"Expletive Negation" revisited: on some properties of negated polar interrogatives in Russian

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In this talk I explore questions with preposed negation like (1). Standard analyses (e.g., Brown & Franks 1995) classify these constructions as a species of Expletive Negation (EN) (alternatively, *pleonastic* negation), alleged to be devoid of polarity reversing semantics despite the compulsory morphosyntactic exponence of negation (i.e., *ne* 'neg') realized on the verb. Its other famous representatives appear in (2).

(1) **Ne** zapretila li ego cenzura?   NegYN
     neg forbade   Q him censorship
     '(I wonder if) he isn't censored.'

(2) a. Ja podoždu, poka ty **ne** prideš'.   UNTIL-clauses
         I   will.wait until you neg will.come
         'I'll wait until you arrive.'

     b. Ja bojus', kak by   on **ne** opozdal.   FEAR-predicates
         I   fear   how SUBJ he neg late
         'I fear that he might be late'

The purported vacuity of negation led some to conclude that negation is neutralized or erased in EN contexts, which amounts to equating the meaning of certain varieties of NegYNs to the meaning of "the corresponding affirmative question[s]" like (3) (Brown 1999). In the first part of the talk, I demonstrate that, despite some overlap, NegYNs are not synonymous with either PosYNs or English biased questions (like ***Wasn't*** *he censored?*), catalogue a range of environments felicitous for NegYNs and establish why NegYNs "feel negative" in the speakers' perception.

(3) Zapretila li ego cenzura?   PosYN
     forbade   Q him censorship
     'Was he censored?'

However, my main preoccupation is with the syntax of NegYNs, where two well-established facts hold. The baseline pattern is found in (6) – its import is best understood against the background supplied by the declaratives in (4) and (5).

- (4) demonstrates the property of negative concord: **nikogo** in (4) is a negative concord item (NCI), morhologically decomposable into n_{NEG}-i_{FOC}-$kogo_{WHOM.ACC}$ (per Haspelmath 1997, Bošković 2009) and required under clausemate negation (cf. the affirmative in (4b) and long-distance negation in (4c)).

- (5) exemplifies the ACC-GEN alternation. Under clausemate negation in (5a), direct objects may optionally appear in the genitive (Genitive of Negation, GoN) instead of the usual accusative. Licensing conditions replicate those that operate under negative concord: a predicate must be negated (cf. 5b) and it must be local (cf. (5c)).

- (6) evinces a peculiar split: while the configuration enables GoN, it evidently removes the environment for NCI licensing. It is this property that formed the basis for compartmentalizing features – a semantically contentful operator is required for NCIs, but not for GoN (the most recent implementation is found in Gribanova 2017). Hence, GoN is a byproduct of "morphosyntactic negation" – negation with the right morphology but no content. If so, NegYNs are not negative semantically (hence, *NCIs) but negative syntactically (hence, $\checkmark$GoN). I will argue **against** this position.

(4) NCIs

    a. Ivan nikogo **ne** znaet.
       Ivan ni-whom neg knows
       'Ivan doesn't know anybody.'

    b. *Ivan nikogo znaet.
       Ivan ni-whom knows

    c. *Ivan **ne** skazal, [čto nikogo znaet].
       Ivan neg said that ni-whom knows

(5) Genitive of Negation

    a. On ne pišet pisem /pis'ma.
       he neg write lettersGEN /lettersACC
       'He doesn't write letters.'

    b. *On pišet pisem.
       he writes lettersGEN

    c. *On **ne** skazal, [čto pišet pisem].
       he neg said that writes lettersGEN

(6) a. *Ne kupil (li) ničego Petr?   [NCI]
      neg bought (Q) ni-what Peter

    b. Ne pišet li Petr pisem?   [GoN]
      neg writes Q Peter lettersGEN

My analysis provisions two possible merge sites for negation in Russian – above AspectP/vP and above TP, as in (7). Lower negation, built atop Aspect/v, delineates the exclusive domain of NCIs. Higher negation is introduced in the illocutionary field and serves to modify speaker commitments. NegYNs are ambiguous between these two structures: this conclusion is based on the novel data involving the polarity sensitive adverbs *ešče* 'still' and *uže* 'already'. The deviance of NCIs in NegYNs with underlying lower Neg will be shown to follow from independent principles – obligatory focus movement and Rizzi's *Criterial Freezing*. On the other hand, both high and low Negs are eligible to license GoN. I identify two additional configurations that are ambiguous in the same way as NegYNs.

(7) [... [$_{NegP1}$ NEG1 ... [$_{TP}$ ... [$_{NegP2}$ NEG1 [AspectP/vP ...]]]]]

References

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