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Introduction. Although Negative Concord (NC) systems still feature Double Negation (DN) readings in certain environments (de Swart (2010): Ch.6)—conditioned by prosodic factors and aspects of information structure (Puskás 2012, Déprez and Yeaton 2022)—our understanding of the range of these environments remains limited. Further, it has been a perennial challenge to develop any analysis in which the distribution of DN is constrained in a principled way (Zeijlstra 2004, Penka 2010, de Swart and Sag 2002). Various mechanisms have been proposed to allow NCIs to contribute negative meaning on their own, but none of them explain why DN readings appear in the specific environments where they are found. Examining specific contexts in the NC system of African American English (AAE) where DN effects arise in connection with focus, I propose a principled account of these effects that draws on parallels with the Wh-domain. I argue that DN readings in AAE arise as a strategy for avoiding an intervention effect—a phenomenon typically attributed to improper composition of alternatives (Beck 2006; Li and Law 2016; Kotek 2019).

The pattern. In AAE, Long Distance Negative Concord (LDNC) occurs across Neg-Raising predicates like *think* (1) and non-Neg-Raising predicates (Zaitsu to appear). However, LDNC is blocked when focus-marked elements intervene between the licensing negation and the NCI. I illustrate this pattern with *think*, but the same effects are predicted for the non-Neg-Raising predicates that allow LDNC.

(1) Amy don't think Melanie lied to nobody.
'Amy thinks Melanie didn't lie to anybody.' (=NC)

(2) Amy don't think only MELANIE$_F$ lied to nobody.
'Amy thinks that Melanie and others (not only Melanie) lied to nobody.' (=DN)

(3) Amy don't think MELANIE$_F$ lied to nobody.
'Amy thinks that someone other than Melanie (not Melanie) lied to nobody.' (=DN)

The DN readings in (2)-(3) follow from my proposal that: (i) NCIs introduce alternatives (ii) negation interacts with the focus dimension of meaning, and (iii) both covert and overt negation exhibit focus sensitivity as described in (ii). The existence of the covert negative operator in NC systems is established elsewhere (e.g., Zeijlstra 2004, Penka 2010), but I contribute an account of why it becomes necessary under particular conditions. While the idea that polarity-sensitive elements introduce alternatives is well-established (Krifka 1995, Chierchia 2013, a.o.), it has been less explored in the context of NC. I offer evidence for this view, arguing that the NC dependency has a semantic component. Notably, not all focus-marked or alternative-introducing expressions (ALT-expressions) result in DN readings. To explain this variation, I draw on Beck's (2006, 2016) framework for Wh-intervention, which addresses the diversity of ALT-evaluating operators, and show that it can also account for the varied effects in the NC system of AAE.

Focus intervention in the Wh-domain. According to Rooth's (1985, 1992) theory of focus interpretation, there are two dimensions of meaning, such that every expression has an ordinary semantic value ('o-value'; $[\![.]\!]^o$) and a focus semantic value ('f-value'; $[\![.]\!]^f$). Foci (subscripted with 'F') introduce alternatives in the focus dimension of interpretation. $\sim$ evaluates the alternatives associated with foci, as in (2)-(3), ensuring that they are contextually licensed; *only* thus associates with foci indirectly. $\sim$ resets the f-value to a singleton consisting of the o-value, effectively "using up" the alternatives introduced by its sister.

In Beck's (2006) account of intervention effects within the Wh-domain, $\sim$ is an unselective operator that interacts with all alternatives in its scope, including those introduced by Wh-elements (WH), which have a defined f-value (a set of alternatives) but an undefined o-value. The ALT-evaluating operator Q, located in the clause's left periphery, can integrate these alternatives into the composition, ensuring a well-defined o-value, but it requires an argument with a defined f-value to do so. When $\sim$ intervenes between Q and WH as in (4), it sets the f-value to the undefined o-value, making both dimensions of interpretation undefined. This results in an uninterpretable LF, predicting that configurations where foci c-command a WH—common in WH-in-situ languages—will be unacceptable, as observed across many such languages (Kim 2002).

(4) LF: *[Q ... $\sim$ ... WH] INTERVENTION CONFIGURATION

Proposal. DN readings in (2)-(3) follow if we take the NC dependency to be framed analogously to the relationship between Q and WH: NCIs introduce alternatives, but lack an ordinary value and depend on either covert or overt NEG to provide one. In this system, NCIs are like Wh-indeterminates (Kratzer and Shimoyama 2002, Uegaki 2018), meaning that the existential import of NCIs arises from ∃-closure over the set of alternatives.

