

On the Diachronic Development of Negation

It is a well-known fact that negation develops along the lines of the Jespersen Cycle (Jespersen 1917). In the first phase of this cycle negation is expressed by means of a preverbal negative marker that is attached to the finite verb. This negative marker weakens and a second negative marker, a negative adverb, is used to enforce the first negative marker. In this phase negation is expressed by means of two negative markers. Finally the second negative marker takes over the role of the first and the first marker disappears. Negation is then only expressed by means of the negative adverb. An examples of the first phase is Italian (1a), an example of the second phase is French (1b) and Dutch is an example of the final phase (1c).

It is however less familiar that this development corresponds to another diachronic development concerning negation: the interpretation of multiple negation. In languages like Italian (2a) two or more negative elements yield one semantic negation (Negative Concord). In languages like French, sometimes negative elements form one negation, sometimes two negative elements cancel each other out (Double Negation), depending on the position of the negative adverb *pas* (2b). In languages like Dutch (2c) two negations cancel each other out (sometimes ambiguous with a negative concord reading). Cf. Zanuttini (1991), Haegeman & Zanuttini (1996).

Apparently the answer to the question how it is possible that two negations do not always cancel each other out, as is expected from a compositional perspective, lies in the analysis of the diachronic development of the expression of negation in a particular language or variety. The occurrence of Negative Concord depends on the kind of marker that is used to express negation. I argue that preverbal negative markers (like Italian *non* or French *ne*) are syntactic heads that cliticize to the finite verb and that negative adverbs (like French *pas* or Dutch *niet*) belong to the class of specifiers. The status of the negative marker then constitutes the scope of the negation. Negative adverbs (specifiers) have scope over the whole domain they c-command. Hence every element in their scope is denied (3). When negation is expressed by means of a negative clitic (a head), the rest of the clause is not under the scope of negation (4). The same goes for negative quantifiers. In the reading of (4b) the negation of the raised quantifier does not cancel out the negation of the finite verb.

Since the morphological form of negative quantifiers shows that they can be treated as existential quantifiers with a negative clitic or prefix, I argue that the same principle holds both for verbs and quantifiers: if the negative marker is a clitical head it only denies the finite verb or quantifier: $[_{TP/DP} [_{T^{\circ}/D^{\circ}} \textit{neg-V}_{fin}/Q_{ex}]]$ but not its complement. If a negative marker is a specifier, it occupies Spec,NegP. Since scope is determined in terms of C-Command, in the first case negation does not have scope over the complement of TP/DP, but only over T°/D° , in the latter case the complement of TP/DP is within the scope of the negation in Spec,NegP. This explains the facts in (2).

This explains also the co-occurrence of the two phenomena. If verbal negation is expressed by a syntactic head negative quantifiers are interpreted as complex units with a negative head that denies the existential quantifier itself, but does not deny its complement. When the negative adverb becomes the dominant negative element, the locus of negation is reinterpreted from heads to specifiers. This means that negative quantifiers are no longer to be interpreted as complex units with a negative head, but are base-generated negative specifiers having negative scope over their whole complement.

This analysis explains the occurrence of Negative Concord or Double Negation as a result of the diachronic development of negation in natural language.

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| (1) | a. | Gianni <i>non</i> a telefonato
John neg has called
'John has not called' | Italian |
| | b. | Jean <i>ne</i> mange <i>pas</i>
John neg eats neg
'John does not eat' | French |
| | c. | Jan eet <i>niet</i>
John eats neg
'John does not eat' | Dutch |
| (2) | a. | <i>Non</i> a telefonato <i>nessuno</i>
Neg has called nobody
'Nobody called' | Italian, Negative Concord |
| | b1. | Jean <i>ne</i> mange <i>rien</i>
John neg eats nothing
'John doesn't eat anything' | French, Negative Concord |
| | b2. | Jean <i>ne</i> mange <i>pas rien</i>
John neg eats neg nothing
'John doesn't eat nothing' | French, Double Negation |
| | c. | Nooit heeft Jan geen vriendin
Never has John no girlfriend
'John never has no girlfriend' | Dutch, Double Negation |
| (3) | | Jan stemt <i>niet</i> op een vrouw
John votes neg for a woman
$\neg\exists x.[\mathbf{woman}(x) \ \& \ \mathbf{vote}(j, x)]$ | Dutch |
| (4) | a. | [?] Milan <i>nevidim</i> nekoho
Milan neg-sees someone
$\exists x.\neg\mathbf{see}(m, x)$ | Czech |
| | b. | Milan <i>nevidim nikoho</i>
Milan neg-sees no one
$\neg\exists x.\mathbf{see}(m, x)$ | Czech |

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