

## Colloquial emphatic negation in Russian and morphology of negative concord

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ABSTRACT

Alongside the standard negation, colloquial Russian has grammaticalized an alternative negation marker, *xuj* 'dick' and its euphemisms, that has negative force but does not license *ni*-phrases in its scope. Adopting the overall approach of Zeijlstra (2004) to negation and negative concord, I explore the properties of this construction to provide novel evidence that both semantic licensing and morphological concord are implicated in forming *ni*-negative indefinites in Slavic. Specifically, I interpret the inability of the negator *xuj* to license *ni*-negative indefinites as evidence that *ni*-negative indefinites undergo morphological concord with *Neg<sup>o</sup>*, which is spelled out as the standard negator *ne*.

**KEYWORDS** negative concord · emphatic negation · *ni*-indefinites · taboo negation

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Situations where a language uses several coexisting patterns to express sentential negation have not been studied particularly widely. This paper addresses such a situation in Russian, which, alongside the common Slavic pattern of standard negation expounded by the preverbal proclitic *ne*=, exhibits a fully grammaticalized, parallel system based on the taboo word *xuj* 'dick' and its euphemisms.

As is well known, the standard negation in Russian obligatorily participates in Strict Negative Concord (SNC), Giannakidou & Zeijlstra (2017), i.e., what are pre-theoretically called "negative indefinites" co-occur in a clause without canceling out the negative force of each other, (1), but they require the presence of the sentential negation marker *ne*.

- (1) **Ni**-kto **ni**-čego **ne** ponjal.  
 NEG-who NEG-what NEG understood  
 'No one understood anything.'

Although the technical implementations vary, a number of works propose to analyze NC as agreement, e.g. Zeijlstra (2004), Haegeman & Lohndal (2010), and Penka (2011). Alternative proposals exist as well, e.g. Zanuttini (1991), De Swart & Sag (2002), and Iordăchioaia & Richter (2015). Early precursors of agreement-based approaches to negation and negative concord in Russian are Brown & Franks (1995) and Brown (1999).

Taboo words are known for their versatility in grammaticalization processes, see e.g. Napoli & Hoeksema (2009). In particular, they can give rise to negators (*squatitives* in the terms of Postal (2004), Postma (2001), Hoeksema (2009), Sailer (2018), Sailor (2020).

- (2) a. English<sup>1</sup>  
 I know **fuck all** about physics.

<sup>1</sup><https://literallystories2014.com/2020/12/19/week-303-the-leader-of-the-rat-pack-three-barrels-is-mingling-and-popeyes-obvious-love-for-power-ballads/> [accessed 04/23/2021]

- b. Colloquial German<sup>2</sup>  
**Einen Dreck** rufe ich zurück.  
 a.ACC dirt.ACC I.call I back  
 ‘I won’t call back.’

A similar pattern of negation using *diabhal* ‘devil’ as the negator is attested in Modern Irish as well, (Ó Siadhail 1989: p. 327), see D’Antuono (2024) for a recent minimalist analysis of this phenomenon, called by him “demonic negation”.<sup>3</sup> The grammar of negative constructions that emerge this way will be different from the standard negation pattern(s) in a given language. That makes them an interesting tool to investigate polarity-related phenomena.

Based on the properties of such a negation pattern in Russian, I argue that licensing of NegP in Russian (headed by *ne*) proceeds according to Zeijlstra’s proposal, i.e. by a dedicated high operator with an interpretable Neg feature. However, unlike Zeijlstra, I argue that negative indefinites are semantically licensed as NPIs by such an operator rather than undergo agreement with it. The morphological marking, spelled out as the proclitic *ni-*, is a result of morphological concord of indefinites with Neg<sup>0</sup>. The judgments reported in this paper are based on the author’s native speaker intuitions and informal consultations with five speakers of Russian.

The paper is organized as follows. §2 provides a basic description of the colloquial emphatic negation pattern under discussion. §3 addresses NPIs licensed by this negation. §4 and §5 are the key technical part of the paper. §4 discusses the position of the negator in the syntactic structure and its relationship with the standard NegP, while §5 explores the implications of this construction for the theory of negative concord in Russian. §6 addresses other *wh*-based indefinites within the proposed system, while §7 addresses several remaining issues, namely the behavior of *ni*-NP negative indefinites and occurrences of *ni*-indefinites in non-negative clauses.

## 2 THE PHENOMENON: ‘XUJ’-NEGATION IN RUSSIAN

Alongside the standard negation, expressed by *ne* procliticized to the verb, a very colloquial register of Russian can emphatically negate sentences with the prosodically prominent word *xuj* ‘dick’ and its various euphemisms (*fig*, *xren*, *xer*, etc.), (2-b). I will call this pattern *xuj*-negation, while the term *ne*-negation will be used for the standard negation.

- (3) a. Standard negation  
 Vasja **ne**=pošël na rabotu segodnja.  
 Vasya NEG=went on work.ACC today  
 ‘Vasya didn’t go to work today.’
- b. *xuj*-negation  
 <XUJ> Vasja <XUJ> pošël <\*XUJ> na rabotu segodnja.  
 x.NEG Vasya went on work.ACC today  
 ‘Vasya didn’t go to work today.’

Although uncommon in edited written texts, this negation pattern is robustly attested in the spoken language and online (4). The naturally attested examples in (4) indicate that *xuj*-negation indeed has negative force, because the clauses in the scope of *xuj*-negation stand in the past or present indicative. Therefore, *xuj* indeed negates the propositions ‘I understood X’ (4-a), ‘I left yesterday’ (4-b), ‘I violated something’ (4-c), and ‘He writes in this manner elsewhere’ (4-d).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup><https://bipo2015.wordpress.com/2021/06/> [accessed 12/13/2021]

<sup>3</sup>I thank Jevgenij Zintchenko for this reference.

