

## Expletive Negation revisited: On some properties of negative polar interrogatives in Russian

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ABSTRACT

Standard approaches classify questions with preposed negation in Russian as a species of Expletive Negation, alleged to be devoid of polarity reversing semantics despite the compulsory morphosyntactic exponence of negation (i.e., *ne* 'neg') realized on the verb. This purported semantic vacuity led to the conclusion that negation is neutralized or erased in Expletive Negation contexts, which amounts to equating the meaning of certain varieties of negative YN questions to the meaning of "the corresponding affirmative question[s]". I argue against this approach. My analysis provisions two possible merge sites for negation in Russian – above AspectP/vP and above TP. Lower negation, built atop Aspect/v, delineates the exclusive domain of negative concord. Higher negation is introduced in the illocutionary field and serves to modify speaker commitments. NegYNs are ambiguous between these two structures.

**KEYWORDS** Expletive Negation · negative question · polarity · negation merge sites

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Under scrutiny are Russian polar interrogatives like (1), formed by fronting the Neg+V complex before the enclitic YN marker *li*. Superficially, (1) resembles (2-a), a construction occupying a prominent spotlight in the theoretical literature (Büring & Gunlogson 2000, Giannakidou & Mari 2019, Goodhue 2018, Krifka 2015, Repp 2013, Romero & Han 2004, a.o.), whose core function is to convey epistemic bias. Hence, by uttering (2-a), the speaker imparts their belief that John's current beverage of choice is coffee and seeks to verify this conviction. Bulgarian (2-b) reportedly incorporates the same type of biased inference (Romero & Han 2004).

- (1) Ne zapretila li ego cenzura? (NegYN)  
NEG forbade Q him censorship  
'(I wonder if) he isn't censored.'
- (2) a. Isn't John drinking coffee? (Auxn't Q)  
b. Ne pije li Ivan kafe? (Bulgarian)  
NEG drinks Q Ivan coffee  
'Doesn't Ivan drink coffee?' (via Romero & Han 2004)

Although in syntax Russian (3) appears to mimic its South Slavic cousin (2-b), it channels a different meaning. Most naturally, (3) is interpreted to communicate the speaker's undesirability or surprise. This question is compatible with a context where Ivan is proscribed from imbibing caffeine. Confronted with evidence that he might be in violation of this injunction, the speaker may express their displeasure or apprehension of this scenario by uttering (3) (particularly evident if the question is inaugurated by the discourse marker 'a').

- (3) Ne p'et li Ivan kofe? (Russian)  
NEG drinks Q Ivan coffee  
'(I wonder) if Ivan isn't drinking coffee?'

In fact, there are environments where detecting any bias for Russian NegYNs presents a considerable challenge. For instance, given the situation in (4), the speaker is free to ask (4-a), a question with preposed negation, or (4-b), a “neutral” YN question. The closest English rendition of (4-a) is: *I wonder if Sergey didn’t stop by today*. Hardly anybody would contest that the English version conveys negative polarity, but it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how it is different from the positive version. So too, the Russian NegYN feels negative but not “biased” in the sense of the *Auxn’t-Q*, which is deviant here (in (4-d)).<sup>1</sup>

- (4) Context: Sergey is known to stop by occasionally.
- a. Ne zaxodil li Sergey segodnja? (NegYN)  
NEG stop.by Q Sergey today  
‘(I wonder) if Sergey hasn’t stopped by today.’
  - b. Zaxodil li Sergey segodnja? (PosYN)  
stopped.by Q Sergey today  
‘Did Sergey stop by today?’
  - c. Did Sergey stop by today?
  - d. #Didn’t Sergey stop by today? (*Auxn’t-Q*)

The closest Russian equivalent of the English *Auxn’t-Q* is a question with the element *razve*, strictly specialized for non-neutral YN questions, as in (5) (for a systematic discussion of *razve*, see Repp & Geist 2022 and Korotkova 2023). When combined with verbal negation in (5-a), it yields an inference of positive bias. The absence of negation in (5-b) reverses the polarity of the inference.

- (5) a. Razve Ivan ne prixodil segodnja? (*razve-Qs*)  
REALLY Ivan NEG came today  
Biased inference: Ivan stopped by today.
- b. Razve Ivan prixodil segodnja?  
REALLY Ivan came today  
Biased inference: Ivan did not stop by today.

Within the NegYN class, Restan (1972) distinguishes the following three semantic groups (examples are his). The “purely informative” NegYN in (6-a) is “equivalent to the corresponding affirmative question” (Brown 1999: p. 99), which serves to obtain information. The earlier (4-a) presumably belongs in this category. “Dubious” NegYNs in (6-b), and ostensibly (3), are purported to convey the speaker’s belief in the opposite of the utterance’s denotation. Insofar as this description implicates reference to the epistemic state, it is unclear how the “dubious” NegYNs distinguish themselves from the English *Auxn’t-Qs* like (2-a) (or *razve-Qs* from (5)). Finally, “rhetorical NegYNs” in (6-c) (which I will put aside for the purposes of this exercise) are a vehicle for imparting an opinion or swaying the addressee. In all three types, negation is alleged to carry no negative force (Brown 1999).

- (6) a. Ne pomniš li ty tvoju prežnjuju sosedku? (Informative Q)  
NEG remember Q you your former neighbor  
‘Do you remember your former neighbor?’
- b. Ne uznaš li kto-nibuđ, počemu ty ko mne xodiš? (Dubious Q)  
NEG found.out Q somebody why you to me come  
‘Do you think somebody found out why you come to my place?’
- c. Ne govoril li ja tebe? (Rhetorical Q)  
NEG said Q I to.you  
‘Didn’t I tell you?!’

<sup>1</sup>Root questions with *li* of either polarity require some minimal context—they are not immediately available as the “out of the blue” variety. In fact, the most natural strategy of forming a root YN-question in Russian relies strictly on intonation.

While there is no apparent correlation between the morphological specification on the verb and the type of the question, Shatunovskii (2016) detects one prosodic diagnostic for disambiguating between the “informative” and the “dubious” kind. The baseline example in (7) can be articulated in one of two ways. The informative reading arises when the sentence contains two intonational peaks (in this case, they fall on the fronted verb, *zapretila*, and the internally focalized nominal constituent, *cenzura*) – this contour is identical to the one in PosYNs. The dubious interpretation requires a single sharp rise on the verb, sustained through the sentence with a fall towards the end.

- (7) Ne zapretila li ego cenzura? (repeated from (1))  
 NEG forbade Q him censorship  
 ‘(I wonder) if he wasn’t censored?’

The upshot of the preceding exposition is twofold. First, NegYNs (of any variety) are presumed to be devoid of polarity reversing semantics. In part, this conclusion informed the analyses under which NegYNs are treated as a specimen of Expletive Negation (EN) (defined as negation with no semantic content). Second, the existing descriptions are somewhat wanting, as they fail to capture the difference between the “informative” NegYNs and PosYNs, on the one hand, and between the “dubious” NegYNs and the biased questions, on the other hand. This paper attempts to address both issues. Regarding the former, I will argue that negation in NegYNs is not vacuous (§3). The gist of the proposal is distilled to (8), which provisions two potential merge sites for the negative operator—atop the eventive layer (*vP*/AspectP) and in the illocutionary field (above TP). Underlyingly, NegYNs are ambiguous between the two structures: this structural ambiguity, in turn, is the putative source of the semantic dichotomy (“informative” vs. “dubious” questions). But before delving into syntax proper, I will briefly outline a select set of traits that render NegYNs unique in the inventory of Russian polar interrogatives (§2).

- (8) [ ... [<sub>NegP<sub>1</sub></sub> NEG1 ... [<sub>TP</sub> ... [<sub>NegP<sub>2</sub></sub> NEG2 [<sub>AspectP/vP</sub> ... ]]]]]

## 2 WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT NEGYNs?

The purpose of this part is to demonstrate that NegYNs should not be treated on a par with other YN questions. Section 2.1 deals with some issues of meaning. Section 2.2 examines certain syntactic idiosyncrasies of NegYNs.

