On the syntax of variable negative concord in English varieties

In this talk we propose a new theory of negative concord (NC) which combines components of the movement-based theory of Blanchette (2015, B15) with certain features of the Agree-based theory of Zeijlstra (2004). The proposal is motivated by data from English variable NC.

The movement account. B15 develops a theory of NC which builds directly on the theory of neg-raising and NPIs in Collins & Postal (2014, CP14). This theory captures the dependency between the negative elements in NC configurations such as (1a) in terms of movement: a NEG that is base-generated in the DP in a structure is raised to adjoin to the clause, as (1b); *no* is the spellout of the in the DP in the lower copy of <NEG>, and *-n't* is a spellout of NEG in the raised position. As B15 notes, this is in effect a resumption analysis of NC.

(1) a. I didn't see nobody. b. I did NEG_1 say [$<NEG_1>$ [body]]

As it is built on CP14, B15 predicts that NC will be possible across clause boundaries with neg-raising predicates, and she notes this is borne out with data from a corpus of Appalachian English, where NC into finite clauses embedded by *reckon* is attested.

(3) I don't reckon there was no federal men back then. (B15: 82)

That some accept (3) is a problem for Zeijlstra (2004), who takes the clause-boundedness of NC cross-linguistically to be a strong and correct prediction of his Agree-based approach. We provide judgment data which confirms examples like (3) are OK for some but not all speakers.

Problems. We identify two problems for the movement account which motivate an alternative.

Problem 1: cross-clausal NC. While in some varieties cross-clausal NC may only be possible in neg-raising contexts, we show that NC is possible across non-neg-raising predicates such as *say* and *know* in African American Englishes (henceforth AAE). Weldon (1995, 386) provides (4a,b), attested in corpus data, while Martin & Wolfram (1998, 20) give (5).

(4) a. I ain't know he had no curl. b. I ain't say nobody said nothing 'bout no sick.

(5) He ain't say nobody was eating with no college president.

More problematic still, NC dependencies in AAE can sometimes cross relative clause (RC) boundaries, in particular if the head determiner of the modified nominal is also an NC item, as in Labov's (1972) famous (6a), and others such as (6b). We provide judgment data to confirm that (4)-(6) receive NC readings, and further corpus data to show that they're not mere outliers.

(6) a. It ain't no cat can't get in no coop. b. There's nothing that nobody can do about it.

B15 and Zeijlstra predict (4)-(6) to be impossible (e.g. such configurations prohibit neg-raising), and (6) may seem to doom *all* syntactic accounts, since RCs are typically strong islands. But Sichel (2018) shows that the islandhood of RCs depends on syntactic properties of the RC head, and an important fact about NC into RCs in AAE is that it *requires* the head to be an NCI; if it is a plain indefinite, a double negation reading arises (marked as # here).

(7) He don't like #(no) bars that got no racists in them. (AAE, judgment data)

This effect of putting an NCI at the edge of the island suggests a movement-based analysis.

Problem 2 concerns the analysis of NC where there are multiple NC items, such as (4b), (5), (6). Recall that B15 characterizes NC as resumption, where the lower *no*-words are in effect resumptive copies of the negation that raises to the highest clause. This account faces the problem that very typically resumption involves pronouncing some element like a pronoun at the launching site of movement and nowhere else; that is, multiple resumption of the kind that would be required for (4b) (*nobody… nothing … no sick*) is virtually unattested. The problem is not alleviated if NC in B15's system is recast as multiple copy spellout of the kind invoked by Nunes (2004) for German wh-copy constructions, because unlike these constructions, the elements in the chain of negative dependents in NC clauses need not all be realized with the same form, as 'mixed' chains which involve both *no*-items and *any/ever*-items are possible, such as (7). (CP14/B15 need to analyse such cases in terms of movement out of all the polarity items, given the conditions of their system.) Moreover, even in cases of consistent NC the lower elements in the chain may be morphologically very distinct, such as in cases like (6) where two of the lower NEGs are determiners and another is a verbal negation.

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(7) …but we **never** had **any** luck there **neither**. (CBC podcast "Someone Knows Something")

It is clear, then, that the elements of an NC dependency are independent of each other morphologically. This is something that the Agree-based analysis of Zeijlstra captures well, since the dependency is simply a featural dependency between multiple independent elements.

