UNINTERPRETABLE NEGATIVE FEATURES ON NEGATIVE INDEFINITES

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It was proposed by Ladusaw 1992 and Zeijlstra 2004 that negative indefinites in negative concord languages are semantically non-negative indefinites carrying an uninterpretable negative feature that has to be checked against a semantic negation. This analysis is extended to languages that do not exhibit negative concord. Crucial evidence comes from the fact that negative indefinites give rise to split readings, in which another (modal etc.) operator takes scope in between the negative and the indefinite meaning component. Split readings also provide an argument against implementing the licensing conditions for negative indefinites in certain ways proposed in the literature, in particular against the NEG-criterion of Haegeman and Zanuttini 1991, but also against the analyses of Ladusaw 1992 and Kratzer 2005.

1. Introduction

Negative indefinites in negative concord languages have puzzled linguists for a long time. If they are semantically analyzed as negative quantifiers, as is the standard assumption about the corresponding elements in e.g. English, then why do they not always contribute negative force? For instance, why does the interpretation of the following sentence from Italian only involve one negation, while there are two negative indefinites, *nessuno* and *niente*?

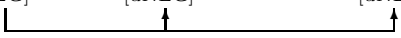
(1) **Nessuno** ha visto **niente.** (Italian)
n-person has seen n-thing
'Nobody has seen anything.'
*'Nobody has seen nothing.' (='Everybody has seen something.')

2. A cross-linguistically unified analysis of negative indefinites

Recently, the insight emerged that negative indefinites in negative concord languages are best analyzed as semantically non-negative indefinites that have to be licensed by negation (see Ladusaw 1992; Zeijlstra 2004). Under this view, negative concord is a form of syntactic agreement: negative indefinites carry an uninterpretable negative feature that has to be checked against an interpretable negative feature on a semantically negative element. In the case of (1), this is assumed to be an abstract negative

operator that simultaneously licenses both negative indefinites under Multiple Agree, as shown in (2) (see Zeijlstra 2004 for details of the analysis).

(2) $\text{Op}\neg_{[\text{iNEG}]}$ nessuno$_{[\text{uNEG}]}$ ha visto niente$_{[\text{uNEG}]}$



I argue that this analysis of negative indefinites is not only adequate for negative concord languages, but also for languages not exhibiting negative concord, such as English, German and Dutch (see Penka 2007). In these languages, negative indefinites prima facie appear to have negative force on their own and thus it seems that they can and should be analyzed as negative quantifiers. However, evidence against this view comes from the fact that negative indefinites in these languages give rise to split readings, where another operator takes scope in between the negative and the indefinite meaning component, as illustrated in (3) (see o.a. Bech 1955/57; Jacobs 1980).

(3) Du brauchst keine Jacke anziehen. (German)
you need n-DET jacket wear
'You don't need to wear a jacket.'

Although in (3), the negation takes scope above the modal verb *brauchen* ('need') (in fact, *brauchen* is an NPI), the salient reading is the one where the indefinite is interpreted in the scope of the modal (*de dicto* reading).

The existence of split readings follows immediately if it is assumed that in non-negative concord languages, too, negative indefinites carry an uninterpretable negative feature. As the real carrier of semantic negation is assumed to be a covert negation operator, negation can take scope above the modal while the indefinite is interpreted below. The structure assumed to underlie (3) is given in (4).[1]

(4) du $\text{Op}\neg_{[\text{iNEG}]}$ [[keine$_{[\text{uNEG}]}$ Jacke anziehen] brauchst]

What distinguishes negative concord languages from non-negative concord languages then is not the fact that in the former negative indefinites are semantically non-negative, while in the latter they are inherently negative, but rather the precise licensing conditions for uninterpretable negative features. In non-negative concord languages, Multiple Agree is not available for negative features. Moreover, the licensing negation can never be realized overtly in non-negative concord languages.[2] Thus, a cross-linguistically unified analysis of negative indefinites results, which reduces differences in the behavior of negative indefinites to parametric variation.

[1] To abstract away from V2-movement, the word order for embedded clauses is given.

[2] There are in fact also negative concord languages in which negative indefinites can only be licensed by abstract negation, but not by an overt element interpreted as negation. An example is French, where negative indefinites co-occurring with the negative marker *pas* obligatorily yield a double negation reading (see Penka 2007).

3. The nature of the licensing relation

The existence of split readings is not only crucial for the analysis of negative indefinites in non-negative concord languages, but also argues against certain implementations of the way negative indefinites associate with the licensing negation in negative concord languages. In negative concord languages, split readings are expressed transparently, in the sense that negation is marked on the modal verb in addition to the negative indefinite, cf. (5).

(5) **No** hace falta que te pongas **ninguna** chaqueta. (Spanish)
NEG makes need COMP you wear.SUBJ n-DET jacket
'You don't need to wear a jacket.'

The fact that other operators can take scope in between negation and the negative indefinite shows that checking of uninterpretable negative features does not involve movement of the negative indefinite to the licensing negation. This argues against accounts based on the NEG-criterion of Haegeman and Zanuttini 1991, which postulates that negative indefinites have to move to the specifier of NegP in order to check their negative features against the negative head.[3]

Data like (5) also pose a problem for accounts like Ladusaw 1992 and Kratzer 2005, which argue that negative indefinites are indefinites that have to stand in a certain semantic relation with negation in order to be licensed. Ladusaw 1992, employing a Heimian analysis of indefinites, proposed that negation is the operator that has to bind free variables introduced by negative indefinites. Kratzer 2005 took up Ladusaw's proposal, but replaced unselective binding by a Hamblin semantics, in which indefinites introduce alternatives. Under both approaches, negative indefinite are assumed to semantically associate with the negation operator, and it should thus not be possible that other semantic operators take scope in between negation and negative indefinites.

4. Conclusion

The assumption that negative indefinites carry uninterpretable negative features leads to a cross-linguistically unified analysis of negative indefinites, which explains phenomena like negative concord and split readings. Data involving split readings provide evidence that the licensing relation is purely syntactic in nature, and moreover, that checking of negative features does not involve movement.

[3] Whereas Haegeman and Zanuttini 1991 and Zanuttini 1991 assumed that the NEG-criterion holds in some languages at LF and in others at S-structure, Haegeman 1995 argued that the NEG-criterion universally has to be satisfied in the surface syntax. This leaves the possibility to undo movement of negative indefinites at LF in order to derive the correct interpretation. But then the original motivation for the NEG-criterion, namely to ensure a configuration in which 'absorption' of multiple negations can take place, becomes void.

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