Expletive Negative Concord in West Germanic

Marten Stelling

Georg-August University of Göttingen / The Landscape of Neg-Words

IGDAL 6, April 23, 2018

Outline

In some West Germanic languages, there are systems of what is usually considered Negative Concord. I will try to make a case for an alternative explanation in terms of Expletive Negation.

Negative Concord

Strict Negative Concord (e.g. Czech): a Neg-Word must always be associated with a negative marker elsewhere in the clause.

Non-strict Negative Concord (e.g. Italian): vP-external Neg-Words can not yield a concord reading with an additional negative marker.

(1)　a.　Milan nikomu *(ne)volá
　　　　　Milan nobody NEG-call
　　　　　'Milan doesn't call anybody.'　　　　Czech, strict NC

　　　b.　Dnes nikdo *(ne)volá
　　　　　today n-body NEG.calls
　　　　　'Today nobody is calling'

(2)　a.　Gianni *(non) telefona a nessuno
　　　　　Gianni NEG call to n-body
　　　　　'Gianni doesn't call anyone.'　　　　Italian, Nonstrict NC

　　　b.　Nessuno (*non) telefona a Gianni
　　　　　n-body NEG call to Gianni
　　　　　'Nobody calls Gianni.'

West Germanic Optional Negative Concord

West Flemish and Bavarian show an inversion of a strict NC structure (Haegeman 1995):

(3)　**Negative Concord:**

　　　a.　da Valère *niemand* (*nie*) gezien oat
　　　　　that Valère nobody NEG seen had
　　　　　'that Valère had not seen anybody'　　　　West Flemish

　　　b.　das *keine* Unanstendlikeit (*nichd*) bassirt isd
　　　　　that no indecency not happened is
　　　　　'that no indecency has occurred.'　　　　Upper Bavarian

(4)　**Double Negation:**

　　　a.　da Valère *nie niemand* gezien oat
　　　　　that Valère NEG nobody seen had
　　　　　'that Valère hadn't seen nobody' (= seen somebody)　　　　West Flemish

　　　b.　das *nichd keine* Unanstendlichkeid bassirt ist
　　　　　that not no indecency happened is
　　　　　'that not no indecency occurred.' (=some indecency)　　　　Upper Bavarian

Questions:

- Why does this inverted NC system arise?
- Is there a relationship with its optionality?

Expletive Negation

Expletive Negation (EN) is a phenomenon where an apparently negative marker creates a sort of indifference reading, without contributing a semantic negation of its own:

(5)　Du kannst nicht aufstehen, bis du %(**nicht**) deinen Teller leergegessen hast.
　　　you can NEG get-up until you EN your plate finished have
　　　'You can't get up until you have finished your plate.'
　　　# 'You can't get up until you have not finished your plate.'　　　　German

Expletive Negation is generally taken to be an NPI: it is licensed in downward-entailing contexts like *until*, but not in upward entailing contexts, such as *after*:

(6)　Du kannst nicht aufstehen, **bis/*nachdem** du nicht deinen Teller leergegessen hast
　　　you can NEG get-up **until/after** you EN your plate finished have
　　　'You can not get up until you have finished your plate.'　　　　German

NPIs are generally domain-wideners (Kadmon & Landman 1993) (see Krifka (1995), Chierchia (2013) for a refinement and a formal implementation of the intuition that NPIs trigger strengthening effects).

Eilam (2009), Preminger (2010) and Chierchia (2013): EN triggers domain widening:

(7)　a.　ma še-dani katav hitparsem ba-iton
　　　　　what that-Danny wrote was.published in.the-newspaper
　　　　　'What Danny wrote was published in the newspaper.'　　　　Hebrew

　　　b.　ma še-dani lo katav hitparsem ba-iton
　　　　　what that-Danny EN wrote was.published in.the-newspaper
　　　　　'What**ever** Danny wrote was published in the newspaper.'　　　　Hebrew

West Germanic NC involves Expletive Negation

Neg-Words implicitly introduce a domain of quantification, which can be widened and trigger the presence of an NPI licenser, like *at all*:

(8)　A: Did you see any of the grad students at the party?
　　　B: I saw **nobody**. I actually stayed home that night, so I really saw **nobody at all**!

Bavarian optional NC triggers a domain widening / strenghtening effect (data from (Eastern) West Middle Bavarian):

(9)　a.　Peter hod koan Menschn gseng Peter hod koan Menschn ned gseng
　　　　　Peter has no human seen Peter has no human EN seen
　　　　　'Peter saw nobody, Peter has seen nobody at all.'　　　　Bavarian

　　　b.　# Peter hod koan Menschn ned gseng, Peter hod koan Menschn gseng
　　　　　Peter has no human EN seen Peter has no human seen
　　　　　'Peter saw nobody, Peter has seen nobody at all.'　　　　Bavarian

If the negative marker in question is an EN, i.e. an NPI licensed by the Neg-Word, the fact that Neg-Word > Neg yields a single negation follows immediately:

(10)　da Valère niemand nie gezien oat
　　　　that Valère nobody EN/*NEG seen had
　　　　'that Valère hadn't seen anybody.'　　　　West Flemish

A double negation reading results in (10) because *nie*, unable to be EN as it would not be licensed, must be a normal negative marker:

(11)　da Valère nie niemand gezien oat
　　　　that Valère *EN/NEG nobody seen had
　　　　'that Valère hadn't seen nobody' (=had seen somebody)

Conclusion: Expletive Negative Concord is a better explanation for West Germanic NC patterns.

Conclusions

- What looks like West Germanic NC involving Neg-Words and negative markers is not in fact NC (as narrowly defined), but EN.
- **Why does this inverted structure occur?**
  – The 'inverted' 'NC' is a function of the EN needing to be c-commanded by its licenser.
- **Is there a relationship with its optionality?**
  – The 'optionality' is an illusion given that EN contributes its own meaning.

References

Chierchia, Gennaro. 2013. *Logic in Grammar: Polarity, Free Choice and Intervention*. Vol. 2 (Oxford studies in semantics and pragmatics). Oxford:Oxford University Press.

Eilam, Aviad. 2009. *The Crosslinguistic Realization of -Ever: Evidence from Modern Hebrew*. In Malcolm Elliott (ed.), Proceedings of the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society (CLS), vol. 2, 39–53. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.

Haegeman, Liliane. 1995. *The syntax of negation*. Vol. 75. Cambridge University Press.

Kadmon, Nirit & Fred Landman. 1993. *Any*. 16(4). 353–422.

Krifka, Manfred. 1995. *The semantics and pragmatics of polarity items*. 25(3-4). 209–257.

Preminger, Omer. 2010. *There's an NPI in whatever*. Ms. MIT.