

Double Negation in Strict Negative Concord Languages: Analyzing constituent negation

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1 Introduction

- **Negative concord** (NC) is when multiple negative elements occur in the same clause but result in one semantic negation

Russian

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

- NC appears to challenge compositional approaches to semantics
- Consequently, syntactic approaches to NC are used
- Within strict NC languages, such as Slavic languages, leading accounts predict double negation (DN) readings to not exist given a single clause
- However, DN readings are found on rare occasions in these languages
- **My proposal:** Using data from five Slavic languages, I propose a unified analysis for DN readings within strict NC languages
- Crucially, my analysis will include DNs available with constituent negation, which are rarely (if ever) discussed in syntactic analyses of NC

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
- In this presentation, I will focus on strict NC languages; Slavic languages are considered strict NC

1.1.1 Non-strict NC

- In non-strict NC languages, 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)

- Zeijlstra (2007) analyzes negative markers in non-strict NC languages as semantically interpretably negative
- NCIs on this analysis are semantically uninterpretablely negative
- With post-verbal NCIs, the negative marker is able to license them
- With pre-verbal NCIs, an abstract negative operator (NEG_{INEG}) will be 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] vio 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)

1.1.2 Strict NC

- 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 interpretably negative
- 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
- A unified analysis of *ne* is desirable because it appears to be the same lexical item across the board

2 Defining Double Negation (DN) Readings

2.1 DN in Logic

- Classical Fregean logic has one negative operator: a propositional operator that forms contradictories (Frege, 1919)
- Contradictory: when one is true, the other must be false (and vice versa)
- Contrary: can both be false, but cannot both be true
- Under this view, $\neg\neg p \equiv p$
- Frege (1919) states that double negation is logically superfluous

2.2 DN Readings in Natural Language

- In natural language, DN readings do not behave like in classical logic¹
- It has been observed by a number of linguists that DNs are not equivalent to positives in natural language
- Jespersen (1924) states that DNs have interpretations like **weak positives**

(13) "I am **not ignorant** of this."
 $\leadsto$ I am to some extent aware of it
 Jespersen (1924)

- Horn (1991, 1993) observes a number of different interpretations that DNs can have
- In addition to the weak positive interpretation, DNs can also have a regular positive reading in denial contexts

(14) "Now if I look unhappy, I apologize. But **I'm not unhappy**."
 Krifka (2007)

- Added context shows how this example can mean the same thing as a regular positive

(15) "Now if I look unhappy, I apologize. But **I'm not unhappy**. I'm happy, in fact."

- Krifka (2007) analyzes pairs like *happy/unhappy* as contradictories
 - He accounts for the differences in interpretations of DNs from regular positives through pragmatic strengthening
 - Pairs like *happy/unhappy* are strengthened locally when in a DN
 - The adj/un-adj pair then receives an interpretation as contraries
- Tessler & Franke (2019) use experimental methods to analyze adj/un-adj pairs
 - They find that negation markers can have flexible meanings; double negation in particular is interpreted in "subtle ways" (Tessler & Franke, 2019)
- Discussion of the interpretation of DNs has largely centered on adj/un-adj pairs
- To my judgment, other types of DNs behave in similar ways

¹This fact is observed by logicians as well. Hintikka (1968) writes, "Surely in ordinary language a doubly negated expression very seldom, if ever, has the same logical powers as the original unnegated statement...[I]f the basic meaning is assumed to be tantamount to that of the original unnegated expression we can explain the residual meanings which a doubly negated expression has on different occasions. Hence the basic meaning of a doubly negated expression can perfectly well be assumed to be the same as that of the original unnegated expression."

Weak Positive:

- (16) "I **didn't do NOTHING today**. I wrote a few sentences for my essay."

Regular Positive:

- (17) "My friend thinks I did nothing today, but this isn't true. **I DIDN'T do nothing**. I wrote an entire essay."

