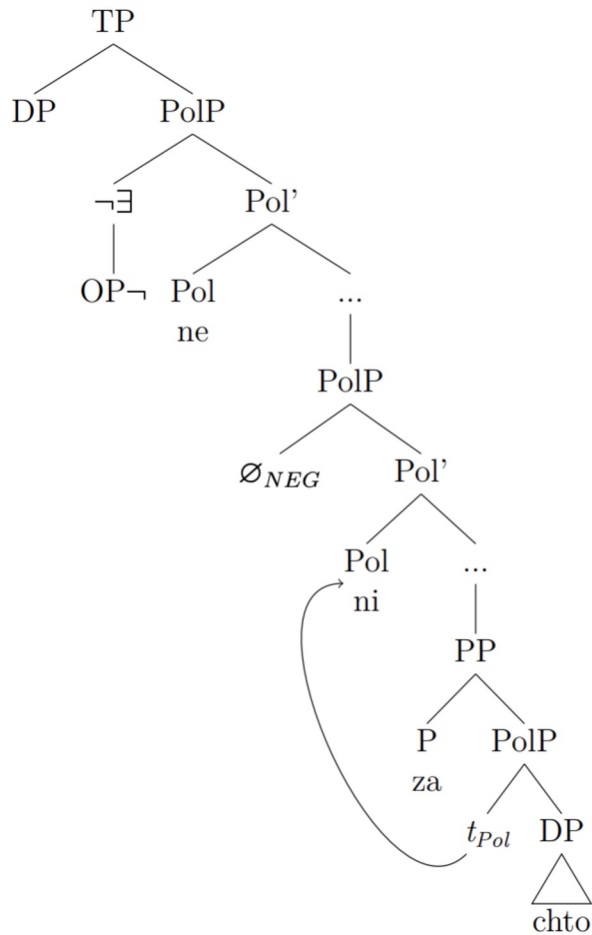
Russian: ‘not...a nobody’(DN)

Context 1: Small Clauses (SCs)



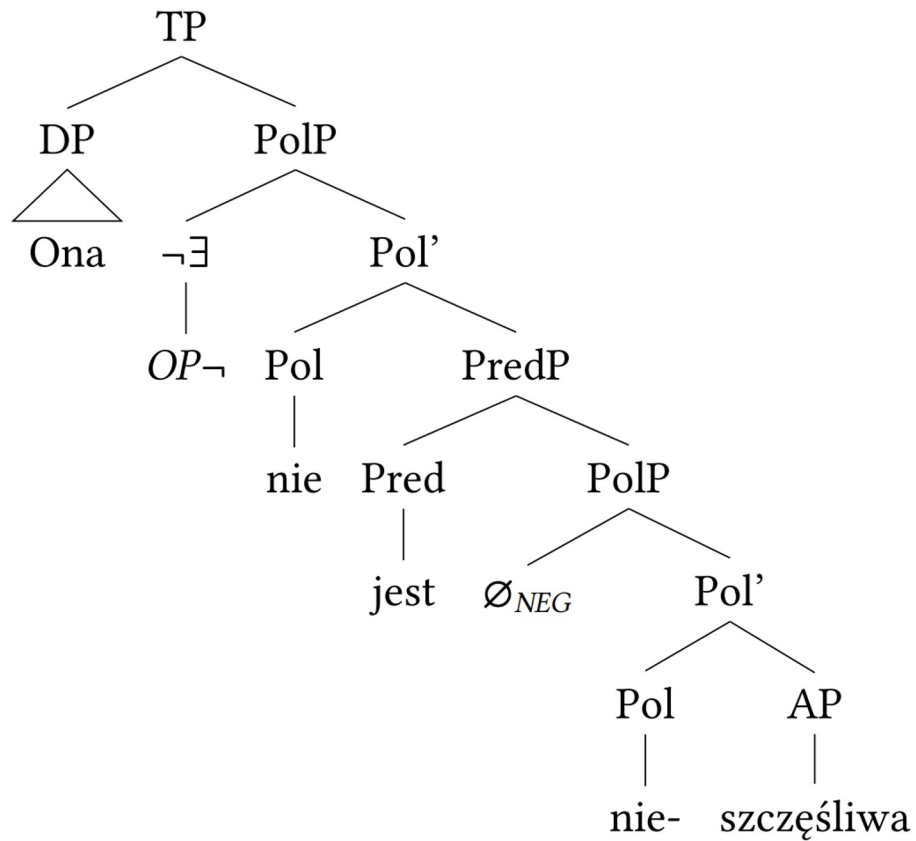
Russian: 'not...a nobody' (DN)

Context 1: Small Clauses (SCs)



Russian: '...not...for nothing' (DN)

Context 2: Prepositional Phrases (PPs)



Polish: 'She is not unhappy' (DN)

Context 3: Constituent Negation (CN)

Negated Adjectives License NCIs in Russian

Russian

23. **Nikomu** **ne** nužn-yj
nobody.DAT NEG necessary.M.SG
'not necessary to anyone' (SN)

example from Letuchiy (2017)

Russian

24. %**Ni s** **kem** **ne** vežliv-yj
NEG with whom NEG polite.M.SG
'not polite with anyone' (SN)

Conclusion

DN readings are available in restricted contexts in Slavic languages

DN readings are available when TP and another TP-less environment both contain a negative element

Using two abstract negative operators (Op_{\neg} , \emptyset_{NEG}), the distribution of DN readings in Slavic languages can be accounted for

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the following native speakers for their help with this project:

Valeriia Modina, Anastasiia

Voznesenskaia, and Daria Izmalkova

Russian judgments

Yana Miroschnychenko

Ukrainian judgments

Martin Alldrick

Slovak judgments

Przemysław Megger and Tomasz

Zyglewicz

Polish judgments

Maša Bešlin

Serbian judgments

I am also grateful to the audience at Syntax near NYU (SynNYU) and to the Yale Syntax Reading Group (Yale SynRG), whose feedback greatly benefited this work.