<sup>4</sup>In this respect *xuj*-negation differs from *vrjad li* ‘hardly’, which otherwise has a very similar distribution. Another item with similar properties, the obsolete *čerta s dva* devil-NUM about two, was probably a genuine

- (4) a. Tol'ko **xuj** ja ponjal čto TS xotel skazat'.  
 only X.NEG I understood what topic.starter wanted to say  
 'Though I didn't understand what the topic starter wanted to say.'<sup>5</sup>
- b. Da ja **xuj** uexal včera.  
 PRT I X.NEG left yesterday  
 'I didn't leave yesterday.'<sup>6</sup>
- c. **Xuj** ja tam čego narušil.  
 X.NEG I there what violated  
 'I didn't violate anything (i.e. any traffic rules).'<sup>7</sup>
- d. **Xuj** on gde eščë tak pišet.  
 X.NEG he where else so writes  
 'He doesn't write this way elsewhere.'<sup>8</sup>

Unlike the standard negation marker, *ne*, the negator *xuj* cannot express constituent negation (5).

- (5) Magazin otkroetsja **ne** /\***xuj** segodnja.  
 shop will.open NEG X.NEG today  
 'The shop will open not today.'

In the theoretical literature, this pattern of negation has only been addressed so far in the talk Hehl et al. (2019). Hehl et al. (2019) argue that the meaning of the negator in *xuj*-negation has a specific modal component. While this conclusion is in all likelihood valid, any systematic discussion of the semantics of *xuj*-negation, and, in particular, of interaction between negation and modality, is beyond the scope of this paper. In the descriptive literature, *xuj*-negation is mentioned (with the Russian gloss '*ne*') in Levin (1986: p.69).

## 2.1 STANDARD NEGATION AND 'XUJ'-NEGATION IN THE SAME CLAUSE

If *ne*-negation and *xuj*-negation occur in the same clause, they cannot enter into the Negative Concord relationship, that is to say, only a double negation reading is possible in such cases (6).

- (6) a. **XUJ** Vasja **ne** pojdët na rabotu.  
 X.NEG Vasya NEG will.go on work.ACC  
 'It is not the case that Vasya won't go to work.' (Double Negation reading)/  
 \*'Vasya won't go to work.' (Negative Concord reading)
- b. **XUJ** Vasja **nikogda ne** p'ët.  
 X.NEG Vasya never NEG drinks  
 'It is not the case that Vasya never drinks.'  
 \*'Vasya never drinks.'

Accordingly, *xuj*-negation and *ne*-negation instantiate separate negative operators.

## 2.2 RESTRICTIONS ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF 'XUJ'-NEGATION

Unlike *ne*-negation, *xuj*-negation is subject to certain distribution restrictions. First, *xuj*-negation requires the host clause to be finite.

negator, but I have no firm intuitions about it. I thank Natasha Kasher and Aldan Yerbalanov for these observations.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.skycentre.net/topic/24389-снайдермэн-экзум> [accessed 12/05/2021]

<sup>6</sup><https://2ch.hk/fj/res/12103.html>, accessed 04/19/2021]

<sup>7</sup><https://max-andriyakov.livejournal.com/187171.html> [accessed 11/25/2022]

<sup>8</sup><https://holywarsoo.net/viewtopic.php?id=1961&p=235> [accessed 11/25/2022]

- (7) a. Infinitival embedded clause  
 Ja rešil [\***xuj** / <sup>ok</sup>**ne** xodit' na rabotu].  
 I decided X.NEG NEG go.INF on work  
 'I decided not to go to work.'
- b. Infinitival main clause  
 ?\* Tam **xuj** proj-ti.  
 there X.NEG pass.through-INF  
 intended: 'It's impossible to pass through there.'<sup>9</sup>

Hehl et al. (2019) proposed a generalization that *xuj*-negation is restricted to main clauses. In actuality, the picture appears to be significantly more complex. While some restrictions definitely exist, examples with *xuj*-negation in embedded clauses of different types are robustly attested, as shown in (8) below. The counterparts of these sentences with *ne*-negation are all grammatical.

- (8) a. Indicative complement<sup>10</sup>  
 Ja dumaju [čto **xuj** eto proizojdet].  
 I think COMP X.NEG this will.happen  
 'I think this won't happen.'<sup>11</sup>
- b. Non-indicative complement  
 Nadejus' vlast' sdelat tak [čtoby **xuj** oni vernulis'].  
 I.hope authorities will.do so COMP X.NEG they would.return  
 'I hope the authorities will make sure that they don't return.'<sup>12</sup>
- c. Conditional  
 Tema ne lez' v politiku [jesli **xuj** čto ponimaeš'].  
 Tema NEG dabble in politics if X.NEG what you.understand  
 'Tema, don't dabble in politics if you understand nothing about it.'<sup>13</sup>
- d. Reason adjunct  
 Černuju ikru ja ne pokupaju nikogda [potomu čto **xuj** na neë  
 black caviar I NEG I.buy never because COMP X.NEG on it  
 zarabatyvaju].  
 I.learn  
 'I never buy black caviar, because I don't earn enough for it.'<sup>14</sup>
- e. Relative clause  
 Ty poxož na maloletnego debila [kotoryj **xuj** čto videl v žizni].  
 you similar on juvenile idiot which X.NEG what saw in life  
 'You resemble a juvenile idiot who hasn't seen anything in life.'<sup>15</sup>
- f. Noun complement  
 V kompanijax tipičnejšaja situacija [kogda **xuj** ty  
 in companies most.typical situation when X.NEG you  
 dožděšsja ot zakazčika TZ].  
 obtain.after.long.waiting from client specs

<sup>9</sup>I thank Aldan Yerbalanov for this observation. Some speakers, however, accept such examples. I leave the reasons and the extent of this interspeaker variation for further research.