- To my judgment, specific prosody is required for both the weak positive and regular positive interpretation of the DN
- Prosody is likely important when analyzing DNs in general
- However, prosody is particularly understudied in Slavic languages
- Consequently, the issue of prosody will be left to further research

2.3 DN Readings in Slavic Languages

- DN readings are rare but available in Slavic languages
- I propose that there are three main contexts where DN readings are available in Slavic languages:

(i) Small Clauses (SCs)

(ii) Prepositional Phrases (PPs)

(iii) Constituent Negation (CN)

2.3.1 Small Clauses

- Fitzgibbons (2010) observes that DN readings are available with certain small clauses in Russian
- She reports that these cases are ambiguous between an SN and a DN
- I was able to check that a similar DN is available in Serbian

Russian

- (18) Vanya **ne** schital Iru **nikem**.
 Vanya **NEG** consider.pst Ira.acc **a-nobody**
 'Vanya did not consider Ira a nobody.' (DN)
 Fitzgibbons (2010)

Serbian

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

2.3.2 Prepositional Phrases

- Fitzgibbons (2010) and McMahon & Pember (2022) observe that certain PPs allow for DN readings in Russian
- I have checked with native speakers to find these DN readings in other Slavic languages as well

Russian

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

Russian²

- (21) 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)
 McMahon & Pember (2022)

Ukrainian

- (22) Vin **ne** viddav svoje zhittya **ni za shcho**.
 He NEG give.pst his life **for nothing**
 ‘He didn’t give up his life for nothing.’ (DN)

Ukrainian

- (23) Yiyi **ne** karali **ne za shcho**.
 She.acc NEG punish.pst.pl **for nothing**
 ‘She wasn’t punished for nothing.’ (DN)

Polish

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

²McMahon & Pember (2022) report that example (21) is ambiguous between a double negation reading with narrow focus and single negation reading with broad focus. Importantly, the double negation reading is salient; any available double negation reading poses a challenge for current analyses of strict NC. I leave open the question of how to analyze ambiguity in examples such as (21).

Polish³

- (27) **Nie** zapłaciłem 1000\$ **za nic**.
 NEG paid.1sg \$1000 **for nothing**
 ‘I didn’t pay \$1000 for nothing.’ (DN)

Serbian

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

Serbian

- (29) Marija **nije** napravila salatu **ni od čega**.
 Mary NEG-is made salad **from nothing**
 ‘Mary didn’t make a salad from nothing.’ (DN)

2.3.3 Constituent Negation

- I propose that a third context should be included when analyzing DN readings in Slavic languages
- When a negative marker is combined with constituent negation, a DN with a weak positive interpretation is available
- *Un-* prefixes in Slavic languages are frequently homophonous with the negative marker, suggesting that these may be the same negative item
- When the *un-* prefix (*ne* or Polish *nie*) occurs with a preceding negative marker, DN readings are obligatory

Russian

- (30) Ona **ne** neshastna.
 She NEG NEG-happy
 ‘She is not unhappy.’ (DN)

Slovak⁴

- (32) Ona **nie** je nešťastná.
 She NEG is NEG-happy
 ‘She is not unhappy.’ (DN)

Ukrainian

- (31) Vona **ne** ye neshchasna.
 She NEG is NEG-happy
 ‘She is not unhappy.’ (DN)

Polish

- (33) Ona **nie** jest nieszczęśliwa.
 She NEG is NEG-happy
 ‘She is not unhappy.’ (DN)

³One Polish speaker slightly prefers the following variants:

- (25) **Nie** wydałem 1000\$ **na nic**.
 NEG spend.1sg \$1000 **for nothing**
 ‘I didn’t spend \$1000 on nothing.’ (DN)
- (26) Wydałem 1000\$, , ale **nie na nic**.
 spend.1sg \$1000, but **not on nothing**
 ‘I spent \$1000, but not on nothing’ (DN)

He also notes that these are not the most accessible DN readings and that an SN reading is preferred; nevertheless, a DN reading is accessible with the right context.

⁴In Slovak, *nie* shows up with ‘to be’; *ne-* is used to negate full verbs.