### 2.1 MEANING

A more exhaustive overview of the environments felicitous for NegYNs is anticipated elsewhere—the discussion here is confined to the two typical contexts where these questions are attested: the “informative” variety, found in questionnaires (Section 2.1.1) and the “dubious” type, expressing undesirability in the absence of firm epistemic commitment (Section 2.1.2).

#### 2.1.1 “INFORMATIVE” NEGYNs: QUESTIONNAIRE

In addition to (4-a), which fits the profile of an “informative” question on account of its interchangeability with its positive counterpart (in (4-b)), NegYNs consistently recur in a questionnaire format like (9), where (9-a) is borrowed from a citizenship application and (9-b) from an online source discussing the fiscal merits and burdens of self-employment. These questions test eligibility: being a suspect in the former case or a lawyer/appraiser/notary in the latter case disqualify one from acquiring citizenship or meeting the requirements for a particular tax status. English *Auxn’t*-Qs found in the glosses (as well as Russian *razve*-Qs) are incompatible with such environments.

- (9) a. Ne presleduetes' li v ugovnom porjadke [...] za soveršenie prestuplenija?  
 NEG pursued Q in criminal order for commission crime.GEN  
 'Are you under criminal investigation for the commission of crimes?'  
 # 'Aren't you under criminal investigation for the commission of crimes?'  
 b. Ne javljaetes' li vy [...] advokatom, notariusom, ocenščikom [...]?  
 NEG are Q you lawyer notary appraiser  
 'Are you a lawyer, a notary or an appraiser?'  
 # 'Aren't you a lawyer, a notary or an appraiser?'

Alongside NegYN in (9), we also find PosYNs (10) in the same two sources:

- (10) a. Privlekalis' li k ugovnoj otvetsvennosti?  
 charged Q to criminal responsibility  
 'Have you been charged with a felony crime?'  
 b. Svjazana li vaša dejatel'nost' s pereprodažej [...]?  
 connected Q your activity with resale  
 'Does your business involve the resale...?'

While the substitution NegYN → PosYN seems to be always accessible in questionnaires, the reverse scenario is not universally available. For example, (11) opens a survey designed to gauge the opinions of Novosibirsk dwellers about the provision of certain services in their city. A NegYN version (*ne javljates' li ...*) would be bizarre here as a starting point. The pollster is interested in the opinion of a specific cohort, i.e., the residents of Novosibirsk. In its extant configuration then, this question seeks to elicit confirmation that the respondents belong in the sought-after population.

- (11) Javljates' li vy žitelem goroda Novosibirska?  
 are Q you resident city.GEN Novosibirsk.GEN  
 'Are you a resident of Novosibirsk?'

If it were truly the case that “informative” NegYNs are indistinguishable from PosYNs in semantics, we would expect for them to be entirely interchangeable, which is not the case. The distribution of NegYNs is more constrained *because* they are asking a negative question (*it is the case that not p?*), setting themselves apart from the “neutral” (10) (with a balanced partition) and the positively biased (11).

### 2.1.2 “DUBIOUS” NEGYNs: UNDESIRABILITY

If the infelicity of a PosYN in place of a NegYN is a reliable diagnostic of the “dubious” variety, then (12) is precisely the right context, cf. (12-b) vs. (12-c). Only in this monologue, the biased questions in both languages are out as well (in (12-a)). The speaker here lacks the conviction that John is in jail: rather, prior knowledge of John's indecorous behavior coupled with his absence enable the speaker to infer the potential fallout (i.e., John's incarceration), which furthermore is assessed as something undesirable.

- (12) Single speaker: *I am worried about John; dude's a screw-up. Haven't seen him around.* (Continuation: ...)  
 a. #Razve ego ne posadili v tjur'mu?  
 REALLY him NEG put in jail  
 # 'Didn't they put him in jail?'  
 b. #Posadili li ego v tjur'mu?  
 put Q him in jail  
 'Did they put him in jail?'  
 c. Ne posadili li ego v tjur'mu?  
 NEG put Q him in jail  
 '(I wonder) if he isn't in jail.'

Conversely, in scenario (13), Speaker 2 does have a particular conviction. Believing that John is, in fact, in jail, she finds his mercantile activities surprising. In this situation, *Auxn't*-Q and *razve*-Q are fine, while both NegYNs, as in (13-b), and PosYNs, as in (13-c), are deviant.

- (13) Conversation between two people.  
 Speaker 1: I just got some pot from John. Wanna smoke up?  
 Speaker 2: Wait, you saw John? (...)
- a. Razve ego ne posadili v tjur'mu?  
 REALLY him NEG put in jail  
 'Didn't they put him in jail?'
  - b. #Ne posadili li ego v tjur'mu?  
 NEG put Q him in jail  
 '(I wonder) if they didn't put him in jail.'
  - c. #Posadili li ego v tjur'mu?  
 put Q him in jail  
 'Did they put him in jail?'

To sum up, this instantiation of a “dubious” NegYN expresses a conjecture that a dis-preferred outcome is true: in other words, the speaker must appraise *p* as uncertain but possible and rank it as the less preferred option relative to the alternatives. This is very much in line with the semantics developed in Anand & Hacquard (2013) for emotive doxastics (like *fear*). And in fact, *fear*-predicates in Russian may embed the NegYN directly ((14-a) from Iordanskaja & Melčuk 1990) (cf. PosYN in (14-b)).

- (14) a. Ja bojus', ne pojdet li Maša v školu odna.  
 I am.afraid NEG go Q Masha to school alone  
 'I am afraid that Masha will go to school alone.'
- b. \*Ja bojus', pojdet li Maša v školu odna.  
 I am.afraid go Q Masha to school alone  
 Intended: 'I am afraid that Masha will go to school alone.'

## 2.2 SYNTACTIC IDIOSYNCRASIES

### 2.2.1 EMBEDDING

NegYNs pattern with PosYNs in their amenability to embedding:

- (15) Ja xoču znat' / sprosil Ivana, (ne) govorit li Anna po-anglijski.  
 I want to.know asked Ivan NEG speaks Q Anna English  
 'I would like to know / asked Ivan whether Anna speaks / doesn't speak English.'

The two biased varieties—English *Auxn't*-Qs and *razve*-Qs—resist embedding. Russian (16) is straightforward, English requires a short digression. Irish English, per McCloskey (2006), embeds a YN question “as is”, i.e., in the shape it takes in root contexts, as in (17-a). Though admitting (17-a), my consultants reject the *Auxn't*-Q in (17-b) under rogative predicates.

- (16) \*Ja xoču znat' / sprosil Ivana, razve Anna govorit po-anglijski.  
 I want to.know/ asked Ivan really Anna speaks English  
 Intended: 'I want to know / I asked Ivan whether Anna really speaks English.'
- (17) a. I wondered/asked did John blab the secret. (Irish English)  
 b. \*I wondered/asked didn't John blab the secret.

Elucidating an explanation for the two patterns is beyond the scope of this paper and will largely depend on one's treatment of “root phenomena” and, indeed, the very nature of *li* in

root vs. embedded clauses.<sup>2</sup> The point here is simply that the negative questions emulate the behavior of their positive counterparts with respect to this syntactic diagnostic. In the next section we will see how the two differ.

### 2.2.2 DISJUNCTIVE QUESTIONS

PosYNs are happy in configurations like (18), while NegYNs (under neutral prosody) in (19) are not. Once again, the approach under which NegYNs are specified as positive polarity Qs, predicts no difference between (18) and (19).