<sup>10</sup>For declarative complements, examples with the following matrix predicates were found *znat'* 'know', *sčitat'* 'to be of the opinion', *dokazyvat'* 'convince/prove', (*ne*) *somnevat'sja* '(not) to doubt', *nadejat'sja* 'hope', *predčuvstvat'* 'have presentiment', *pomnit'* 'remember', *vangovat'* 'predict', *govorit'* 'say', *pizdet'* 'say, lie', *ponjatno* 'it is clear', *uveren* 'is sure'.

<sup>11</sup><https://odessa.xxx/t/6985/> [accessed 11/24/2022]

<sup>12</sup>[https://twitter.com/pvt\\_Scarecrow/status/1568978112368500742](https://twitter.com/pvt_Scarecrow/status/1568978112368500742) [accessed 11/24/2022]

<sup>13</sup><https://tema.livejournal.com/1660052.html?page=2> [accessed on 11/22/2022]

<sup>14</sup><https://alkorikova.livejournal.com/> [accessed 11/24/2022]

<sup>15</sup>[https://vk.com/wall-58666510\\_1675677](https://vk.com/wall-58666510_1675677) [accessed 11/25/2022]

‘The situation when you don’t get the specs from the customer is most typical in companies.’<sup>16</sup>

Incidentally, the ability to appear in embedded contexts distinguishes *xuj*-negation from the English “sentence-initial refutation marker”, (Horn’s 2016 term) *bullshit/the fuck*.<sup>17</sup>

The *xuj*-negation pattern is impossible with imperatives (9-a), although it is possible in other non-indicative root clauses (9-b). On the other hand, the counterparts of these sentences with *ne*-negation are all grammatical.

- (9) a. \***Xuj** kuri!  
 X.NEG smoke.IMP.2SG  
 intended: ‘Don’t smoke!’  
 b. **Xuj by** on vyžil posle takix zapoev.  
 X.NEG MOD he survived after such drinking.binges  
 ‘He wouldn’t have survived after such drinking binges.’<sup>18</sup>

*Xuj*-negation cannot occur in questions of any kind, at least not on the non-echo reading. Again, the counterparts of these sentences with *ne*-negation are all grammatical.

- (10) a. wh-question  
 \*Kto **xuj** pojdët na rabotu?  
 who X.NEG will.go on work.ACC  
 intended: ‘Who won’t go to work?’  
 b. Y/N-question  
 \*Vasja **xuj** pojdët na rabotu?  
 Vasya X.NEG will.go on work.ACC  
 intended: ‘Won’t Vasya go to work?’  
 c. Alternative question  
 \*Vasja ili Petya **xuj** pojdët na rabotu?  
 Vasya or Petya X.NEG will.go on work.ACC  
 intended: ‘Won’t Petya or Vasya go to work?’

For the sake of completeness, let me add that *xuj*-negation may not replace *ne*-negation in its capacity of expletive negation. See Brown & Franks (1995); Brown (1999: p.94–111), and Abels (2005) for various analyses of expletive negation in Russian; as well as Inkova (2006) for an overview of contexts where expletive negation appears.

- (11) a. Ja čut’ **ne** /\***xuj** razbil vazu.  
 I barely NEG X.NEG broke vase.ACC  
 ‘I nearly broke the vase.’  
 b. Poka ja **ne** /\***xuj** vyučil gollandskij ja ne čital Reve.  
 while I NEG X.NEG learned Dutch I NEG read Reve  
 ‘Until I learned Dutch, I hadn’t read Reve.’  
 c. Ja bojus’ kak by Lev **ne** /\***xuj** razbil vazu.  
 I fear how MOD Lev NEG X.NEG broke vase.ACC  
 ‘I fear that Lev will break the vase.’

These facts are compatible both with the analysis of Brown & Franks (1995) and Brown (1999), who argue that expletive negation does not involve semantic negation, which in their implementation means that it is not accompanied by a negative operator in Spec NegP. On the analysis of Abels (2005), on the other hand, expletive negation is regular negation that takes a high position at LF. At present, I do not see how to reconcile the

<sup>16</sup><https://2ch.life/pr/arch/2022-09-03/res/2336182.html> [accessed 11/24/2022]

<sup>17</sup>I thank Steve Franks and Colin Davis for a discussion of this point.

<sup>18</sup>[https://vk.com/wall-130938419\\_23570](https://vk.com/wall-130938419_23570) [accessed 7/15/2021]

facts in (11) with Abels' analysis. I must leave the matter for further research.

To recapitulate, *xuj*-negation occurs in declarative finite main root clauses and some finite embedded ones. While details are unclear, these restrictions seem to indicate that *xuj*-negation is located high in the left periphery of the clause. The main point of this paper does not depend on the precise structural position of *xuj*-negation.

### 3 'XUJ'-NEGATION AND NPI LICENSING

In this subsection, I show that *xuj*-negation licenses NPIs, but not *ni*-words.<sup>19</sup> Russian has few NPIs other than *ni*-words, and they typically belong to a rather literary register (e.g. *pal'cem \*(ne) poševelit'* 'lift a finger' and *pal'cem o palec \*(ne) udarit'* 'idem', lit. 'strike a finger against a finger'). They are somewhat infelicitous with *xuj*-negation because of a strong register clash. However, modulo this clash, they are licensed by *xuj*-negation.

- (12) #**XUJ** on radi tebja pal'cem poševelit.  
 X.NEG he for you finger.INS move  
 'He wouldn't lift a finger for your sake.'

In the matching register, *xuj*-negation licenses an NPI, *ebat'* lit. to fuck 'to give a fuck', which is indeed a (weak) NPI (13).

