Negative Concord (NC) refers to a phenomenon where negation is semantically interpreted once in spite of being expressed by more than one element in the clause, see (1).

(1)  Pedro no compró nada
     Peter NEG buy-3SG.PAST NOTHING
     ‘Pedro didn’t say anything’

The characterization of NC has been subject to much debate in the literature. While some approaches (Tubau 2008, Zeijlstra 2004) claim that NC is the result of the establishment of a syntactic relation (i.e., Agree) between the n-word and the sentential negative marker, as shown in (2); others claim that NC is a semantic phenomenon and thus, not subject to syntactic restrictions (Giannakidou 2000, 2006; Uribe-Etxebarria 1994).

(2)  Pedro no [iNeg:val] compró nada [uNeg: ]
     Agree

However, if NC is truly the result of a syntactic operation, namely Agree, then it should be subject to strict locality. As a result, NC relationships between participating elements in two different syntactic domains or clauses should not obtain. However, Spanish shows an interesting asymmetry: While NC obtains in embedded subjunctive/infinitive clauses, it fails to obtain in embedded indicative clauses, compare (3)-(4) to (5).

(3)  Javier no cree [CP que nadie lavara la ropa]
     Javier NEG believe-3SG.PAST.IND. that NO ONE wash-3SG.PAST.SSUBJ the clothes
     NC: ‘It is not the case that Javier believes that someone had washed the clothes’

(4)  Juan no espera comprar nada en la tienda
     Juan NEG expect-3SG.PRSNT buy-INF NOTHING at the store
     NC: ‘It is not the case that John expects to buy something at the store’

(5)  Javier no dijo [CP que nadie habia lavado la ropa]
     Javier NEG say-3SG.PAST.IND. that NO ONE had washed the clothes
     *NC: ‘It is not the case that Javier said that someone had washed the clothes’

The fact that NC is able to obtain across embedded subjunctive/infinitive clauses challenges its characterization as syntactic. However, NC as a syntactic phenomenon can be tested further. Some clauses like adjuncts and complex-NP clauses are well-known for being islands to syntactic operation. Thus, the goal of this presentation will be to test whether NC is a syntactic phenomenon by examining its behavior across embedded indicative and subjunctive clauses as well as adjuncts and complex-NP clauses.
References


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