- (18) a. Ubil li on Marfu Petrovnu ili net? (I. Annenskii. Vtoraia kniga.... 1979)  
 killed Q he Marfa Petrovna or no  
 ‘Did he kill Marfa Petrovna or not?’  
 b. Ubil li on Marfu Petrovnu ili ne ubil?  
 killed Q he Marfa Petrovna or NEG killed  
 ‘Did he kill Marfa Petrovna or not?’
- (19) a. \*Ne znaeš li ty Ivana ili net?  
 NEG know Q you Ivan or no  
 Intended: ‘Do you not know Ivan or do you?’  
 b. \*Ne znaeš li ty Ivana ili (ne) znaeš?  
 NEG know Q you Ivan or NEG know  
 Intended: ‘Do you not know Ivan or do you?’

Gračanin-Yuksek (2016) makes another pertinent observation for Croatian, which is applicable to Russian as well. In disjunctive questions with the alternative reading, preposing negation results in ungrammaticality, as in (20-b). Gračanin-Yuksek’s explanation hinges on the size of coordinated elements: the disjuncts in (20-a) are introduced at the level of FocP, a projection above TP, which hosts *li*. The material in the second disjunct is deleted, as in (21-a). Ungrammatical (20-b), on the other hand, is attributed to the coordinate structure constraint (CSC) violation, where the verb moves to the higher projection, PolP, in the manner of (21-b).

- (20) a. Pišet li Ivan knigu ili recenziruet stat’ju?  
 writes Q Ivan book or referees paper  
 ‘Is Ivan writing a book or refereeing an article?’  
 b. \*Ne pišet li Ivan knigu ili recenziruet stat’ju?  
 NEG writes Q Ivan book or referees paper  
 Intended: ‘Is Ivan not writing a book or is he refereeing a paper?’
- (21) a. [<sub>FocP</sub> V+li ...] [or [<sub>FocP</sub> ~~li~~ Ivan referees paper]]  
 b. \*[\_PolP ne V [<sub>FocP</sub> *li* t<sub>V</sub>] [or [<sub>FocP</sub> ~~li~~ Ivan referees paper]]]

There is one objection to the syntactic treatment. In disjunctive questions, the sequence Pos > Neg is prioritized, as shown for contexts in (22), where (22-a) is perfect, (22-b) is impossible under any circumstances, and (22-c) is acceptable as long as there is a pause before *or* and each verb is focalized. Given that no reordering takes places, the restriction must be pragmatic/semantic. More interestingly, the NegYN in (23) with a disjunctive component patterns with (22-c): for a subset of my consultants, the manipulation of the prosodic contour (and the addition of various discourse-related elements) results in vast improvement. This I interpret in favor of ascribing “real” content to negation in NegYNs.

- (22) a. Raskol’nikov ubil staruxu ili net / ili ne ubil?  
 Raskolnikov killed crone or no or NEG killed  
 ‘Did Raskolnikov kill the crone or not?’

<sup>2</sup>Ora Matushansky (p.c.) points out that while the *li* of the embedded contexts behaves on a par with a run-of-the-mill complementizer, its contribution in root contexts transcends the duty of a mere YN-marker. I concur and leave the issue open.

- b. \*Raskol'nikov ne ubil staruxu ili net?  
Raskolnikov NEG killed crone or no  
Intended: 'Did Raskolnikov not kill the crone or did he?'
- c. Tak Raskol'nikov ne UBIL staruxu | ili (vse-taki) UBIL?  
so Raskolnikov NEG killed crone or after-all killed  
'So, did Raskolnikov not kill the crone or did he, after all?'
- (23) ?Tak ne UBIL li on staruxu | ili vse-taki UBIL?  
so NEG killed Q he crone or after.all killed  
'So, did Raskolnikov not kill the crone or did he, after all?'

Returning to Gračanin-Yuksek's data, the oddness detected in (20-b) also obtains in situations like (24): (24-a) is predicted to be acceptable on her account, while (24-b) and (24-c) feature no apparent movement. My inference from these data is that for reasons unrelated to syntax, disjuncts do not tolerate polarity mismatches.

- (24) a. ?\*Pišet li Ivan knigu ili ne recenziruet stat'ju?  
writes Q Ivan book or NEG referees paper  
Intended: 'Is Ivan writing a book or is he not refereeing a paper?'
- b. ?\*Ivan ne pišet knigu ili recenziruet stat'ju?  
Ivan NEG writes book or referees paper  
Intended: 'Is Ivan not writing a book or is he refereeing a paper?'
- c. ?\*Ivan pišet knigu ili ne recenziruet stat'ju?  
Ivan writes book or NEG referees paper  
Intended: 'Is Ivan writing a book or is he not refereeing a paper?'

If so, independent of the syntax one assumes here, the infelicity of disjunctive NegYNs is a consequence of either the injunction on Neg»Pos sequences or on the polarity mismatches in the disjuncts themselves. The logical upshot of this interpretation is that NegYNs are, in fact, of negative polarity.

### 2.2.3 COMPATIBILITY WITH *BY CHANCE*

The final context where NegYNs and PosYNs diverge requires a small set-up. Sadock (1971) shows that *by any chance* in English is only compatible with neutral polar questions:

- (25) a. Are the gazanias blooming, by (any) chance?  
b. \*Aren't the gazanias blooming, by (any) chance?  
c. \*The gazanias are blooming by any chance.

In Russian, *by chance* can only appear with NegYNs in (26).<sup>3</sup> The set in (27) further demonstrates that non-veridicality alone is not a sufficient condition—*slučaem* needs negation even in questions formed via the prosodic strategy.

- (26) a. \*Tjul'pany slučaem (ne) tsvetut. (\*declaratives)  
tulips by.chance NEG blossom.IPFV  
Intended: 'The tulips are(n't) blooming by any chance.'
- b. \*Tsvetut li slučaem tjul'pany? (\*PosYNs)  
blossom Q by.chance tulips  
Intended: 'Are the tulips blooming, by any chance?'
- c. \*Razve tjul'pany slučaem ne tsvetut? (\*razve-Q)  
REALLY tulips by.chance NEG blossom  
Intended: 'Aren't the tulips blooming, by any chance?'

<sup>3</sup>*Slučaem* is also possible in a handful of non-veridical contexts—conditionals, under *fear*-predicates and with negated perfective imperatives.

- d. Ne tsvetut li slučaem tjuľpany? (✓NegYN)  
 NEG blossom Q by.chance tulips  
 ‘Are the tulips not blooming, by any chance?’
- (27) a. On slučaem ne upomjanul, na kogo rabotaet?  
 he by.chance NEG mentioned on whom works  
 ‘Did he not mention who he works for, by any chance?’
- b. \*On slučaem upomjanul, na kogo rabotaet?  
 he by.chance mentioned on whom works  
 Intended: ‘Did he mention who he works for, by any chance?’

To recap the discussion thus far, it has been established that despite some contextual overlap, NegYNs are distinct from PosYNs: they “feel negative” in the perception of speakers, because they *are* of negative polarity. The evidence for this is adduced from the fact that they pattern together with (unambiguously) negative intonational questions (those that superimpose question prosody over the declarative syntax) in disjunctive contexts and with *by chance*. In their “informative” incarnation, they are asking a negative question (*is it the case that not p?*)—and for this reason cannot serve as a free substitute for PosYNs across the board. The “dubious” NegYNs are also peculiar: they lack the epistemic certainty we find in biased questions, and introduce a desirability scale.

### 3 EXPLETIVE NEGATION

#### 3.1 PREVIOUS ANALYSES

In the pioneering research on this construction (i.e. Brown 1999, Brown & Franks 1995), meaning was rather a peripheral point, but there were two crucial syntactic arguments to bolster the claim that NegYNs fall under the umbrella of EN phenomena (whose other famous representatives appear in (28)).