- (13) a. Standard negation  
 Menja éto \*(ne) ebët.  
 I.ACC this.NOM NEG fucks  
 'I \*(don't) give a fuck about it.'
- b. Y/N question  
 Tebja éto ebët?  
 you.ACC this.NOM fucks  
 'Do you give a fuck about it?'
- c. Conditional  
 [Ešli tebja éto ebët] ty étim i zanimajsja.  
 if you.ACC this fucks you this FOC deal.with  
 'If you give a fuck about this, you yourself deal with it.'
- d. Xuj-negation  
**XUJ** menja éto ebët.  
 X.NEG I.ACC this.NOM fucks  
 'I don't give a fuck about it.'

However, *xuj*-negation cannot license *ni*-words or *ni*-NPs; compare the sentences in (14-a) and (14-b); and (14-c) and (14-d).

- (14) a. **Ni**-kto **ni**-čego segodnja **ne** ponjal.  
 NEG-who NEG-what today NEG understood  
 'No one understood anything today.'
- b. \***<XUJ>** ni-kto ni-čego segodnja **<XUJ>** ponjal.  
 X.NEG NEG-who NEG-what today X.NEG understood  
 intended: 'No one understood anything today.'

<sup>19</sup>*Xuj*-negation does not license the genitive of negation either (i). I propose that this indicates that the genitive of negation in Russian involves morphological agreement with the NegP instantiated by *ne*, which is effectively what was proposed by Brown (1999: p.62).

- (i) Vasja **ne** /\***xuj** razbival vaz-y.  
 Vasya NEG X.NEG broke vase.GEN  
 'Vasya didn't break a vase.'

- c. Ja **ne** dam emu **ni** kopejki.  
I NEG will.give him NI kopeck.GEN  
'I won't give him a kopeck.'
- d. \***XUJ** ja dam emu **ni** kopejki.  
X.NEG I will.give him NI kopeck.GEN  
intended: 'I won't give him a kopeck.'

To render the meaning 'No one understood anything.' with *xuj*-negation, different indefinites, most naturally, plain wh-words,<sup>20</sup> have to be used (15-a). Remarkably, it is the bare wh-stem of the respective *ni*-item that surfaces under *xuj*-negation, compare (14-a) and (15-a). Modulo a certain register clash, other indefinites may be used as well (15-b). Their stems are still the same wh-words. While the sentences in (15-a)–(15-b) are constructed to form a minimal pair with (14-a), examples of this type do occur naturally; (15-c).

- (15) a. **XUJ** segodnja **kto** **čego** ponjal.  
X.NEG today who what understood  
'No one understood anything today.'
- b. **XUJ** segodnja **kto-nibud'**?-**libo čego-nibud'**?-**libo** ponjal.  
X.NEG today who-IDF what-IDF understood  
'No one understood anything today.'
- c. **XUJ** ty potom **komu** **čto** dokažeš.  
X.NEG you later who.DAT what.ACC you.will.prove  
'You won't prove anything to anyone later.'<sup>21</sup>

Unlike the regular negative marker *ne* (1), emphatic negation must precede all the indefinites it licenses: compare the grammatical sentence in (15-a) and the ungrammatical one in (16).

- (16) \***Kto** <**XUJ**> **čego** <**XUJ**> ponjal.  
who X.NEG what understood  
Intended: 'No one understood anything.'

Unlike *ni*-phrases, indefinites under *xuj*-negation cannot be associated with *počti* 'almost' (17-a)–(17-b). The latter must precede the *xuj*-negation marker.

- (17) a. Ja počti ni-čego ne ponjal.  
I almost NI-what NEG understood  
'I understood almost nothing.'
- b. \*Ja **xuj** počti čego ponjal.  
I X.NEG almost what understood  
intended: 'I understood almost nothing.'
- c. Oni bilis'-bilis' i počti **xren** čego dobilis'.  
they struggled-struggled and almost X.NEG what achieved  
'They struggled and struggled, but achieved almost nothing.'<sup>22</sup>
- d. Krome menja počti **xuj** **kto** prišěl.  
besides I.GEN almost X.NEG who arrived  
'Besides me, almost no one arrived.'<sup>23</sup>

With these facts in mind, we can proceed to an analysis of *xuj*-negation in Russian. To

<sup>20</sup>This function of plain wh-words in Russian has not been explicitly described in the theoretical literature so far: see Yanovich (2005) and Hengeveld et al. (2023) for a discussion of non-interrogative uses of Russian wh-words, although the latter authors observe that wh-items lacking interrogative force can appear in environments where NPIs are licensed.

<sup>21</sup><https://2ch.life/b/arch/2022-02-13/res/263093981.html>, accessed 11/25/2022.

<sup>22</sup><https://nosikot.livejournal.com/5174866.html>, accessed 11/28/2022]

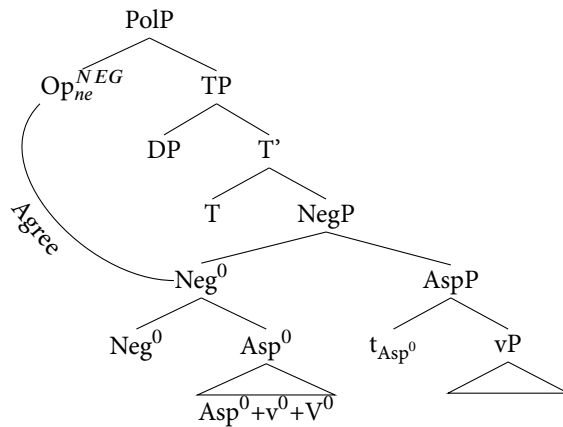
<sup>23</sup><https://www.yaplakal.com/forum2/st/75/topic1442356.html> [accessed 11/28/2022]

account for the licensing of indefinites in the scope of *xuj*-negation, any such analysis must include a proposal about the licensing of *ni*-items.

