

NEGATIVE CONCORD IN RUSSIAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Jeremy Kuhn

Institut Jean Nicod, CNRS
jeremy.d.kuhn@gmail.com

Lena Pasalskaya

HSE University
lena@ales.ru

SUMMARY

- RSL has **negative concord**: NOBODY, NOTHING require sentential negation
- Unlike spoken Russian, it is **non-strict concord**:
Some positions allow NC items without negation
- Like a number of other SLs,
the syntactic structure of **negation is on the right** not the left.
- **Result**: RSL is the mirror image of Italian
- Sign language informs theoretical linguistics: Syntactic properties common to sign language allow us to distinguish between hypotheses.

BACKGROUND

Negative concord (NC) – a phenomenon in which two negative elements—the **NC item** and its **licensor**—express a single negative meaning.

Strict concord: NC items always require sentential negation

- (1) a. Marija **ne** videla **ničego**. (Russian)
Maria NEG see.PST nothing.GEN
'Maria saw nothing.'
- b. **Nikto** **ne** videl Mariju.
nobody NEG see.PST Maria-ACC
'Nobody saw Mary.'

Non-strict concord: NC items may sometimes appear without negation

- (2) a. **Non** ha telefonato **nessuno**. (Italian)
NEG PST call nobody
'Nobody called.'
- b. **Nessuno** ha telefonato.
nobody PST call
'Nobody called.'

No concord: NC items always appear without sentential negation

- (3) I saw **nobody**. (English)

Languages with NC		Languages without NC
Strict NC	Non-strict NC	
Russian, Greek, Hungarian	Italian, Portuguese, Spanish	English, German
	RSL	DGS, ASL, LFS, LIS (Kuhn 2019)

RSL DATA

I. NC items *in situ* require a negative licensor

- (4) a. NOBODY 3-CALL-1 NOT
b. *NOBODY 3-CALL-1
'Nobody called me.'



Irregular negation may be licensor

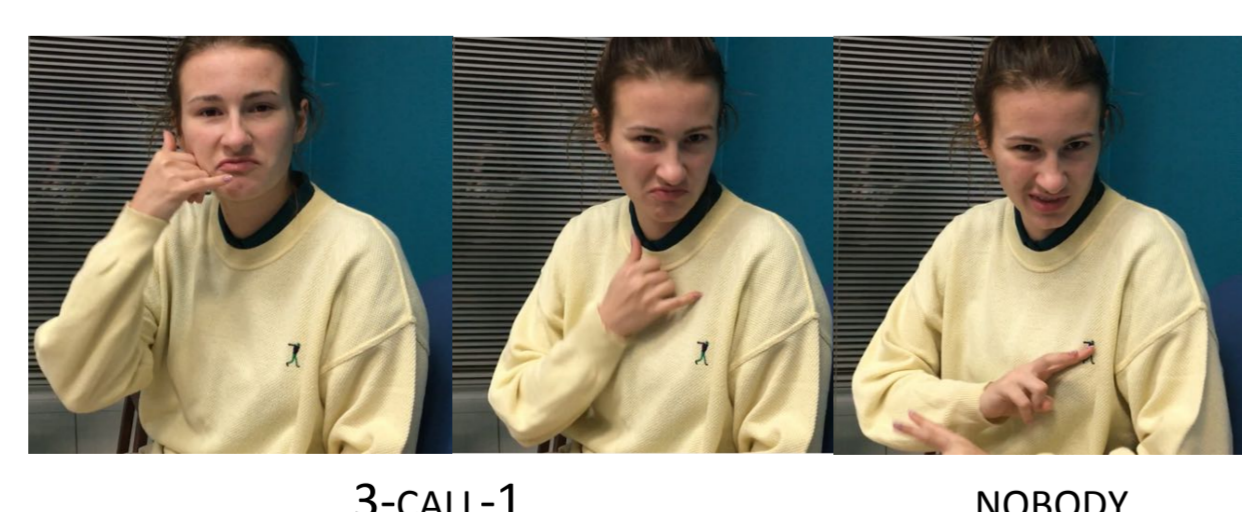
- (5) IX-3 NOTHING NEED.NOT
'I don't need anything.'

One licensor may license multiple NC items

- (6) NOBODY NOTHING GIVE NOT
'Nobody give me anything.'

II. NC items on right edge do not need a licensor

- (7) 3-CALL-1 NOBODY
*3-CALL-1 NOT NOBODY
'Nobody called me.'
- (8) IX-1 ENGLISH UNDERSTAND NEVER
IX-1 ENGLISH UNDERSTAND.NOT NEVER
'I never understand English.'