- (28) a. Ja podoždu, poka ty ne prideš. (until-clauses)  
 I will.wait until you NEG will.come  
 ‘I’ll wait until you arrive.’
- b. Ja bojus’, kak by on ne opozdal. (fear-predicates)  
 I fear how SUBJ he NEG late  
 ‘I fear that he might be late’

These arguments are best understood against the background supplied by the declaratives in (29) and (30). (29) demonstrates the property of negative concord (NC): *nikogo* in (29) is a negative concord item (NCI), morphologically decomposable into  $n_{\text{NEG}}-i_{\text{FOC}}\text{-kogo}_{\text{WHOM.ACC}}$  (per Bošković 2009; see also Haspelmath 1997) and required under clausemate negation. NCI-intolerant are affirmative sentences (29-b) or those where negation is non-local, as in, e.g. (29-c).

- (29) a. Ivan nikogo ne znaet.  
 Ivan ni-whom NEG knows  
 ‘Ivan doesn’t know anybody.’
- b. \*Ivan nikogo znaet.  
 Ivan ni-whom knows  
 Intended: ‘Ivan doesn’t know anybody.’
- c. \*Ivan ne skazal, [čto nikogo znaet].  
 Ivan NEG said that ni-whom knows  
 Intended: ‘Ivan didn’t say he knew anybody.’

The second set in (30) exemplifies the ACC~GEN alternation. Under clausemate negation in (30-a), direct objects may optionally appear in the genitive, the so called GENITIVE OF NEGATION (GoN), instead of the usual accusative. Licensing conditions replicate those



that operate under negative concord: a predicate must be negated (cf. (30-b)) and it must be local (cf. (30-b)).

- (30) a. On ne pišet pisem / pis'ma.  
he NEG write letters.GEN letters.ACC  
'He doesn't write letters.'
- b. \*On pišet pisem.  
he writes letters.GEN  
Intended: 'He doesn't write letters.'
- c. \*On ne skazal, [čto pišet pisem].  
he NEG said that writes letters.GEN  
Intended: 'He didn't say that he wrote letters.'

Now consider (31), which evinces a peculiar split: while the configuration enables GoN, it evidently removes the environment for NCI licensing. The same holds of the other EN contexts, shown for *fear*-predicates in (32).<sup>4</sup> It is this property that formed the basis for compartmentalizing features: a semantically contentful operator is required for NCIs, but not for GoN. Hence, GoN is a byproduct of "morphosyntactic negation"—negation with the right morphology but no content. If so, NegYNs are not negative semantically (hence, \*NCIs) but negative syntactically (hence, ✓GoN). I will argue against this position.<sup>5</sup>

- (31) NegYNs
- a. \*Ne kupil li ničego Petr? (\*NCI)  
NEG bought Q ni-what Peter  
Intended 'Did Peter buy anything?'
- b. Ne pišet li Petr pisem? (GoN)  
NEG writes Q Peter letters.GEN  
'Does Peter write letters?'
- (32) *fear*-predicates
- a. \*/✓Ja bojus', kak by nikto ne opozdal. (\*NCI or ✓NCI)  
I fear how SUBJ ni-who NEG was.late  
'I fear that somebody might be late.'
- b. Ja bojus', kak by on ne narušil eksperimenta. (GoN)  
I fear how SUBJ he NEG ruined experiment.GEN  
'I fear that he might ruin the experiment'

Gribanova (2017) offers a more recent syntactic implementation of these early ideas. She posits two negation-related positions within a sentential spine. The higher one, a specialized polarity projection above TP, houses features pertaining to affirmation/negation. The lower one, NegP, serves as a locus of morphosyntactic negation. These two projections are linked via AGREE, as in (33): Pol, being the host of semantically contentful features, "passes" on its specification to Neg. Although Gribanova writes that "positive valued polarity features on NEG receive a zero exponent, while valued negative features on NEG are realized as the clitic *ne*" (p. 1089), presumably, in EN contexts, some mechanism ensures that the positive features on Pol are no impediment for the realization of *ne* on the verb. I will call this the "split polarity" approach. For its proponents, the variable behavior with regard to the polarity diagnostics in (31)/(32) is a consequence of the division of labor. Genitive is assigned by the lower morphosyntactic Neg, whereas *ni*-items require a negative specification on Pol (to agree with Neg). But if NegYNs and the complements

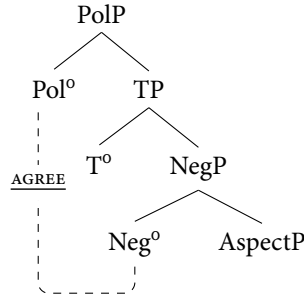
<sup>4</sup>Note that there is speaker variation with *fear*-predicates: NCIs are fine for some speakers in these contexts. As this is orthogonal for present purposes, we may assume "standard" judgements—i.e., that NCIs are not licensed under the predicates of fear. See Zorikhina Nilsson (2012) for further data adjudication.

<sup>5</sup>I will continue to refer to these constructions as "EN contexts" as a descriptive shorthand. I also note here that there are alternative treatments to the two approaches I overview in the ensuing discussion (e.g., Yoon 2011, Makri 2013, 2016, etc).

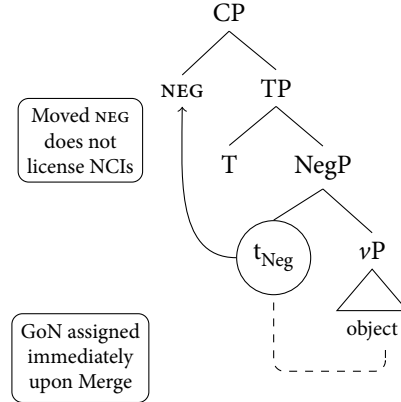
of *fear*-predicates bear a positive polarity value, then only GoN is possible, because for *its* licensing, the value on the higher head is irrelevant.

Abels (2005) derives the relevant set of facts via standard syntactic mechanisms – movement and locality. His core idea is that the assignment of genitive happens immediately upon Merge. However, NEG is free to move covertly, which then removes the environment for *ni*-licensing, as sketched in (34).

(33) Gribanova (2017):



(34) Abels (2005):

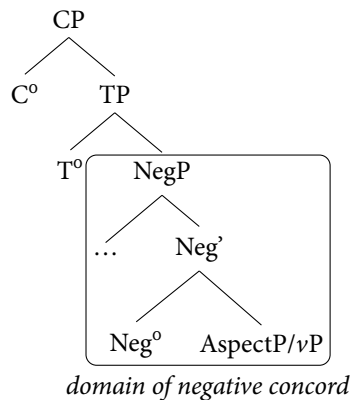


### 3.2 PROPOSAL

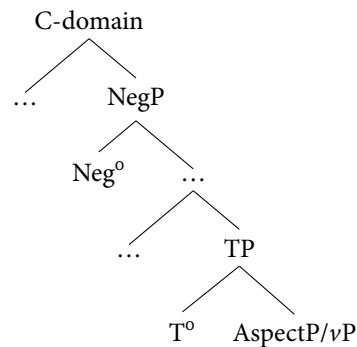
My proposal is closer in spirit to Abels, who indicts EN, i.e. semantically vacuous negation, as superfluous and theoretically unsatisfactory. Of course, a theoretical desideratum is not a sufficient excuse to reject the idea. There are, however, more tangible reasons to do so. First, in the overwhelming majority of cases, PolP appears to recapitulate what is directly encoded. We need the split specification on the two polarity-related heads for those cases that are *conveyed* as positive propositions in English.<sup>6</sup> Second, the Split Polarity approach (and kindred treatments) predict that there should be no semantic differences between PosYNs and NegYNs (as both should be specified as [pos]), which, given the facts in Section 2, is not true.

The analysis is straightforward: suppose there are multiple Merge sites available for Neg in Russian (see also Przepiórkowski 1999). Low negation in (35) merges with AspectP/vP: it negates events and delimits the exclusive domain of negative concord. High negation, introduced in the illocutionary field above TP (36), does not license NCIs. NegYNs are ambiguous between these two structures.

