

Phonologically null licensors of negative concord items in the syntax of Russian, Serbo-Croatian and Spanish

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As has been pointed out in the literature (Brown 1999, among others), negative concord items (NCIs) in Russian need to be licensed by clausemate sentential negation (SN) (1). Nevertheless, I show that Russian NCIs appear in some environments where SN is lacking. Similar results have been reported and analyzed for Serbo-Croatian (SC) (Progovac 2005a,b, etc.) and Spanish (Herburger 2001, etc). In this paper, I look at some environments where freestanding NCIs are possible in the three languages and propose that they are syntactically licensed by a phonologically null negative head.

I show that freestanding NCIs in Russian occur as complements of P and predicates of small clauses (2a,b). If SN is present in these environments, freestanding NCIs lead to double negation (DN) readings (3a,b). It follows that freestanding NCIs must be licensed by a negative head. Based on the availability of DN readings in negated sentences with freestanding NCIs, I argue that small clauses and PPs optionally contain a Pol(arity)P(hrase) headed by a phonologically null negative element \emptyset_{NEG} which licenses the freestanding NCIs (4a, b). This PolP is similar to the PolP argued for by Progovac (2005a, b) for SC adjunct PPs (5a,b). Note the important similarity between the Russian and Serbo-Croatian data: in both languages, DN readings result if a freestanding NCI occurs in a negated sentence (3b), (5a,b). I argue for a unified syntactic analysis of licensed and freestanding NCIs based on the system in Bošković (2007), where a constituent with an uninterpretable feature necessarily acts as a probe.

Another NC language where freestanding NCIs have been studied is Spanish (Herburger 2001, etc). Generally, preverbal NCIs in Spanish do not require SN in contrast to their postverbal counterparts (6a,b). Herburger concludes that Spanish NCIs are ambiguous between a negative quantifier reading and an NPI reading. A syntactic account of the same paradigm that does not require this ambiguity is suggested in Martín-González (2002) and Bošković (2001). It is based on the idea that the Spanish SN head is phonologically null and dependent on negative constituents. NCIs that appear freestanding are licensed by a phonologically null SN. This makes Spanish similar to Russian, where freestanding n-words in small clauses and PPs are licensed by a phonologically null negative element.

A noticeable difference between Spanish and Russian is that only Spanish allows negative spread (6c). This difference is related to the fact that Spanish n-words can be licensed not only by SN, but also by other NPI licensors (Herburger 2001), whereas in Russian they are not. Russian n-words are unambiguously NCIs, but Spanish n-words are ambiguous between NPIs and NCIs. In a sentence with negative spread, the NCI n-word moves to Spec, PolP; the NPI n-words do not have to move to get licensed.

This syntactic theory of negative concord accounts for Russian, SC and Spanish in a uniform way, whereas the ambiguity theory works for Spanish, but no for the other two languages (7).

- (1) Ivan *nikogo* **ne** ljubit. Russian
Ivan n-who NEG loves
'Ivan does not love anybody.'
- (2) a. Doroga vela [_{pp} v *nikuda*]. Russian
Road led into n-where
'The road led nowhere.'

- b. Ivan sčital [_{PreDP} Irinu nikem]. Russian
 Ivan considered Irina n-who
 ‘Ivan considered Irina a nobody.’
- (3) a. Doroga ne vela v nikuda. Russian
 Road NEG led into n-where
 ‘The road did not lead nowhere.’ *Double negation*
- b. Ivan ne sčital Irinu nikem.
 Ivan NEG considered Irina n-who
 ‘Ivan did not consider Irina a nobody.’ *Double negation*
 ‘Ivan did not consider Irina anybody.’ *Negative concord*
- (4) a. PP: [_{PP/CP} [_{PolP} ∅_{NEG} [_{PP} P n-word]]]
 b. SC: [_{PolP} ∅_{NEG} [_{PreDP} NP ∅_{Pred} [_{NP/AP} n-word]]]
- (5) a. On plače zbog ničega. Serbo-Croatian (Progovac 2000)
 He cries for n-what
 ‘He is crying for nothing.’
- b. On ne plače zbog ničega.
 He NEG cries for n-what
 ‘He is crying for nothing.’ *Double negation*
- (6) a. *(No) vino nadie. b. Nadie vino. Spanish (Herburger 1998)
 NEG came n-body n-body came
 ‘Nobody came.’ ‘Nobody came.’
- c. Nadie miraba a nadie. Spanish (Herburger 2001)
 n-body looked at n-body
 ‘Nobody looked at anybody.’
- (7) *Nikto priexal. Russian
 n-who has.come
 ‘Nobody has come.’

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