#### 4 SYNTACTIC POSITION OF ‘XUJ’-NEGATION AND ITS RELATION WITH NEGP

I adopt the basic clause architecture of Russian from Gribanova (2017: p.1085). For *ne*-negation in Russian, I adopt Gribanova’s (2017) proposal that it is licensed by a negative operator high in the clause. I will use the notation  $\text{Op}_{ne}^{NEG}$  instead of Gribanova’s Pol. The overt standard negation, the  $\text{Neg}^0$  head *ne*, is licensed by  $\text{Op}_{ne}^{NEG}$  by means of Agree.<sup>24</sup>

(18)



Besides that, I propose that the Russian clause can host an additional negative operator  $\text{Op}_{xuj}^{NEG}$  high in the left periphery. In this respect, my proposal about *xuj*-negation in Russian is similar to what D’Antuono (2024) proposes for the demonic negation in Irish.

(19)  $[\text{Op}_{xuj}^{NEG} [ \dots [\text{Op}_{ne}^{NEG} \dots [\text{VP}] \dots ]]$

The operator  $\text{Op}_{xuj}^{NEG}$ , if present, is the specifier of the projection whose head is spelled out as *xuj* or its euphemisms. Both operators bear an interpretable [Neg] feature, which explains the double negation reading of (6-a) repeated here as (20).

(20) **XUJ** Vasja **ne** pojdët na rabotu.  
 X.NEG Vasya NEG will.go on work.ACC  
 ‘It is not the case that Vasya won’t go to work.’/\*‘Vasya won’t go to work.’

The following facts support the conclusion that  $\text{Op}_{xuj}^{NEG}$  is situated high in the left periphery of the declarative clause. First, as was shown in (9), §2.2, *xuj*-negation is ungrammatical in imperative clauses, which are standardly assumed to lack the CP layer, see e.g. (Zhang 1991, Rupp 2007; Isac 2015: p.102) Second, unlike the standard negation, *xuj*-negation can take scope over a *nibud’*-indefinite in the subject position, as illustrated by the contrast between (21-a) and (21-b). Examples analogous to (21-b) are attested online (21-c).

<sup>24</sup>This involves establishing an Agree relation between a c-commanded featurally deficient probe ( $\text{Neg}^0$ ) and a c-commanding goal (the negative operator). The theoretical legitimacy of this non-standard theoretical move, initially proposed in Zeijlstra (2004), is a subject of vigorous debate. See Zeijlstra (2012) and Bjorkman & Zeijlstra (2019) in favor of upward Agree, and Preminger (2013), Preminger & Polinsky (2015); and Rudnev (2020, 2021) in favor of the canonical direction of Agree. Deal’s (2021) recent proposal allows one to disengage the direction of Agree from the interpretability of involved features, and to restrict the system to downward Agree. It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in this debate. I will only note that the facts discussed here allow an analysis in terms of upward Agree.

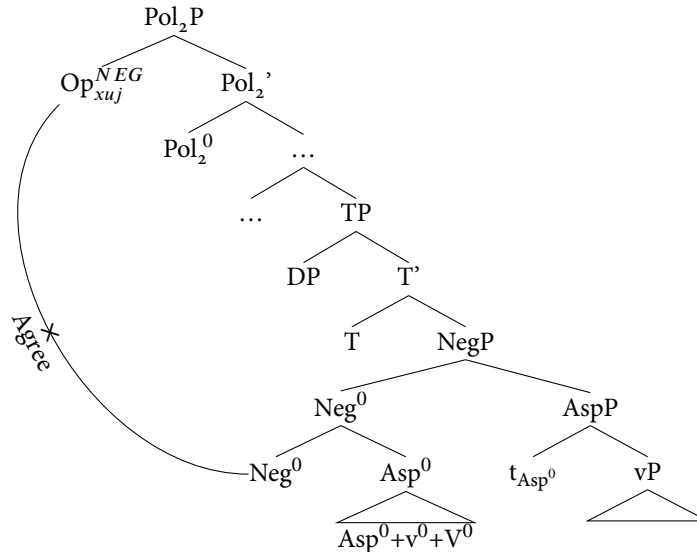


- (21) a. Kto-nibud' **ne** prišël.  
 who-IDF NEG came  
 'Someone didn't come./'No one came.'
- b. **Xuj** kto-nibud' prišël.  
 X.NEG who-IDF came  
 'No one came./'Somebody didn't come.'
- c. **Xuj** kto-nibud' kogda-nibud' menja vytaščit.  
 X.NEG who-IDF when-IDF I.ACC make.go.out  
 'No one will ever make me go out.'<sup>25</sup>

Finally, I assume that interrogative clauses lack the position that accomodates *xuj*-negation, which explains the ungrammaticality of (10).

It remains to explain why the operator  $Op_{xuj}^{NEG}$  fails to undergo Agree with  $Neg^0$  to license NC between *xuj* and *ne* (22). Although  $Neg^0$  has the right feature makeup to agree with  $Op_{xuj}^{NEG}$ , I assume that this agreement is blocked for locality reasons. Specifically, given the assumption is that  $Op_{xuj}^{NEG}$  occupies the specifier of the projection whose head is spelled out as *xuj*, and Agree takes place between them. I propose that  $Op_{xuj}^{NEG}$  is unable to participate in multiple agree and is accordingly unable to additionally agree with  $Neg^0$ . For arguments in favor of the ability to participate in multiple agree being goal specific, see Baker (2008) and Oxford (2017). Therefore, the meaning 'Vasya won't go to work' in (20) is not derived.