(35) Lower negation configuration



(36) Higher negation configuration



<sup>6</sup>That is not to say that PolP is not needed at all—just that it does not seem necessary in EN contexts.

Attempts to syntacticize discourse-related properties go as far back as Ross (1970). The elaboration of the periphery has been a long-standing preoccupation of the cartographers (e.g., Cinque (1999) posits four mood/modality levels: Speech Acts » Evaluative » Evidential » Epistemic).

Some approaches, spearheaded by Speas & Tenny (2003), provision a specialized S(peech)A(ct) P(hrase), in which Speaker and Hearer are values (“we may think of the SPEAKER as the agent of the speech act, the UTTERANCE CONTENT as its theme, and the HEARER as its goal” (p. 320) (see also Wiltschko 2021, Wiltschko & Heim 2016, a.o.).

Others conceive of the illocutionary domain in terms of speaker commitments: Krifka (2015, 2023) posits the structure in (37), where ActP is the locus of assertions (●) or questions (?), ComP is the domain of the speaker’s social commitments to the proposition, and J(udgment)P is the conduit of subjective epistemic attitudes.

(37) [ActP [Act<sup>0</sup> ●][ComP [Com] [JP ...[TP ...]]]]

Though I am reluctant to commit to any particular version of “illocutionary syntax”, for the sake of illustration, I assume Sode & Truckenbrodt (2018) who argue that the Force-head is the locus of speaker anchoring, available in two incarnations, shown in (38)—BEL<sub>x,t,w</sub> and WANT<sub>x,t,w</sub> (see also Truckenbrodt & Sode 2020).<sup>7</sup>

(38) Syntactic representations of speaker anchoring in Force:  
 BEL<sub>x,t,w</sub>: The proposition of the clause is believed by x at time t in world w.  
 WANT<sub>x,t,w</sub>: Futures in which the proposition of the clause comes true are preferred by x at t in w to those in which it does not come true.

Suppose now that the “dubious” questions of the kind we find in (12-c) feature a bouletic Force-head with the negative operator merged high, as in (39): in this case, the dispreference component is a straightforward consequence of the compositional procedure.

(39) [ ...*li* [NegP Neg<sup>0</sup> [ForceP Force<sub>WANT</sub> [TP ...]]]]

In other words, high (illocutionary) negation has the effect of attenuating or modifying speaker commitments by negating something in the extended domain of C. The negation found in “dubious” questions is of this type, i.e., (36). A further claim here is that “informative” questions feature lower negation, as in (35).

At first glance, this proposal contradicts the facts rather than explains them. To be sure, there are a few outstanding questions that have not yet been addressed. The list below serves as a guide to the remaining discussion: each question is tackled in the subsequent sections.

1. Is there independent evidence for the two Neg positions? The default expectation is that if Russian indeed has this flexibility of introducing the negative operator in two domains, we should be able to detect it outside of this particular construction. (Section 3.2.1)
2. Though distinguishing “dubious” and “informative” questions on the basis of their meaning is sensible, could we corroborate the presumed syntactic determinants for this taxonomy? (Section 3.2.2)
3. The height of the Neg operator appears to be irrelevant for the assignment of GoN (recall that GoN is licensed in all EN contexts, including both types of NegYNs). If so, what is the source of GoN? (Section 3.2.3)

<sup>7</sup>My hesitancy is a by-product of the following consideration. I do not envision a fixed position for “high negation”. Indeed, its behavior in other contexts (including the typical EN configurations, additional varieties of NegYN not discussed here, certain types of subjunctives with a meaning of LEST-clauses, etc.) is consistent with variable merge sites in the illocutionary domain. The precise configuration of the illocutionary domain and the formal implementation should hence be approached on a case-by-case basis. However this is ultimately resolved, the core point here is that the higher NEG applies at the not-at-issue level, denying the relevant component(s) of the illocutionary layer.

4. In light of the ostensibly conflicting claims—i.e., (i) that the lower negation is the sole licenser of NCIs and (ii) that negation in “informative” NegYNs originates low—why is there a blanket ban on *ni*-items in all types of NegYNs? (Section 3.2.4)

### 3.2.1 EVIDENCE FOR TWO NEGATIONS

I will answer the first question in the affirmative. My evidence revolves around the behavior of modals. First observe that a verb like *moč* ‘can’ is compatible with a range of meanings in (40) in situations when negation precedes it (this is documented in Pađučeva 2008, where she considers the interactions of modality with aspect—(40-b) and (40-c) are hers).<sup>8</sup> In this configuration, *možet* can express ability, permission or likelihood.

- (40) NEG » *možet*: range of meanings
- a. Ja ne mogu čixnut.  
I NEG can to.sneeze.PFV  
‘I am unable to sneeze.’ (ability)
  - b. Ty ne možeš stroit’ zdes’ garaž.  
you NEG can to.build.IPFV here garage  
‘You are not allowed to build a garage here.’ (deontic)
  - c. Ivan ne može uspet’.  
Ivan NEG can to.be.on.time.PFV  
‘It is impossible for Ivan to make it on time.’ (epistemic)

To my knowledge, the paradigm in (41) has not been reported in the literature. It shows that NCIs are only compatible with negated root modals—i.e., those denoting inability (41-a) or prohibition (41-b). Insofar as (41-c) is acceptable at all, it cannot be interpreted in the epistemic sense; it must be construed to express dynamic modality.

- (41) a. Nikto ne može čixnut.  
ni-who NEG can to.sneeze.PFV  
‘Nobody is able to sneeze.’ (ability)
- b. Nikto ne može stroit’ zdes’ garaž.  
ni-who NEG can to.build.IPFV here garage  
‘Nobody is allowed to build a garage here.’ (deontic)
- c. Nikto ne može uspet’.  
ni-who NEG can to.be.on.time.PFV  
✓ ‘Nobody is able to make it on time.’ (ability)  
\* ‘It is impossible for anyone to make it on time.’ (epistemic)

The pattern is replicable for objects as well: *ni*-items are deviant with the epistemic interpretation, as shown in (42).

- (42) a. On ne mog etogo uznať.  
he NEG could this to.find.out.PFV  
‘He could not have found it out.’ (epistemic, ability)
- b. On ničego ne mog uznať.  
he nothing NEG could to.find.out.PFV  
✓ ‘He was unable to find anything out.’ (ability)  
\* ‘It was impossible for him to find anything out.’ (epistemic)

Circling back to the purpose of this detour, the stated objective was to provide independent evidence for the availability of two Neg position. And, indeed, the facts in (41) can be handled by the proposed apparatus, developed to account for a separate

<sup>8</sup>It is worth mentioning that there is some interplay between a negated modality marker and the aspectual specification on the verb (see Pađučeva 2008), but it does not interfere with my data from (41).

phenomenon. Here is how. Epistemic verbs are special in that they consistently take the widest scope. For this reason, they are presumed to occupy a peripheral position, high enough to outscope other sentential operators (for specific proposals see Butler 2003, Drubig 2001, Cormack & Smith 2002, a.o.). For explicitness, we may assume the skeletal structure in (43): to negate epistemic modality, the negative operator must be merged “high”. This results in a configuration where the licenser is not close enough for *ni*-items. Root modals, on the other hand, are negated by the “low neg”, i.e., within the unique domain of negative concord. Hence, the only convergent derivation for (41-c) is one where the modal is merged in the lower position (in the scope of lower negation)—hence, the absence of the epistemic reading.

$$(43) \quad [_{CP} [Neg^0 [_{FP} Mod^0_{Epis} [_{TP} T^0 [_{NegP} Neg^0 [Mod^0_{root} \dots]]]]]]]$$

Note as well that I am implicitly arguing that the position of low negation, much like the position of high negation (see fn. 7), is also not “fixed”—root modals are presumably higher than AspectP/*v*P (cf. the structure in (35)). One obvious way to fit this into the theory is by adopting a dynamic approach to phases, e.g., à la Bošković (2014), according to whom the highest phrase in the extended domain of a lexical head functions as a phase (i.e., what counts as a phase is determined contextually). Attendant to this suggestion are two conclusions: (i) root modals extend the verbal domain in Russian; (ii) the Merge site of the lower negation is not decided ad hoc—instead, there is a principled procedure that regulates the Merge order. Neg forms a projection that “closes off” the phasal domain of the verb.

