Licensing N-words Across Domains
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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-$_{3SG.PAST.SUBJ}$ 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 había 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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