Serbian

- (34) Marija **nije** **nesrećna**.
 Mary **NEG**-is **NEG**-happy
 ‘Mary is not unhappy.’ (DN)

- The available readings in these interpretations are not regular positives; instead they are more like a weak positive
- To my judgment, other DN readings also are not like regular positives (as discussed in Section 2)
- DN readings in restricted contexts in Slavic languages need to be accounted for

3 An Analysis

- I propose using **two separate abstract negative operators** to account for these DN readings in Slavic languages
 - **Negative operator one:** $\text{Op}_{\neg}$
 - * associated with TP
 - * triggered when grammatically necessary (Zeijlstra, 2004, 2007)
 - **Negative operator two:** $\emptyset_{\text{NEG}}$
 - * adopted from Fitzgibbons (2010)
 - * associated with TP-less environments
- If both of these operators are employed when grammatically necessary, DN readings in all three contexts can be explained
- Such an approach allows me to analyze the negative marker in Slavic languages as the same semantically non-negative lexical item in all cases

3.1 Small Clauses

- Fitzgibbons (2010) analyzes DNs with small clauses in Russian through a PolP headed by $\emptyset_{\text{NEG}}$
- $\emptyset_{\text{NEG}}$ is able to license the NCI in the small clause
- $\emptyset_{\text{NEG}}$ also has an interpretable negative feature
- With a second negation introduced higher in the syntactic structure, this results in a DN

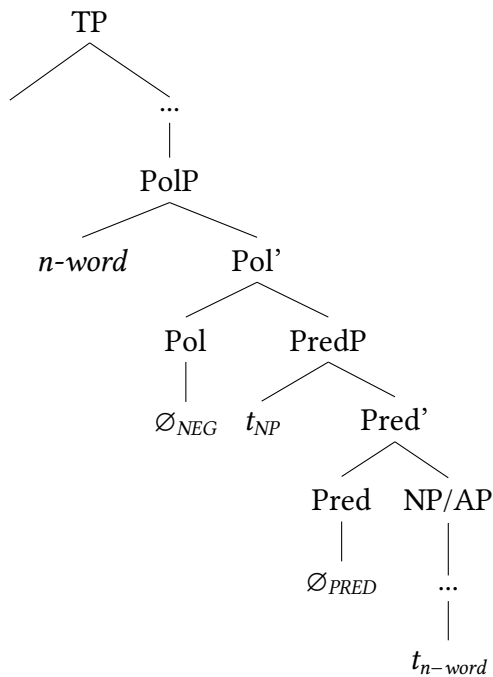


Figure 1: Small Clause from Fitzgibbons (2010)

- I propose modifying Fitzgibbons (2010)'s structure slightly
- Instead of $\emptyset_{NEG}$ being the head of PolP, I propose that $\emptyset_{NEG}$ is in Spec PolP
- $\emptyset_{NEG}$ being in specifier position is more consistent with analyses proposed by Zeijlstra (2004, 2007, 2008)
- This modification also allows the negative marker to head PolP
- The negative marker can then be the same syntactic head in all contexts
- I'm also placing PredP syntactically higher than PolP. This better accounts for word order in other Slavic languages and doesn't seem to have consequences for Russian.