### 3.2.2 EVIDENCE THAT NEGYNs ARE AMBIGUOUS BETWEEN THE TWO STRUCTURES

Although the classification of NegYNs into the two types is coherent on the basis of meaning, it would be helpful to find independent confirmation of the syntactic correlates of the two NegYN types. Evidence in favor of the proposal is supplied by the adverbs *ešče* ‘still/yet’ and *uže* ‘already’. These elements are polarity sensitive in certain environments.<sup>9</sup> Perfective verbs in the past, when negated, are compatible with *ešče* ‘still, yet’ (44-a) but not *uže* ‘already’ (45-a). Conversely, the positive polarity contexts do not tolerate *ešče* in (44-b) but admit *uže* in (45-b).

- (44) a. Koroleva *ešče* *ne* umerla.  
           queen   still NEG died.PFV  
           ‘The queen is not yet dead.’  
       b. \*Koroleva *ešče* umerla.  
           queen   still died.PFV  
           Intended: ‘The queen is yet dead.’
- (45) a. \*Koroleva *uže*   *ne* umerla.  
           queen   already NEG died.PFV  
           Intended: ‘The queen has not died already.’  
       b. Koroleva *uže*   umerla.  
           queen   already died.PFV  
           ‘The queen has already died.’

Paducheva (2016) draws the equivalence between *ešče ne* ... (‘still not’) and *it is not the case that...uže* (‘already’), demonstrated in (46). Writing on *uže* in non-veridical contexts, she asserts (translation from Russian is mine): “appearing in the contexts of suspended assertions, negation is converted from a narrow scope particle to a sentential operator that outscopes *uže* [...] in the contexts of suspended assertions, the particle *ne* behaves as

<sup>9</sup>To reiterate: one needs to control for tense/aspect to make this diagnostic work: e.g., negative and positive assertions in the present tense are compatible with both *ešče* and *uže*.

the clause *it is not true that...*, which forms separate predication and occupies a position higher than *uže* in syntax/ semantics.” (p. 30)<sup>10</sup>

- (46) Rebenokešče ne usnul. = Neverno, čto rebenok uže usnul.  
 child yet NEG fell.asleep.PFV Not.true that child already fell.asleep.PFV  
 ‘The child hasn’t yet fallen asleep. = It is not true that the child is already asleep.’

Consider now NegYNs in light of this intuition. From (47) and (48) (sourced from the Russian National Corpus), we glean that NegYNs provide a happy environment for both *ešče* and *uže*. Building on Paducheva’s insight, I take *ešče* to be symptomatic of low negation (35), while the “global” negation interpretation (compatible with *uže*) points to the configuration of high negation in (36).

- (47) Ne iznosilis’ li ešče pokryški? (I. Sirin. Iaponskoe .... 2004)  
 NEG wore.out.PFV Q still tires  
 ‘The tires haven’t yet worn out, have they?’
- (48) (...)ne nastupil li uže moment, kogda etim čelovekom možno požertvovat’.  
 NEG arrived.PFV Q already moment when this person can be.sacrificed  
 ‘Has the moment not already arrived, when this person can be sacrificed?’  
 (A. Solzhenitsyn. V krugu pervom. 1968)

One prediction this analysis makes is that *uže*, indicative of high negation, should not be able to combine with *ni*-items. While this is untestable with NegYNs, which do not tolerate NCIs (for independent reasons expounded on in Section 3.2.4), there is one construction that enables NC (49) and also admits both polarity sensitive adverbs (50). The crucial paradigm is provided in (51): as expected, the higher negation (for which *uže* is the diagnostic) fails to trigger NC.

- (49) Razve nikogo ne nastorožil pjatyj etaž? (I. Lobusova. Tot, kto .... 2016)  
 REALLY ni-whom NEG gave.pause fifth floor  
 ‘Didn’t the fifth floor give pause to anybody?’
- (50) a. Razve ona uže ne ušla vo frikovsktvo? (beauty forum)  
 REALLY she already NEG left.PFV to freakishness  
 ‘Has she not already become a freak?’  
 b. Razve ona ešče ne ušla? (I.Uzun. Pora ženit’sja. 2023.)  
 REALLY she yet NEG left.PFV  
 ‘Has she not yet left?’
- (51) a. \*Razve ona uže nikuda ne ušla?  
 REALLY she already ni-where NEG left.PFV  
 Intended: ‘Hasn’t she gone anywhere yet?’  
 b. Razve ona ešče nikuda ne ušla?  
 REALLY she yet ni-where NEG left.PFV  
 ‘Hasn’t she gone anywhere yet?’

### 3.2.3 GENITIVE OF NEGATION

GoN is not at all a straightforward phenomenon, with considerable speaker variation (and a commensurate volume of scholarly output). Here I confine my attention to objects, but there is a similar effect with subjects (which evince Nom~Gen alternation) (see Harves 2013 for an overview and Partee et al. 2011 for arguments that it should not be treated on a par with object GoN). The set in (52) provides a baseline reminder pattern: recall that genitive may be optionally assigned to the direct object of the clausemate negated predicate. Recall also that GoN is possible in NegYNs (53).

<sup>10</sup>A description of non-conventional uses of *uže ne* is found in Boguslavskii (2002).

- (52) a. Ivan ne polučil otveta. NEG → ✓ Gen (GoN)  
 Ivan NEG received answer.GEN  
 ‘Ivan didn’t receive an(y) answer.’  
 b. \*Ivan polučil otveta. No NEG → \*Gen  
 Ivan received answer.GEN  
 Intended: ‘Ivan received an answer.’  
 c. Ivan ne polučil otvet. NEG → ✓ Acc  
 Ivan NEG received answer.ACC  
 ‘Ivan didn’t receive the answer.’  
 d. Ivan polučil otvet. No NEG → ✓ Acc  
 Ivan received answer.ACC  
 ‘Ivan received the answer.’
- (53) (Nužno pomoč’ upavšemu.) \*(Ne) polučil li on ser’eznyx travm?  
 need to.help fallen NEG got Q he serious.GEN injuries.GEN  
 ‘One must help a person who fell. Did he get any serious injuries?’ (online)

The likelihood of GoN assignment is said to rely on a set of “tendencies”: its acceptability depends on the type of the nominal complement (e.g., abstract nouns are more likely to tolerate GoN than concrete nouns), the verbal specification (e.g., imperfectives under negation tend to combine more willingly with genitive complements than their perfective counterparts), register (sometimes GoN scans as a more sophisticated alternative) or even age (the construction appears to be in the state of obsolescence) ((54) is partially replicated from Timberlake 1975, where “»” means “is more likely to appear in GoN or to assign genitive under negation”).

(54) Priorities in GoN assignment

Nouns	Verbs
abstract » concrete	finite » infinite
plural » singular	indicative » non-indicative
common » proper	imperfective » perfective
indefinite, non-specific, narrow scope	specific lexical clusters (verbs of perception, existence, possession, emotion, creation, etc.)

There are roughly two approaches to GoN. Proponents of the syntactic solution stipulate a syntactic licenser of some kind: either (i) GoN is triggered by a null quantifier in the genitive NP itself (e.g., Bailyn 2012, Pereltsvaig 1999, Pesetsky 1982); or (ii) GoN is licensed by the Neg head (e.g., Bailyn 1997, Harves 2002a,b).