Analysis. We follow CP14 and B15 in deriving NC dependencies with movement, but we don't tie this to neg-raising and don't take it to be scopally vacuous; rather, the movement involved is much like *wh*-movement, in that it extends the mover's scope and may potentially proceed long-distance via clause boundaries. On our analysis, the mover is a null NegP which merges in the specifier of the lowest negative element (e.g. an NPI/NCI) and then raises to a higher scope position, typically in the spec of the ΣP just below T. This NegP conditions the form of the head whose specifier it occupies by agreement; that is, the head bears a uPol feature which is valued by the NegP by Agree, and this agreement results in the relevant NCI form of the head: *no* if it is D, *n't* if it is Σ. Thus a simple example like (1a) is derived as in (8).

(8) [TP subj T [ΣP NegP_i [Σ' Σ [VP V [DP <NegP_i>] [D' $\text{D}_{[\text{Pol:NEG}]}$ [body]]]]]

The derivation of cases with multiple NC DPs such as (4b) and (5) would involve ATB-movement of NegPs within both DPs, as in (9). This is similar to what is proposed by Collins et al. (2017), but for our account there is no radical reconstruction of the raised NegP, as there is for them, and so we do not need the additional technology of polyadic quantification (which risks massive overgeneration) to ensure only one of the negations is interpreted, as CP14 do, nor any other account based on indexation or "negative absorption" (as in B15). Rather, for our account to work we may adopt a syntax-semantics for interpreting the lower copies of the raised NegPs as bound variables, and we sketch an implementation in terms of Abels & Marti's (2010) analysis of high-scoping negative quantifiers in German, where the raised quantifier binds choice-function variables in the lower DPs. As for the fact that our derivation involves ATB-extraction from non-coordinate structures, as partially schematized for (4b) in (9), Vicente (2017) shows that restricting ATB to coordinations leads to undergeneration, and so we follow Citko (2005) in assuming that such derivations (we adopt Citko's in terms of parallel merge) are not to be ruled out entirely but rather they should be filtered by conditions which apply at the interfaces (which Vicente's exceptions may help to elucidate).

(9) [TP I [ΣP NegP_i [Σ' Σ [VP say [TP [DP t_i [D' $\text{D}_{[\text{NEG}]}$ [body]] [VP say [DP t_i [D' $\text{D}_{[\text{NEG}]}$ [thing]] …

As for 'mixed' cases like (7), these can also be derived by ATB-movement on our account, since the D which would be realized as *any* is syntactically independent from the moving NegP itself (which is null) and thus able to be realized with a non-NC form. On this analysis, English variable NC is an instance of *variation in spellout*, where *any* and *no* are simply two outputs of a probabilistic variable rule which learners would acquire on the basis of input. In the talk we outline how differences between varieties wrt their 'degrees' of NC may be accounted for.

As for Problem 1, the task at hand is to improve on B15 and hone in on what the dialectal ingredients are which would allow for the different cross-clausal NC options. We suggest that cross-clausal NC may be conditioned by the availability of Pol features on the embedding C to drive NegP movement through its edge: if they are absent, NegP may not pass through and will thus be trapped in the lower clause, ruling out NC. We propose that Pol features only appears on C in dialects with polarity-driven T-to-C movement, and we suggest that negative aux inversion in AAE ("ain't nobody say nothing") is the sign that this dialect has such a feature. The absence of true cross-clausal NC in British varieties is then unsurprising as these varieties lack negative aux inversion (Smith 2000). Finally, RCs allow for NC into them when the head NP is an NCI since relativization gets the NegP to the edge of the RC without requiring any crossing dependencies, and this is the primary source of islandhood of RCs (cf. Sichel 2018).

Selected refs: Blanchette, F. 2015. *English Negative Concord, Negative Polarity, and Double Negation*. CUNY PhD diss. **Collins, C. & P. Postal**. 2014. *Classical NEG raising.* MIT Press. **Zeijlstra, H.** 2004. *Sentential negation and negative concord*. Utrecht: LOT. **Vicente, L.** 2016. ATB without coordination. NELS 46.