(22)



The fact that *xuj* is situated very close to a negative operator can be inferred from the behavior of fragment answers, for which I adopt the combination of analyses of Merchant (2005) and Zeijlstra (2004). In the absence of the overt *xuj*-negator, NPIs licensed by it are ungrammatical, unlike the behavior of *ni*-words under standard negation. The explanation for this is that in fragments lacking overt *xuj*-negation (23-c), the negative operator necessary to license NPIs is absent, unlike under standard negation (23-a).

- (23) Q: Kto pojdët v magazin?  
 who will.go in shop  
 'Who will go to the shop?'

<sup>25</sup><https://v1.anekdot.ru/story-03-display.html?from=3635&sort=1> [accessed 11/28/2022]

- a. Fragment negative answer, standard negation

A1: [ $\text{Op}_{ne}^{NEG}$  [TopP nikto [ $\text{TP } t_{nikto} \dots$ ]]]  
no.one

‘No one.’

- b. Fragment negative answer, *xuj*-negation

A2: ??[ $\text{Op}_{xuj}^{NEG}$  **xuj** kto ...[TP]...]  
X.NEG

‘No one.’

- c. A3: \*[TopP kto [ $\text{Op}_{xuj}^{NEG}$  xuj ...[TP]...]]  
who X.NEG

intended: ‘No one.’

I leave the precise location of  $\text{Pol}_2\text{P}$  in the left periphery for further study.

## 5 LICENSING ‘NI’-ITEMS

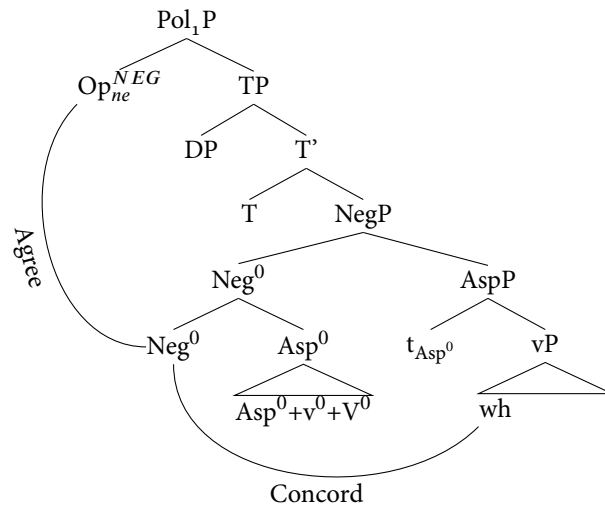
Now let us explore theoretical implications of the fact that *xuj*-negation fails to license *ni*-indefinites (14). I propose that two processes are implicated in deriving clauses with *ni*-indefinites in Russian: semantic licensing of NPI wh-stems and morphological concord between such items and  $\text{Neg}^0$ , which is responsible for the appearance of the proclitic *ni*-.

Recall that *xuj*-negation licenses bare wh-indefinites that are identical to the stems of the respective *ni*-indefinites under standard negation, (14-b) of §3. To account for this phenomenon, I propose that NIs are licensed in the scope of a negative operator as NPIs and are base-generated as bare wh-phrases. I leave aside the issue of how to characterize the environments where a wh-item can, or must, stay bare, see Yanovich (2005) and observations in Hengeveld et al. (2023). The latter authors observe that bare wh-indefinites are licensed in Russian “only in environments that can be roughly characterized as ones licensing negative polarity items.” Accordingly, both  $\text{Op}_{ne}^{NEG}$  and  $\text{Op}_{xuj}^{NEG}$  are capable of licensing them.

On the other hand, given that  $\text{Op}_{xuj}^{NEG}$  fails to license *ni*-indefinites, it is clear that an additional ingredient is implicated in their derivation. I take this process to be morphological concord.<sup>26</sup> I stay agnostic as to how exactly it is to be implemented, restricting myself to the observation that morphological concord, first, does not hinge on the interpretability of the features involved, and, second, can target multiple items – for instance, this is the case when an inanimate noun, whose morphological gender must be uninterpretable, undergoes concord in case and morphological gender with modifying adjectives. The resulting system is illustrated in (24).

<sup>26</sup>In this respect, my proposal is similar to those of Abels (2002, 2005), Bošković (2009), and Rossyaykin (2020) who argue that *ni*-indefinites move into Spec NegP and undergo Spec-head agreement with its head  $\text{Neg}^0$ . In their analyses, however,  $\text{Neg}^0$  bears an interpretable [+Neg] feature, contrary to what is assumed here.

(24)



The proposal to subdivide *ni*-word licensing into semantic licensing by a negative operator and morphological concord with  $\text{Neg}^0$  deviates from the original analysis of Zeijlstra (2004), where *ni*-words would directly agree with the operator.

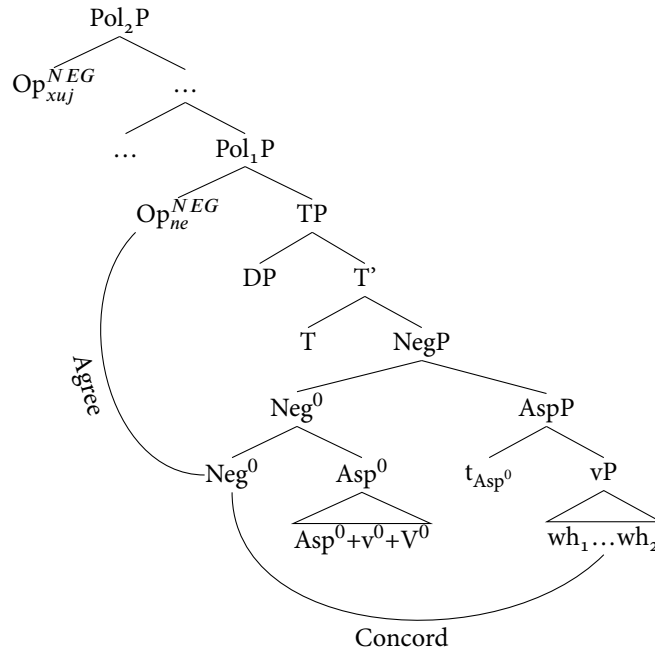
This account makes the following prediction.<sup>27</sup> Bare *wh*-indefinites licensed by *xuj*-negation on the one hand, and standard negation and *ni*-items on the other hand cannot occur in the same clause (25).