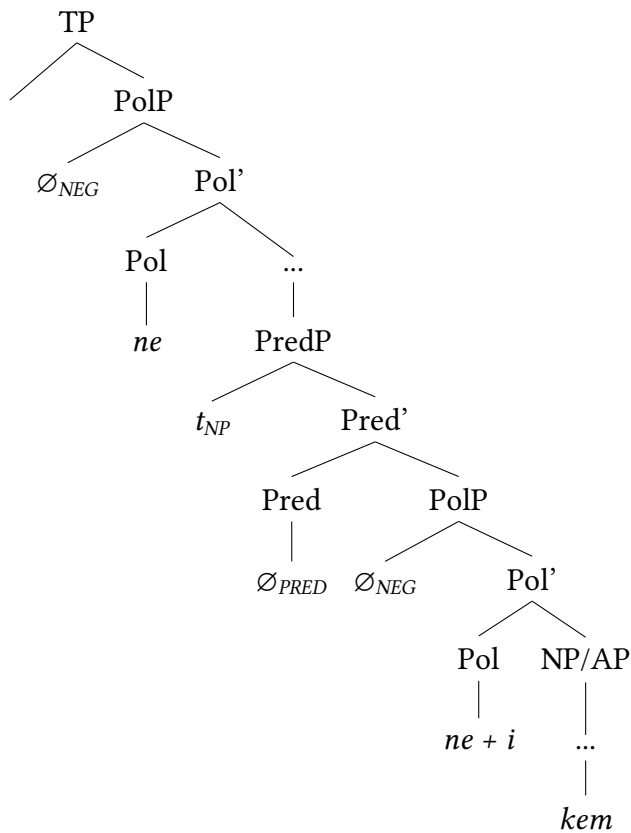


Figure 2: 'not...a nobody.'

3.2 Prepositional Phrases

- Fitzgibbons (2010) observes that both small clauses and PPs lack TP
- This means that $\emptyset_{NEG}$ can be employed in these environments
- Bošković (2004) argues that the highest functional projection in the extended projection of a PP is CP^{PP}
- Fitzgibbons (2010) and Kohut & McMahon (2023a, 2023b) propose a rich functional structure for PPs that includes CP^{PP} and PolP
- The PolP in the extended projection of the PP can contain $\emptyset_{NEG}$, allowing for DN readings when a second negation is introduced higher in the syntactic structure
- Below, I roughly adopt the structure proposed for PPs in Kohut & McMahon (2023a, 2023b)⁵
 - However, I have a few changes

⁵For the preposition *za*, Kohut & McMahon (2023a, 2023b) adopt an analysis from Svenonius (2004). The usage of PlaceP is not crucial for my analysis. What is important for me is that PPs have an extended functional projection including (at a minimum) PolP. For more details about the structure of *ni za chto*, see Kohut & McMahon (2023a, 2023b).

- $\emptyset_{NEG}$ is now in Spec PolP, which is more in line with the abstract operators proposed in Zeijlstra (2004, 2007, 2008)
- *ni*- heads PolP, while in Kohut & McMahon (2023a, 2023b) *ni*- was in specifier position
 - * *Ni*- morphologically decomposes into *ne* + *i* (see section 1.1.3)
 - * Consequently, I would like to treat this occurrence of *ne* as the same syntactic head as in other cases
 - * In this way, *ne* can be treated as syntactically the same in all cases

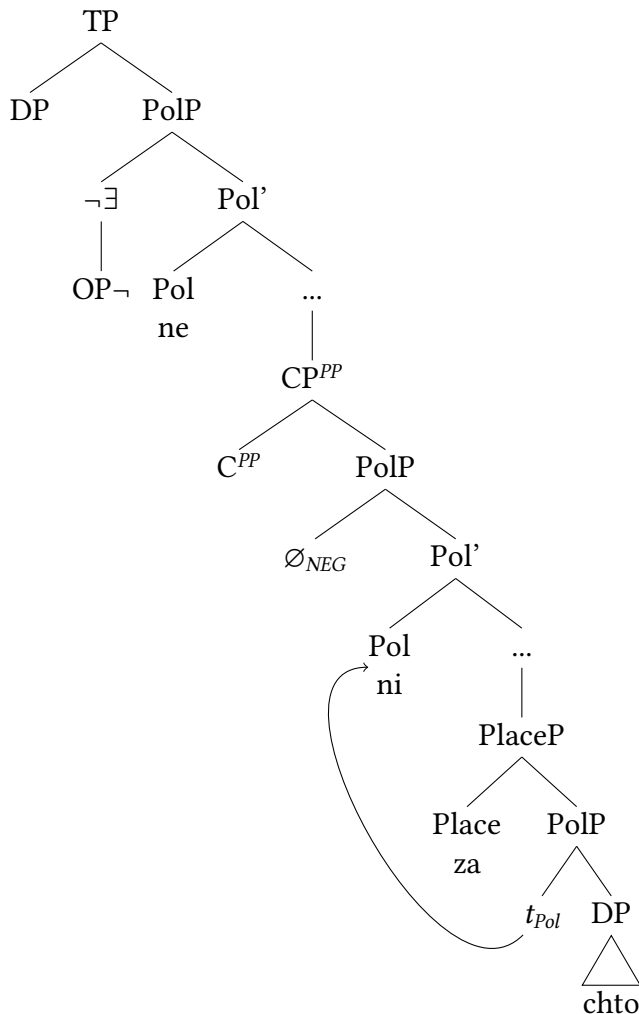


Figure 3: ‘not...for nothing.’