(5) $[\![\text{nobody}]\!]^o$ = *undefined*
$[\![\text{nobody}]\!]^f = \{x \mid x \text{ is a human}\}$

(6) $[\![\text{NEG } \varphi]\!]^o = \lambda w.\bigwedge_{p \in [\![\varphi]\!]^f} \neg p(w)$
$[\![\text{NEG } \varphi]\!]^f = \{[\![\text{NEG } \varphi]\!]^o\}$

Alternative composition proceeds in the f-dimension via Pointwise Functional Application; this includes ∃-closure, which collapses the alternatives into a singleton (Uegaki 2018). The o-dimension, however, remains undefined until NEG enters the composition. As with Q, NEG requires an argument with a well-defined f-value to assign a well-defined o-value to the expression. In the NC derivation of (2) (see (7a)), ∼ intervenes between NEG and the NCI, and given the semantics of the NCI (as in (5)), it returns an object where both dimensions of meaning are left undefined. Consequently, NEG cannot provide the expression with an o-value, resulting in an intervention effect.

(7) a. LF: *[*n't*$_{\text{NEG}}$ ... [$_{\text{CP}}$ only$_{\text{C}}$ ∼$_{\text{C}}$ MELANIE$_{\text{F}}$ ∃ lied to NCI]] (*NC)

b. LF: ✓[*n't*$_{\text{NEG}}$ ... [$_{\text{CP}}$ only$_{\text{C}}$ ∼$_{\text{C}}$ MELANIE$_{\text{F}}$ NEG ∃ lied to NCI]] (✓DN)

Unlike the fixed position of Q, the interpretive position of NEG is more flexible. I assume that covert NEG can intervene between overt NEG and ∼ (as in (7b)), creating a semantic object with an ordinary value. This allows composition with ∼ to proceed in the standard manner and results in the obligatory DN reading.

Selective operators. In Beck's framework, ALT-evaluating operators are distinguished as either selective or unselective, with unselective operators giving rise to intervention effects while selective ones do not. Selective evaluation can be modeled with focus indices, as required for independent reasons (Kratzer 1991). Beck considers Q a selective operator that evaluates only alternatives within its scope that share the same index, disregarding all others—a claim supported by the acceptability of (8a). In my analysis, NEG is like Q, predicting that non-NCI alternatives within its scope should not be a problem; this is confirmed by the acceptability of (8b).

(8) a. *I only wonder who Amy*$_{\text{F}}$ *likes.* / LF: I only$_{\text{C}}$ [∼$_{\text{C}}$ wonder [Q$_1$ who$_1$ AMY$_{\text{F}}$ likes]].

b. *I only don't give Charlie*$_{\text{F}}$ *nothin. (=NC)* / LF: I only$_{\text{C}}$ [∼$_{\text{C}}$ do n't$_{\text{NEG}_2}$ give CHARLIE$_{\text{F}}$ nothing$_2$].

Moreover, these data support the idea that the scope of ∼ matters for inducing an intervention effect; ALT-expressions themselves are not interveners. This analysis of Q and NEG also predicts that Q should not act as an intervener for NEG, which is indeed the case. Examples like (9) are completely routine for my consultants across a range of matrix predicates and Wh-elements.

(9) I do n't$_{\text{NEG}_2}$ know [$_{\text{CP}}$ Q$_1$ who$_1$ called nobody$_2$]. (=NC)

The properties of ALT-evaluating operators are crucial in determining whether specific ALT-expressions will generate an intervention effect. Another example of this is *even*, a focus-sensitive operator that does *not* trigger intervention in the NC domain.

(10) I don't think even ELLA$_{\text{F}}$ found nothing at the thrift store. (=NC)

It has been argued that the focus associate of *even* is evaluated by an operator distinct from ∼. Unlike ∼, this operator does not reset the f-value to the o-value; instead, it passes up the alternatives of its sister (Bade and Sachs 2019). This distinction provides a natural explanation for why *even* does not trigger intervention effects in the NC domain, whereas *only* does.

Conclusion. This analysis helps to clarify the association between DN readings and focus in NC systems, while maintaining the commitment that NCIs are uniformly non-negative. Additionally, I show that alternative approaches to intervention, such as those proposed by Kotek (2019) and Li and Law (2016), do not fully capture the range of NC effects observed in AAE. More generally, this approach also addresses the challenge for purely syntactic accounts of the NC dependency—raised by Penka (2010)—which fail to explain why NCIs must be interpreted in the scope of negation at LF.

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