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



References:

- Bešlin, M. (2023). Domain mismatches in syntax and morphophonology: Consequences for phase theory. *Syntax near NYU (SynNYU)*, New York University, New York, NY, United States.
- Biberauer, T., & Zeijlstra, H. (2012). Negative concord in Afrikaans: Filling a typological gap. *Journal of Semantics*, 29(3), 345–371.
- Blanchette, F., Nadeu, M., Yeaton, J., & Déprez, V. (2018). English negative concord and double negation: The division of labor between syntax and pragmatics. *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America*, 3(1), 1–15.
- 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.
- Boškovič, Ž. (2004). Object shift and the clause/pp parallelism hypothesis. In B. Schmeiser, V. Chand, A. Kelleher, & A. Rodriguez (Eds.), *WCCFL 23 Proceedings* (pp. 101–114). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.
- den Dikken, M. (2010). On the functional structure of locative and directional PPs. In G. Cinque & L. Rizzi (Eds.), *Mapping spatial PPs: The cartography of syntactic structures* (pp. 74–126, Vol. 6). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Déprez, V. (2016). What is negative in Haitian Creole? A reply to Homer 2013. [Unpublished manuscript, Rutgers University].
- Fitzgibbons, N. (2010). Freestanding n-words in Russian: A syntactic account. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics*, 18(1), 55–99.
- Frege, G. (1919). Negation. In M. Beaney (Ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Giannakidou, A. (2006). N-words and negative concord. In M. Everaert & H. van Riemsdijk (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax* (pp. 327–391, Vol. 3). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Haspelmath, M. (1997). *Indefinite pronouns*. Oxford University Press.

- Hintikka, J. (1968). Epistemic logic and the methods of philosophical analysis. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 46(1), 37–51.
- Horn, L. R. (1989). A natural history of negation. Center for the Study of Language and Information (CSLI) Publications. Horn, L. R. (1991). Duplex negatio affirmat...: The economy of double negation. *Chicago Linguistic Society*, 27(2), 80–106.
- Horn, L. R. (1993). Economy and redundancy in a dualistic model of natural language. *SKY–Yearbook of the Linguistic Association of Finland*.
- Jespersen, O. (1924). *The philosophy of grammar*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Kohut, A., & McMahon, C. (2023a). Disambiguating double and single negation readings in Russian. 18th Annual Meeting of the Slavic Linguistics Society (SLS-18), Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia.
- Kohut, A., & McMahon, C. (2023b). Double negation in Russian: Variation in the functional structure of PPs. *New Ways of Analyzing Variation 51 (NWAV 51)*, Queens College, New York, NY, United States.
- Krifka, M. (2007). Negated antonyms: Creating and filling the gap. In U. Sauerland & P. Stateva (Eds.), *Presupposition and implicature in compositional semantics* (pp. 163–177). Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Letuchiy, A. (2017). Non-standard negative concord in Russian. Talk presented at Formal Approaches to Slavic Linguistics (FASL).
- McMahon, C. (2023). Not unavailable: Toward a complete analysis of double negation readings in Slavic languages. *Syntax near NYU (SynNYU)*, New York University, New York, NY, United States.
- McMahon, C. (2024). Double Negation in Strict Negative Concord Languages: Analyzing constituent negation. *Yale Syntax Reading Group (Yale SynRG)*, Yale University, New Haven, CT, United States.
- McMahon, C., Coolidge, M., Kinney, J., & Segall, D. (2021). Not unlike a positive: Flexible negation with negative concord [Unpublished manuscript, Boston University].

- McMahon, C., & Pember, K. (2022). Rethinking strict negative concord [Unpublished manuscript, Boston University].
- Rozhnova, M. A. (2009). Sintaksičeskie svojstva otricateľ'nyx mestoimenij v russkom i ispanskom jazykax [Bachelor degree thesis. Moscow: Russian State University for Humanities].
- Svenonius, P. (2004). Slavic prefixes inside and outside VP. *Nordlyd: Special Issue on Slavic Prefixes*, 32(2), 205–253.
- Tessler, M. H., & Franke, M. (2019). Not unreasonable: Why two negatives don't make a positive. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/tqjr2>
- Watanabe, A. (2004). The genesis of negative concord: Syntax and morphology of negative doubling. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 35, 559–612.
- 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 [Doctoral dissertation, University of Amsterdam].
- Zeijlstra, H. (2007). Negation in natural language: On the form and meaning of negative elements. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 1(5), 498–518.
- Zeijlstra, H. (2008). Negative concord is syntactic agreement [Unpublished manuscript, University of Amsterdam].
- Zeijlstra, H. (2009). On French Negation. In I. Kwon, H. Pritchett, & J. Spence (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 35th annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (pp. 447–458).