

Negative concord items and sets of alternatives: the case of East Slavic languages

Egor Tsedryk
Saint Mary's University

This talk focuses on negative concord items (NCIs) in Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian. Previous analyses have mainly focused on wh-base NCIs, as in (1), in which the particle *ni* is assumed to be a morphological reflex of a [*uNeg*] feature (see Brown 1999 on Russian). More recently, this idea has been implemented crosslinguistically in terms of (multiple) Agree between the [*uNeg*] feature(s) of the NCI(s) and the [*iNeg*] feature of the negative operator (Zeijlstra 2022). In addition to this morphosyntactic view of negative concord, NCIs have also been analyzed as \forall -quantifiers or indefinites in LF (see Penka 2020 and Giannakidou 2020 for an overview).

- (1) *Nixto nikoho *(ne) počuv.* (Ukrainian)
NI.who.NOM NI.who.ACC NEG heard
'Nobody heard anyone.'
- (2) *Ni Olena, ni Ljuba ni Petro *(ne) pryšli na svjato.*
NI Olena.NOM NI Ljuba.NOM NI Petro.NOM NEG came on party
'Neither Olena, Ljuba, nor Petro came to the party.'
- (3) *Ty *(ne) maeš ni kropli sumlennja.* (Belarusian)
you.NOM NEG have NI drop.GEN conscience.GEN
'You don't have a shred of conscience.'
- (4) *Ona ne spela ni *(odnoj) pesni.* (Russian)
she.NOM NEG sing.PST.F NI one.F.GEN song.F.GEN
'She didn't sing any song.'
- (5) **Ona ne spela ni vse pesni.*
she.NOM NEG sing.PST.F NI all.PL.ACC song.PL.ACC
'She didn't sing any songs.' / 'She didn't sing all the songs.'
- (6) **Ona ne spela ni dve/tri/četyre pesni.*
she.NOM NEG sing.PST.F NI two/three/four song.PL.ACC
'She didn't sing two/three/four songs.'

An Agree-based approach has little to say about the distribution of *ni* as a syntactic head that has its own selectional properties. In fact, any non-negative XP could in principle be a bearer of [*uNeg*]. This possibility brings us to the distribution of *ni* in front of lexical (non-wh) NPs. Thus, *ni* can occur in front of a lexical NP if it (i) is part of an enumeration (2) or (ii) denotes an atomic unit (3). However, *ni* cannot occur in front of a bare NP, which denotes a mass-like property unless there is a divisive element (Borer 2005), such as ONE in (4); nor can *ni* occur in front of a universal QP or a NumP, with $|\text{Num}| > 1$, as shown in (5)–(6). The data in (2)–(6) is problematic for any analysis that attempts to classify East Slavic NCIs (as \forall -quantifiers, indefinites, or [*uNeg*] bearers) without recognizing *ni* as an operator on its own.

To provide a unified analysis of NCIs in East Slavic languages, I propose to analyze *ni* as an exponent of an “empty-set operator”, which selects a set of alternatives (α) and returns \emptyset , being applied to each individual member of α . As defined in (7), a *ni*-phrase denotes a set of false propositions in the extension of a given predicate (which is equivalent to ‘an empty set of true propositions in the extension of a given predicate’). (7) is inspired by Shimoyama’s (2006) analysis of the restrictor *mo* ‘every’ in Japanese in terms of Hamblin’s (1973) semantics for wh-questions.

- (7) For $[[\alpha]]^g \subseteq D_e$,
 $[[ni \alpha]]^g = \{\lambda f_{\langle e, \langle s, t \rangle \rangle} \lambda e_s \exists x_e [x \in [[\alpha]]^g \wedge f(x)(e) = 0]\}$

In order to switch the truth value from 0 to 1, the negative (Boolean) operator, \neg (realized as *ne* in PF) has to be added to the structure/formula containing $[[ni \alpha]]^g$. This compositional approach allows bridging wh-base NCIs with those in (2)–(6) without vacuous assignment of [*uNeg*]. The [*uNeg*] feature could be kept as a defining property of \emptyset , or it could be dispensed with entirely.

References

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