

Influence of the Attributive Position on the Nature of *ni*- and *libo*- NPIs in Russian

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Speaking about the distribution of the Russian NPIs with *ni*- and *libo* elements, Pereltsvaig (2004) refers to the phenomenon which she calls the “Bagel Problem”. She claims that weak NPIs *libo*-items are excluded from the contexts which license the *ni*-items.

The *libo*-items are licensed in the bagel-shaped area covering downward monotone but excluding antimorphic contexts, which license only the *ni*-items. Antimorphic contexts are represented by the “hole of the bagel”. Thus the “bagel”- theory testifies the fact of complementary distribution of the *ni*- and *libo*- items. Pereltsvaig (2004:16) concludes that the ungrammaticality of the *libo*-items in some antimorphic contexts depends on the grammaticality of the *ni*-items in the same contexts. She explains the restriction of the distribution of the *libo*-items in terms of morphological blocking principle (MBP). According to the Distributed Morphology theory of Halle and Marantz (1993), when all requirements in the lexical entries of both items are satisfied to get inserted in the given position (which is the case with both *ni* and *libo*), the item whose lexical entry is more fully specified and hence matches the features for a licenser more closely, gets inserted in such situations. The insertion of a more fully specified *ni*-item blocks the insertion of a less fully specified *libo*-item – this is how the effect of morphological blocking functions. However there are sentences where both items can be used interchangeably:

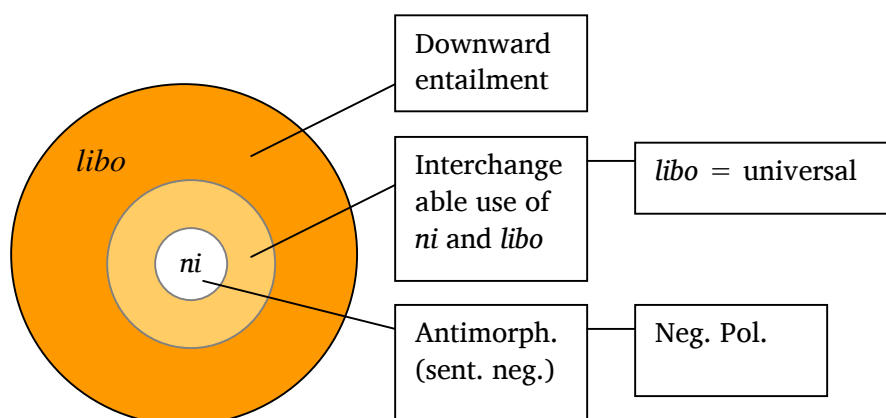
- (1) a. Na dannyj moment *net* informatsii o *kakih-libo* pojezdkah.
at given moment no information on which-*libo* trips
b. Na dannyj moment *net* informatsii *ni* o *kakih* pojezdkah.
at given moment no information *ni* on which trips
'At the moment there is no information on *any* trips.'

Why are both variants possible here? Does the morphological blocking principle fail to apply in these sentences? To answer these questions we need to analyse the (a) and (b) variants of the given example in more detail. Translation as well as interpretation of both (a) and (b) variants of the sentence come to a unified English equivalent. However, if we take a closer look at the contrasting sentences (a) – (b), slight differences of meaning come out on the surface. We will observe that in variant (a) we get the ‘whatever’/‘no matter what’-meaning rendered by the *libo*-items present in the sentences, which means the universal (‘free-choice’)-use of *libo*, whereas the *ni*-item in (b) variant is used existentially.

The MBP works when we have to do with existential use of *ni* (which is used only existentially) or *libo* (used universally in most cases). In the three examples studied above the *ni*-items are used existentially while the *libo*-items show universal character. This is the reason why the morphological blocking principle is simply not applicable here. Pereltsvaig’s (2004:15) idea of the complementary distribution of *ni*- and *libo*- elements (*libo*-items are licensed in all downward entailing contexts on the exclusion of those where the *ni*-items are licensed) can be expanded due to examples supporting possible interchangeability of *ni*- and *libo*-items. Proceeding from these observations of *ni/libo* interchangeability, the ‘Bagel’ gets a narrow transition circle from *libo*- to *ni*- area in which interchangeable contexts overlap. It is important to emphasize once more that *ni*- and *libo*- items are

interchangeable in a very narrow field of cases, namely those where the *libo*- items have a ‘free-choice’-reading and the principle of morphological blocking is not applicable.

Graphic 1 (Comp. Pereltsvaig 2004:13)



Interestingly, the exceptions from the Bagel-rule, i.e. interchangeable use of *ni*- and *libo*- items, are found only in the attributive position and not when having any other syntactic function, the same effect do we observe in the following example.

- (2) Ja govoril s *ni* v *čjom* *ne* *vinovatym* rebjonkom.
 I spoke with *ni* in *what not guilty* child
 ‘I spoke to the child who *was not guilty of anything*’

In (2) the negative particle *ne* refers to the attribute *vinovatym* (Prepos/mask/sg) ‘guilty’: the *ni*-item *ni v čjom* ‘ni in what’ is thus situated in the scope of a constituent negation *ne vinovatym* ‘not guilty’, the sentence still remaining grammatical, which contradicts to Pereltsvaig’s (2004:4) claim that the *ni*-items are not licensed in the scope of constituent negation, which is supported by the examples:

- (3) a. *Rebjonok *vinovat ne ni v čjom*. b. Rebjonok *ne vinovat ni v čjom*.
 child *guilty not ni in what* child *not guilty ni in what*
 *‘The child is not guilty of anything’ ‘The child is not guilty *of anything*.’

The negative marker *ne* does not refer to the predicative *vinovat* ‘guilty’, like it is the case in the well-formed counterpart (3b) but to the prepositional object which is here the *ni*-item *ni v čjom* ‘ni in what’. The cluster of two negative markers, negative particle *ne* and negative prefix *ni*- makes the sentence ungrammatical. Examples (3a,b) indeed support the claim that the *ni*-items are ungrammatical in the scope of a constituent negation. Considering sentence (2) however, we see that in this case we still have to do with a *ni*-item positioned in the scope of a constituent negation bearing attributive function, the sentence remaining well-formed.

References

- Halle, Moris and Alec Marantz (1993) Distributed Morphology and the Pieces of Inflection. Kenneth Halle and Samuel Jay Keyser, eds. *The view from building 20*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 111-175.
 Pereltsvaig, Asya (2004) *Negative Polarity Items in Russian and the “Bagel Problem”*, in: Adam Przepiorkowski and Sue Brown (eds.) *Negation in Slavic*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers.
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