- (25) a. \***Xuj kto** ničego **ne** videl.  
 X.NEG who nothing NEG saw  
 intended: 'No one saw anything.'
- b. \***Xuj nikto čego** **ne** videl.  
 X.NEG nobody what NEG saw  
 intended: 'No one saw anything.'

The reason for this is that indefinites are base-generated below  $\text{NegP}$  and accordingly cannot escape agreement with it. Therefore, bare *wh*-indefinites, *kto* 'who' in (25-a) and *čego* 'what' in (25-b) cannot surface at the end of the derivation.

<sup>27</sup>I thank an anonymous reviewer who attracted my attention to this prediction. The data in (25) are partly theirs.

(26)



To recapitulate, I have proposed that *ni*-indefinites are semantically licensed by a negative operator, but the proclitic *ni* is the result of concord between the indefinites and Neg<sup>0</sup>. What remains to be addressed is, first, how this proposal accounts for the existence of other *wh*-based indefinites, and, second, why uses of *ni*-indefinites in the absence of negation do not constitute a counterexample to it.

**6 APPARENT PROBLEM: INTERROGATIVE WH-PHRASES AND WH-BASED INDEFINITES WITH NON-NULL MORPHOLOGICAL MARKING**

As is well known, Russian (like other Slavic languages) has several series of *wh*-based indefinites, see e.g. Haspelmath (1997).

- (27) Indefinites based on *kto* ‘who’  
 kto kto-to kto-nibud’ kto-libo koe-kto  
 who who-IDF who-IDF who-IDF IDF-who

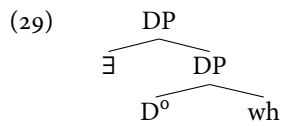
If we assume that all *wh*-based items are generated fully underspecified, we seem to predict that concord with Neg will automatically occur in the presence of Neg. Robustly attested sentences such as those in (28) will be then impossible to derive.<sup>28</sup>

- (28) a. *wh*-question  
 Čego nikto ne ponjal?  
 what nobody NEG understood  
 ‘What did no one understand?’

<sup>28</sup>This shows that the “bagel paradox” (Błaszczak 2002, 2005, Pereltsvaig 2006) only exists as a statistical tendency. I tentatively propose that the reason for its existence is pragmatic, namely, additional existential operators, which are necessary to create a bagel paradox violation, are normally not inserted in the structure.

- b. Indefinite in the scope of negation  
 Davno **ne** čital **čego-libo** stol' bezdarno debil'nogo.  
 long NEG read what-IDF so talentlessly moronic  
 '(I) haven't read anything as talentlessly moronic in a long time.'<sup>29</sup>
- c. Po povodu finala kar'jery xokkeist **ne** skazal **čego-libo**  
 about regarding end career hockey.player NEG said what-IDF  
 opredelennogo.  
 definite  
 'Regarding the end of his career, the hockey player didn't say anything  
 definite.'<sup>30</sup>

To explain this phenomenon, I assume that indefinites with an overt morphological marker come together with a local operator which they undergo concord with as in (29), in the spirit of Kratzer & Shimoyama (2017/2002), Kratzer (2005).



The concord with the operator blocks the concord of the indefinite with  $\text{Neg}^0$ . For interrogative *wh*-phrases, I adopt the proposal of Hengeveld et al. (2023) that to receive interrogative interpretation, *wh*-items must be contrastively focused. I assume that the presence of the respective feature blocks agreement with  $\text{Neg}^0$ .

## 7 REMAINING ISSUES

In this section I address, first, the failure of *xuj*-negation to license *ni* + DP combinations in Russian, and, second, two instances when *ni*-words appear in the absence of sentential negation; specifically, depreciative uses of *ni*-phrases in the absence of negation, and the ability of the preposition *bez* 'without' to license *ni*-phrases.

As was shown in (14-d), *xuj*-negation fails to license *ni* + DP combinations. Within the system I present in §6 and §7, I propose to analyze these items in the following manner. I propose that such items host a [+IDF] D that undergoes concord with  $\text{Neg}^0$  and can be spelled out either as *ni-odin* or as *ni-*. Given that *xuj*-negation is incompatible with an overt  $\text{NegP}$ , such items are not licensed by it.

(Some) additional *ni*-words in Russian are used in affirmatives where they mean approximately "the worst representative of the respective ontological class" (30). I will call this use of negative indefinites depreciative. In this use, they appear without sentential negation and lack negative force.

- (30) a. On byl soveršenno **ni=kto** / **ni=kem**.  
 he was totally nobody.NOM nobody.INS  
 'He was a total nobody.'
- b. Ja vsë éto delal **ni=začem**.  
 I all this did NI=what.for  
 'I did it all in vain.'
- c. Ja priexal iz **ni=otkuda**.  
 I arrived from NI=from.where  
 'I arrived out of the blue.'