3.3 Constituent Negation

- $\emptyset_{NEG}$ can also explain DNs that appear with constituent negation
- These are also TP-less environments, meaning that $\emptyset_{NEG}$ can be employed

- When constituent negation has another PolP higher in the syntactic structure, $OP_{\neg}$ can be introduced as well—resulting in a DN

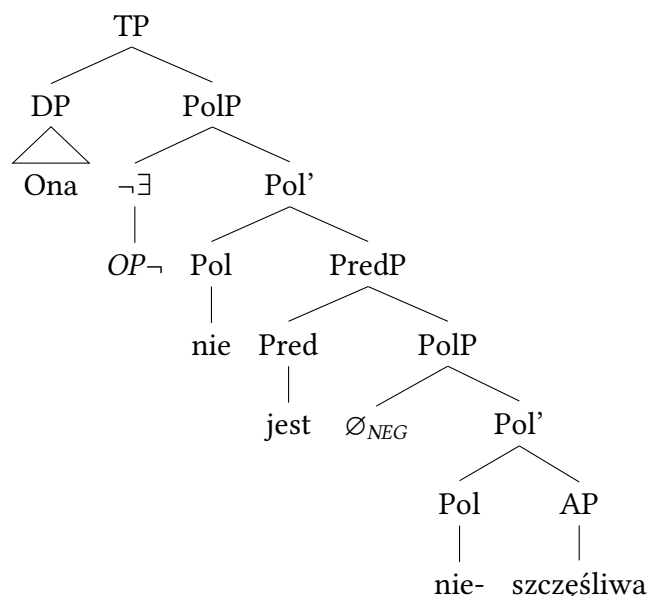


Figure 4: ‘She is not unhappy.’

3.4 Negated Adjectives License NPIs in Russian

- Such an analysis also captures data that certain negated adjectives can license NPIs in Russian
- Letuchiy (2017) analyses NCIs as NPIs
- Letuchiy (2017) provides examples that certain adjectives (with an *un-* prefix) are able to license NCIs
- Letuchiy (2017) provides example (35) and says that example (36) is ungrammatical
- However, at least one native Russian speaker reported that she accepts example (36); judgments may vary here

Russian

- (35) Nikomu ne nužn-yj
 nobody.DAT NEG necessary.M.SG
 ‘not necessary to anyone’ (SN)

Russian:

- (36) %Ni s kem ne vežliv-yj
 NEG with whom NEG polite.M.SG
 ‘not polite with anyone’ (SN)

- If the *un-* prefix is treated the same as the negative marker in Russian, it is clear how these NCIs could be licensed
- Since these are TP-less environments, $\emptyset_{NEG}$ (which is associated with the *un-* prefix) will be able to license both the negative marker and the NCI

4 Remaining Questions

4.1 Similarities to (Dialects of) English

- English dialects that have negative concord often show subject/object asymmetries (Blanchette, 2017)
- In this way, they are not like strict NC languages
- However, certain PPs do not participate in NC in these English dialects as well

(37) The man did **not** feed the baby with **no** hair.
 DN reading only
 Blanchette (2013)

- Blanchette (2013) proposes that this is a result of the complex DP [the baby with no hair] being a phase
- As such, the complex DP cannot interact with the sentential negation present and negative concord does not occur
- Negative concord also does not occur with the negative marker and *un-adj* constructions in NC dialects of English (p.c., Christina Tortora)
- In this case, phases cannot be appealed to
- Bešlin (2023) presents an argument that aPs are not Chomskyan phases in BCS (see Bešlin (2023) for more details)
- The environments I have described seem to potentially interfere with NC in non-strict NC languages as well
- This analysis could be extended to account for similarities between more languages besides just Slavic languages
- I leave this endeavor to future work

4.2 Effects of Prosody

- Prosody is known to affect available negation readings
- Even within strict NC, negative verum focus can lead to DN readings
- Negative verum focus is shown in example (38) in Afrikaans (a strict NC language)

Afrikaans

(38) Speaker 1: Net HANS het **nie** die werk voltooi **nie**, né?
 only Hans has **NEG** the work completed **NEG** right
 ‘It was just Hans who didn’t finish the work, right?’

