

The Syntax of Negation and Optimality Theory

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Languages differ with respect to negation phenomena along many interacting, but essentially independent dimensions. In this paper we examine four such dimensions: the distribution of the Negative Phrase (NgP) in the clause; the presence of the negative head in negative clauses; the displacement of negative operators and whether the language displays Negative Concord (NC) or Double Negation (DN) phenomena.

With respect to the distribution of the NgP, languages differ not only in where NgP is positioned, but also in how freely it is distributed. Ouhalla (1991) reports that some languages have fixed positions for NgP, differing in terms of its relative position to the inflectional categories. However, other languages allow NgP to appear in a number of places:

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|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | a John may [_{NgP} not have been reading]
b John may have [_{NgP} not been reading] | c | John may have been [_{NgP} not reading]
... John [_{NgP} not to have been reading] |
|---|--|---|---|

We will argue that the English NgP is freely distributed in the clause, restricted only by conditions placed on the abstract operator (Scope Marker - SM) contained in its specifier position. One such restriction is that SMs have to be licensed by a local negative element.

The head of the NgP therefore plays an important role in licensing SMs when this cannot be done otherwise. This, in turn, determines the conditions under which the negative head can and cannot be present in some languages:

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|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | a John saw [_{NgP} SM (*not) no one]
b * John did [_{NgP} SM not see no one] (= John saw no one) | | |
| 3 | a Gianni *(non) legge niente
G not reads nothing
"Gianni doesn't read anything" | b | a nessuno _i Gianni (*non) telefona t _i
to no one Gianni telephones
"Gianni calls no one" |

The English paradigm shows that a negative head is not allowed to accompany a negative operator (without a DN interpretation), whereas in Italian the negative head is required unless there is a fronted negative operator (the same pattern is demonstrated for pre- and post verbal subjects). We argue that the negative operator in English licenses its own SM, because the distribution of NgP allows it to be local enough, whereas in Italian, the NgP has a fixed position above VP (at least) and hence the head is required to license the SM. Fronted negative operators move through spec NgP, eradicating the need for a SM and hence a head to license it.

Other languages, such as Hungarian, require a negative head whether or not this is needed to license a SM:

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|---|--|---|---|
| 4 | a SM *(nem) latom semmit
not see-1s nothing-acc
"I don't see anything" | b | semmit *(nem) latom
"I don't see anything" |
|---|--|---|---|

The Hungarian case also demonstrates differences in how negative operators are given their scope: indirectly via a SM or directly by moving to the relevant scope position (spec NgP). Once again languages differ with respect to which option they select. Some

languages, such as West Flemish, never make use of SMs, preferring to move negative operators in all cases:

- 5 a da ze [_{NgP} me niks_i ketent t_i] (en)-was b * da ze [_{NgP} SM_i ketent me niks_i] (en)-was
 that she with nothing pleased not was that she pleased with nothing not was
 "that she was pleased with nothing"

Finally, we propose to capture the difference between NC and DN phenomena through a restriction on the multiple appearance of NgP in a clause: DN amounts to the use of a NgP for every negative operator, hence giving each a unique interpretation, while NC is produced in a situation in which all negative operators share the same scope position (either by movement or via their SMs). Following Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991), we suggest that when spec NgP is multiply adjoined to, there is absorption of the negative features and hence only one negation is expressed. Evidence from English, West Flemish and Hungarian is put forward to support this analysis.

Within an Optimality Theory framework, we propose five constraints to account for the above differences:

- 6 Insert
 Do not insert any element or structure
- 7 Move
 Do not move elements in a structure
- 8 Head
 All heads must be overt
- 9 UniSpec (= Unique Specifier)
 Any specifier position may only contain one element (no adjunction)
- 10 LSM (= License SMs)
 All SMs must be licensed

We demonstrate that Insert conflicts with all other constraints and hence ranking this with respect to the others produces the required differences between languages: the higher ranking of two conflicting constraints being always adhered to unless another conflicting constraint is even more highly ranked. Thus, the notion of the rank ordering of constraints captures the way in which there is interaction between the phenomena.

A particular innovation within Optimality Theory of this analysis is the assumption that not all constraints have to be ranked with respect to each other. In this way we propose to capture optionally, the idea being that if two conflicting constraints are equally ranked, then each candidate must violate at least one constraint at that ranking, hence no optimality decision can be made and all candidates will survive to be further evaluated.

Haegeman, L. and R. Zanuttini 1991 'Negative Heads and Negative Concord', ms., paper presented at UCL and Tillburg University.

Ouhalla, J. 1990 'Sentential Negation, Relativised Minimality and the Aspectual Status of Auxiliaries', *the Linguistic Review* 7, 183-231.

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