On the other hand, semanticists (e.g., Borschev et al. 2008, Partee et al. 2011, Kagan 2013) point out that insofar as the meaning differences between Acc and Gen are detectable at all, the objects in genitive tend to exhibit “decreased referentiality” and a lack of existential commitment. Their proposal is to treat such objects as type-shifted elements, as in (55) (an identical conclusion is reached in Kagan 2013). Of course, “[a] crucial corollary is that a shift in NP type requires a shift in VP type, and hence a shift in VP semantics. Different classes of verbs have different “routes” to type-shifted meanings” (Partee et al. 2011: p. 156). While the precise formalization of this remains elusive, I think this is the right overall approach.

(55) **The property-type hypothesis for Russian genitives:**

If a Russian Nom/Gen or Acc/Gen alternation shows a semantic difference at all, then Nom or Acc is interpreted as e-type, and Gen is interpreted as property-type: <e,t>. (Borschev et al. 2008)

Following Zeijlstra (2004), I assume that the negator *ne* is an affix: together with the verb it functions as a lexical unit. Additionally, it contributes NEG-features, subject to

checking by a clausebounded operator (either by the lower NEG or the higher one on the present account). The proposal here is to say that type-shifting is facilitated by this morphological property of negated verbs: i.e., that the negative affix itself is complicit in triggering the type-shift. If so, GoN may be assigned by low or high negation, as desired. That is because in both cases, the verb, in addition to the “right” lexical properties, also bears the right morphology.

If so, some other incarnations of high negation in (56) predictably fail to trigger GoN: in (56-a), we are looking at a NegYN with a fronted noun; in (56-b) we have an instance of literal expletive negation: per Erschler (2023), the negator, a taboo word, sits in the Spec of the TP-external PolP.

- (56) a. Ne Andrei li polučil <\*otveta> / otvet?  
 NEG Andrei Q received answer.GEN answer.ACC  
 ‘I wonder if it wasn’t Andrei who got an answer.’  
 b. Xuj on polučil <\*otveta> / otvet.  
 dick he received answer.GEN answer.ACC  
 ‘Fuck if he got an answer.’

One secondary benefit of this proposal concerns the well-known surface effects. In Russian, the negator is inseparable from the verb, which follows from its status as a bound morpheme.<sup>11</sup> The point here is that independent of the merge site of the negative operator, we do not expect to see the NEG-marker isolated from its host. The compulsory linear adjacency of *ne* and the verb in EN and conventional negation contexts alike is a natural consequence of this treatment.

### 3.2.4 WHY ARE NCIS IMPOSSIBLE IN NEGYNs?

The remaining question concerns negative concord. As previously stated, NCIs are not licensed in NegYNs (57):

- (57) \*Ne kupil li ničego Petr? repeated from (31-a)  
 NEG bought Q ni-what Peter  
 Intended ‘Did Peter not buy anything?’

The tricky part is to explain what prevents the appearance of *ni*-items in NegYNs with underlying low negation. My analysis requires two ingredients: in NegYNs, (i) *ni*-items must move; and (ii) they target a position that disables any further manipulations of the moved XP *and* of the head, whose Spec provides a landing site to the displaced NCIs. In other words, what I am suggesting here is a conspiracy of sorts: in the presence of *ni*-items, the standard procedure for forming *li*-questions cannot apply, forcing the declarative string (with the question prosody) instead.

The intended configuration, sketched in (58), is a result of two operations: movement of the NCI to Spec, NegP, and V-raising to the Neg-head. The former is driven by focus.<sup>12</sup>

- (58) [...[NegP *ni-item*<sub>[FOC, NEG]</sub> [NegP Neg<sup>0</sup>+V<sup>0</sup><sub>[FOC, NEG, Q]</sub> [AspectP/vP...]]]

There is a well-established precedent in the literature for analyzing NCI licensing as a consequence of movement. For instance, Bošković (2009) argues that in BCS, *ni-(t)ko* ‘*ni*-who’ (identical to its Russian *ni*-equivalent) and *i-(t)ko* ‘*i*-who’ (licensed by long-distance negation and in certain non-veridical contexts) can be treated as spell-out variants: *ni*-emerges when the NCI finds itself in a Spec-Head configuration with negation; *i*- is spelled out in the positions of focus. Both movements—i.e., to Spec, NegP and to a median focus projection—are obligatory. My hunch for Russian is that movement for

<sup>11</sup> A sideshow comment: native speakers are explicitly taught to spell *ne* separately from the verbs. Though by no means conclusive, the existence of this prescriptive rule is a minor indication in favor of this treatment.

<sup>12</sup> (58) is reminiscent of the NEG-criterion configuration (Haegeman & Zanuttini 1991, Haegeman 1995). However, under my analysis the presumed driving force of NCI movement to Spec, NegP is focus.



focus and NCI-licensing *qua* licensing should be divorced: a *ni*-item must be licensed (via the AGREE-type mechanism) and, independently of this, it may *also* be subject to displacement driven to satisfy the information structure demands. This topic begs for a place of its own, so I confine myself to a single point exemplified in (59). As a general prosodic default, the first negative element (whether a *ni*-item in (59-a) or a negated verb in (59-b)) tends to realize sentential stress (indicated by caps). On the hypothesis entertained here, *ni*-items are “licensed” in each example, but only in (59-a), does the NCI undergo movement for focus. For reasons I cannot yet explain the NCI focus movement in NegYNs is obligatory.

- (59) a. On ničeGO ne prines.  
           he ni-what NEG brought  
           ‘He didn’t bring anything.’  
       b. On ne priNES ničego.  
           he NEG brought ni-what  
           ‘He didn’t bring anything.’

If this stipulation is granted, (58) results in a configuration of “Criterial Freezing” (CF), defined in (60). CF is understood as an instance of a Spec-Head relationship, as in (61).

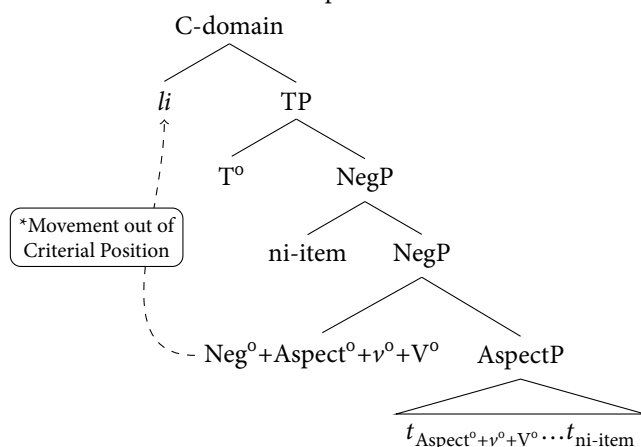
- (60) **Criterial Freezing:** An element satisfying the criterion is frozen in place.  
       (Criterial features are those related to information structure) (Rizzi 2015a,b)
- (61) **Left Periphery Condition:**  
       α) A carrier of a criterial feature {Top, Mod, Foc, Wh, Subj, etc.} must be in a Spec-head relation with the matching head.  
       β) A head of the set {+Top, +Mod, +Foc, +Wh, +Subj, etc.} must be in a Spec-head relation with the relevant element. (Samo 2019)

Rizzi originally formulated (60) to account for cases like (62) and (63). The first set shows that focus movement in Italian is possible in principle (though not obligatory). The second set – that the phrase [quale.Q LIBRO.FOC] is stuck in place, because it has two criterial features – Q and FOC. In principle, he conjectures, we can imagine a situation when the Q feature is satisfied *en passant* to enable further movement for FOC, but this does not happen (as confirmed by (63-b)), because (63-a) is a criterial configuration, so (60) applies.