Ostensibly, the fact that depreciatively used *ni*-words appear without  $\text{Neg}^0$  to license them presents a challenge for the proposal laid out in §4 and §5. A syntactic analysis for

<sup>29</sup>[https://mobile.twitter.com/drinkins\\_/status/1302875639201050624](https://mobile.twitter.com/drinkins_/status/1302875639201050624) [accessed on 11/24/2021]

<sup>30</sup><https://www.kp.ru/daily/2171207/4319392/> [accessed on 7/13/2021]

this phenomenon was proposed by Fitzgibbons (2010), who argued that they come with an additional null Pol head that licenses them. Fitzgibbons's analysis is applicable to any NC language and unavoidably predicts the existence of such uses in any such language. Furthermore, it does not allow for any differences in the depreciative use of different *ni*-words in a single language.

However, both Russian-internal and cross-linguistic facts suggest that such uses of NIs are fully lexicalized. They lack the meaning of a negated existential quantifier, no matter how obtained, and exhibit lexical restrictions. For instance, *nikogda* 'never' is not used in this function in Russian. Furthermore, in some NC languages depreciative uses of neg-words are very restricted. This is the case for *ni*-words in Slovenian, and for respective neg-words in another NC language, Modern Hebrew (31).

- (31) a. Slovenian (Mladen Uhlik, p.c.)  
 Janez je imel Petra za nepomembneža/ničeta / \*nikoga.  
 J.NOM AUX.PRS.3SG had P.ACC for non-entity.ACC nobody.ACC  
 'Janez considered Petr a nobody.'  
 b. Hebrew (Roey Gafer, p.c.)  
 Hu mamaš efes/\*af-exad.  
 he really zero/nobody  
 'He's really a nobody.'

Accordingly, contrary to what was proposed by Fitzgibbons (2010), in their depreciative use, *ni*-words are not licensed by any negative operator, and do not fall under the purview of the theory proposed here.

Finally, to account for the cross-linguistically very common ability of neg-words to be the complement of 'without' (32), I propose that 'without' bears a morphological feature allowing it to agree with *ni*-words<sup>31</sup> (and, more widely, neg-words).

- (32) a. Russian  
 Sovsem bez nikogo ostalsja.  
 completely without nobody remained  
 '(He) remained completely alone (lit. without anyone).'<sup>32</sup>  
 b. Slovenian  
 Kako lahko postanem milijonar brez ničesar?  
 how possible become millionaire without nothing  
 'How is it possible to become a millionaire without anything?'<sup>33</sup>  
 c. Hebrew  
 anašim še-baim bli af-exad le-medina zara  
 people rel-go without no-one to-country foreign  
 'people who come alone to a foreign country'<sup>34</sup>

To recapitulate, the presence of *ni*- on certain lexical DPs in Russian, as well as depreciative uses of *ni*-words and their ability to be licensed by 'without' are not counterexamples to the analysis proposed in this paper.

<sup>31</sup>Pereltsvaig (2006) and Rosseyaykin (2021: p.105) argue that such uses of *nikto* 'no one' and *ničego* 'nothing' are lexically idiosyncratic. If this proposal is correct, it in a sense even strengthens the overall analysis developed in this paper – in that case, only Neg<sup>0</sup> is able to undergo concord with indefinites. However, seeing that the licensing of negative indefinites by 'without' is common cross-linguistically, I am reluctant to ascribe this phenomenon to a lexical idiosyncrasy. Due to time and space limitations, I am unfortunately unable to address here the analysis of *ni*-word licensing that Rosseyaykin (2021) proposes.

<sup>32</sup><https://rsdn.org/forum/life/7063035.flat> [accessed 01/09/2023]

<sup>33</sup><https://themoney.co/sl/how-can-i-become-a-millionaire-with-nothing/> [accessed 01/09/2023]

<sup>34</sup><https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1001367528> [accessed 01/09/2023]

## 8 CONCLUSION

I have shown that, in colloquial Russian, an additional negation strategy is used alongside the regular negation that involves Strict Negative Concord and *ni*-words. This alternative strategy involves the word *xuj* ‘dick’ as the negator and NPIs that may occur in non-negative contexts, typically plain wh-words. The difference between the two constructions is transparently reflected in the morphology of the licensed indefinites. I have shown that the standard negation and *xuj*-negation correspond to different negative operators with different licensing properties.

The fact that the negative operator corresponding to *xuj*-negation fails to license the preverbal NegP and *ni*-words forces one to modify Zeijlstra’s (2004) analysis of Negative Concord. Unlike in Zeijlstra’s original proposal, I conclude that *ni*-words do not agree directly with the negative operator, but rather are semantically licensed by it and undergo morphological concord with Neg<sup>o</sup>.

It stands to reason that in other languages with squattive negation this negation corresponds to a separate negative operator as well. Given that squattive negations appear to be widespread in the languages of Europe, the conclusion that negative concord items do not agree with a negative operator directly is typologically testable. I leave this typological study for further research.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	accusative	MOD	modal
COMP	complementizer	NEG	negation
FOC	focus	NOM	nominative
GEN	genitive	NUM	numerative
IDF	indefinite	PRS	present tense
IMP	imperative	REFL	reflexive
INF	infinitive	X.NEG	<i>xuj</i> -negation
INS	instrumental		

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Slavic Linguistics Circle (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Bar Ilan University), the online Russian Syntax Reading Group organized by John Bailyn, FASL 30 at MIT, and *Meaning in Language* Colloquium, University of Düsseldorf. I thank the audiences for their feedback. I thank Igor Erschler, Maxim Erschler, Dmitry Nikolaev, Pavel Rudnev, and Vitaly Volk for their judgments. I thank John Bailyn, Rajesh Bhatt, Steve Franks, Stephanie Harves, Olga Kagan, Natasha Kasher, Ekaterina Lyutikova, Denis Paperno, Mitya Privoznov, Pavel Rudnev, and Aldan Yerbalanov for their comments on and discussion of earlier versions of this work, and the FASL reviewers and the audience for their very helpful and constructive comments.

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