Speaker 2: Nee, **NIEMAND** het **nie** die werk voltooi **nie**
 no **nobody** has **NEG** the work completed **NEG**

‘No, NO-ONE didn’t finish the work’ (focused subject)

↷ ‘Everyone finished the work.’ (DN)

Biberauer & Zeijlstra (2012)

- Negative verum focus:
 - only felicitous when it directly follows a negative sentence
 - requires a stressed negative element
 - must operate on full propositions
- Negative verum focus exists in Russian as well and can result in DN readings

Russian

- (39) Ona **ne** podarila eyo drugu **nichego**.
 She **NEG** give.pst her friend **nothing**
 ‘She didn’t give anything to her friend.’ (SN)

vs.

- (40) Ona **ne** podarila eyo drugu **NICHEGO**. Ona podarila emu otkrytku.
 She **NEG** give.pst her friend **nothing**. She gave.pst him card
 ‘She didn’t give NOTHING to her friend. She gave him a gift card.’ (DN)

- Preliminarily, the contexts I have shown in this paper do not appear to be solely a result of prosody (like with negative verum focus)
- Native Russian speakers disagree, and sometimes even contradict each other, on the prosody required for DNs with the negative marker and PPs (if any specific intonation is even required)
- Prosody helps but does not seem to be required for DNs with constituent negation
- However, the role of prosody remains to be thoroughly investigated

4.3 Variation with PPs

- Some, but not all, PPs result in DNs with a preceding negative marker in Slavic languages
- Sentences that do have a DN, such as example (41), are also sometimes ambiguous between a DN and an SN reading
- Additionally, in some syntactic environments, the available DN may disappear (even with the same negative marker + PP combination)

Russian

- (41) 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)

vs.

- (42) Ona **ne** otdala svoj post **ni za chto**.
 she **NEG** give.pst.f her job **for anything**.
 'She didn't give away her job for anything.' (SN)
 Kohut & McMahon (2023a, 2023b)

Ukrainian⁶

- (43) Vin **ne** viddav svoje zhittya **ni za shcho**.
 He **NEG** give.pst his life **for nothing**
 'He didn't give up his life for nothing.' (DN)

vs.

- (44) Vona **ne** viddala yiyi robotu **ni dlya choho**.
 She **NEG** give.pst.f her job **for anything**
 'She didn't give up her job for anything.' (SN)

- Kohut & McMahon (2023a, 2023b) attempt to explain this variation through argument structure
- They observe that when the PP is semantically entailed, a DN is available
- The analysis in Kohut & McMahon (2023a, 2023b) does not explain the ambiguity in examples like (41)
- Additionally, the details of how this relates to argument structure (if this is the correct analysis) need to be explained further
- The issue of variation surrounding DNs with negative markers + PPs remains open to further investigation

4.3.1 Effects of word order

- With PPs, there appear to be word order effects in some Slavic languages
- In Russian and Serbian, when the negative marker is higher in the syntactic structure than the PP containing an NCI, a DN reading is available

⁶I have not yet checked if example (43) is also ambiguous between an SN and a DN reading.

Russian

- (45) 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)

Serbian

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

- However, when the PP containing an NCI is syntactically higher than the negative marker, only an SN reading is available

Russian

- (47) On **ni za chto** **ne** otdal svoju zhizn'.
 He **for nothing NEG** give.pst.m his life
 'He didn't give up his life for anything.' (SN)
 McMahon & Pember (2022)

Serbian

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

- Preliminary conversations with native Czech speakers suggest that Czech does not have the same effects of word order
- Word order does not appear to affect constituent negation DNs
- This point of variation remains to be explained

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