- (62) a. Hanno deciso di leggere il LIBRO, non l’articolo.  
           they.have decided to read the book.FOC not the-article  
           ‘They decided to read the book, not the article.’  
       b. Il LIBRO hanno deciso di leggere, non l’articolo.  
           the book.FOC they.have decided to read not the-article  
           ‘It was the book they decided to read, not the article.’
- (63) a. Gianni non sapeva [quale LIBRO avessero raccomandato di leggere],  
           Gianni not knew which.Q book.FOC they.had recommended to read  
           non quale articolo.  
           not which article  
           ‘Gianni didn’t know which book they had recommended reading, not which article.’  
       b. \*[Quale LIBRO]<sub>i</sub> Gianni non sapeva [<sub>i</sub> Q avessero raccomandato di  
           which.Q book.FOC Gianni not knew they.had recommended to  
           leggere], non quale articolo.  
           read not which article  
           Intended: ‘Gianni didn’t know which book they had recommended reading,  
           not which article.’

A rather natural extension of Rizzi's idea is that *all* the elements appearing in the criterial position are equally affected. In other words, I suggest that CF renders both the Spec and the relevant checking head immobile. Applying this to the Russian NegYNs with low negation, we get (64), where the complex V-head proceeds as high as Neg. While there is room for debate on exactly *what* (and where) *li* is (see fn. 2), it is hard to imagine any disagreement on the matter of verb movement being the main syntactic means in the formation of Russian YN questions. For explicitness, let us assume that a well-formed configuration requires adjunction of V to C. From the sketch in (64), it should be obvious why this attempted fronting is prohibited: Neg+V cannot extract for the same reason *quale libro* is stuck in the intermediate slot: the verb cannot satisfy its criterial features (of which there are two, Q and FOC) "in passing". Since the head of NegP hosts FOC, the verb is ineligible to move further. It should be reiterated that the situation obtains only in the presence of a filled Spec, which, by assumption, is parasitic on the focal features of Neg<sup>0</sup> (which, in turn, drives the obligatory focus movement of the NCI).

(64) Extraction out of the criterial position



To recap: In YN questions, low Neg<sup>0</sup> is merged with FOC-features, which trigger movement of the *ni*-items to its Spec. The complex verbal head (clustered in Neg<sup>0</sup>) as well as the moved NCIs end up in the criterial position, which precludes any further movements.

Here is my evidence in defense of this proposal. First, in YN questions, Negative Concord is possible only in questions that employ the prosodic strategy. Moreover, in such instances there is a word order effect, whereby the *ni*-phrases must precede the verb, as in (65-a). The example in (65-b) has been noted in the literature.

- (65) a. Nikto ne prixodil?  
         ni-who NEG came  
         'Did no one come?'  
       b. \*Ne prixodil nikto?  
           NEG came   ni-who  
           Intended: 'Did no one come?' (Gribanova 2017)

But the fronting requirement actually holds for all *ni*-items in polar questions, as in (66) (although (66) is not truly outrageous, it is considerably dispreferred compared to (66-a)).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Pasha Koval (p.c.) informs me that in his judgment, (65-b) and (66-b) are fine. While this intuition is not shared by my five consultants or those from the previous studies, I believe it warrants a second look. It is plausible that those speakers who accept the examples I report as ungrammatical, interpret these questions in a particular way (perhaps, as echo questions or some version of biased questions). The other non-trivial variable to control for is prosody, which seems particularly crucial for Russian. Pending a systematic exploration of those issues, I leave this as a matter for further scrutiny.

- (66) a. Ivan nikogo ne videl?  
 Ivan ni-whom NEG saw  
 'Did Ivan not see anyone?'  
 b. ?\*Ivan ne videl nikogo?  
 Ivan NEG want ni-whom  
 Intended: 'Did Ivan not see anyone?'

Second, in the absence of special prosody, *ni*-items are best in a cluster before the verb. This property is reminiscent of multiple *wh*-fronting (claimed to be triggered by focus in Russian by Bošković 2002).<sup>14</sup>

- (67) a. On nikogo nigde ne videl.  
 he ni-whom ni-where NEG saw  
 'He didn't see anybody anywhere.'  
 b. ??On nikogo ne videl nigde.  
 he ni-whom NEG saw ni-where  
 Intended: 'He didn't see anyone anywhere'

Third, Criterial Freezing that affects heads is not some eccentricity of Russian: its imprint is detectable crosslinguistically.<sup>15</sup> Hungarian is a language argued to have focus movement which targets a preverbal position (Kiss 2002), as shown in (68). It is also a language that has an option to front verbs in YN questions, as in (69-a). What is not possible, however, is a configuration like (69-b)—where the verb is presumably extracted from the criterial position, much like the attempted fronting in (64).<sup>16</sup> As a side point, the Russian equivalent of (69-b) is likewise unacceptable for the same reason.

- (68) a. Zsuzsi MARIT / csak Marit hívta meg. (Hungarian)  
 Suzy Mary.FOC / only Mary invited PRT  
 'Suzy invited only Mary.'  
 b. \*Zsuzsi meghívta MARIT / csak Marit.  
 Suzy met Mary.FOC / only Mary  
 Intended: 'Suzy invited only Mary.'
- (69) a. Meghívta Zsuzsi Marit? (Hungarian)  
 invited Suzy Mary  
 'Did Suzy invite Mary?'  
 b. \*Meghívta Zsuzsi csak Marit / MARIT?  
 invited Suzy only Mary / Mary.FOC  
 Intended: 'Did Suzy invite only Mary / MARY?'

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The main takeaway from the discussion above is that the original explorers of "Expletive negation" phenomena were not quite right (I say this with all the deference due to them for delimiting the general parameters enabling this discussion). I have argued that negation in NegYNs, a purported instantiation of EN, is not vacuous. My analysis provides two Merge domains for the negative operator—in the illocutionary sphere and above the verbal layer. I have further suggested that NegYNs are ambiguous between the two—which roughly correlates with the two available meanings.

Getting to the specifics: I have suggested that low Neg is solely responsible for the licensing of NCIs and compatibility with *ešče* 'yet, still' (under certain conditions). While high Neg does not license NCIs, it is compatible with *uže* 'already'.

<sup>14</sup>The parallelism between the negative and interrogative sentences is discussed in Haegeman (1995).

<sup>15</sup>I am grateful to Željko Bošković (p.c.) for this pointer.

<sup>16</sup>Many thanks to George Fowler (p.c.) for a consult on Hungarian (and for providing access to native speakers).

The thorniest bit involved explaining why NCIs are impossible in NegYNs with low negation. I have proposed an analysis under which they are ruled out for independent reasons: a complex V-head is inextricable out of a criterial position (an extension of Rizzi's *Criterial Freezing*) in the presence of a filled Spec. This fact enjoys some crosslinguistic confirmation.

Finally, with regard to the assignment of the genitive to objects under clausemate negation, I argued that the negator *ne* is a verbal prefix, integral in triggering a type-shift that accompanies GoN (where applicable). Whether its checking operator is high or low is immaterial—which is why GoN is presumed to be possible for both types of negative configurations.

The main proposals were flanked by a couple of incidental claims: one related to the nature of phases (I argued in favor of the contextual approach to phases) and the other to the nature of NCI-licensing (via an Agree-type mechanism).

There were also some points that were meant to inaugurate (rather than settle) the discussion. One of my stipulations concerns the obligatory NCI movement to Spec, NegP in NegYNs: my hope is that a principled explanation can be uncovered for this compulsory operation. Another non-trivial component of the phenomenon that I largely ignored (save for a few cursory mentions) is prosody, which calls for a systematic exploration of its own.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	accusative	NC	Negative Concord
CF	Criterial Freezing	NCI	Negative Concord Item
EN	Expletive Negation	NEG	negation
FOC	focus	NOM	nominative
GEN	genitive	PFV	perfective
GoN	Genitive of Negation	Q	Question
IPFV	imperfective	YN	Yes-No

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