One NC item may license a second

- (9) NOBODY CAR GIVE-1 NEVER
'Never has anyone given me a car.'

ANALYSIS

I. Word order

Facts:

- SVO → SOVNeg

(10) MOTHER BUY BOOK
'Mother bought a book.'

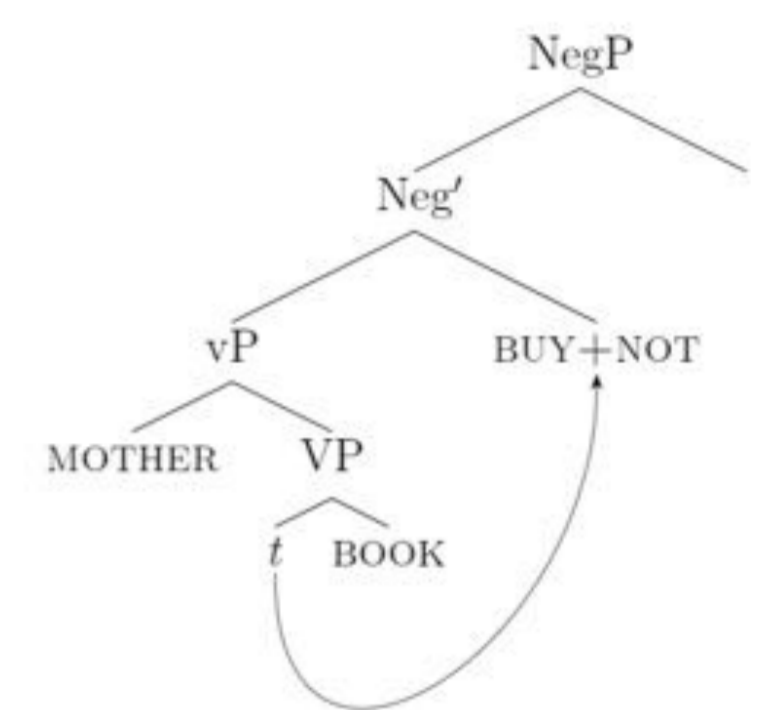
(11) MOTHER BOOK BUY NOT
'Mother didn't buy a book.'

- V-Neg compounding:

- The loss of repetition of the predicate
- Mouthing change

Explanation:

- Movement to NegP on the right
- Cf. LIS, DGS, TID, HKSL

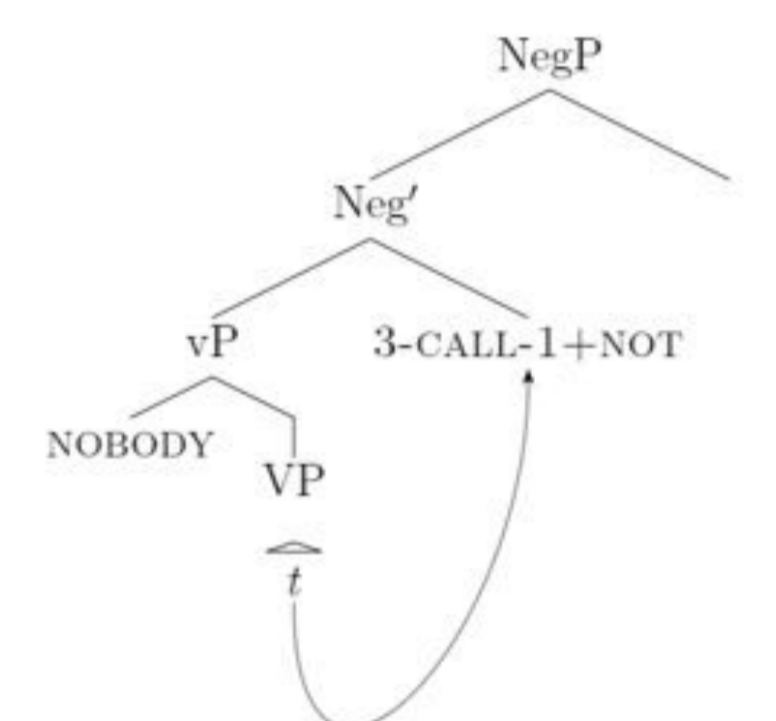


II. Negative concord

Two parts of the analysis (Zeijlstra 2004)

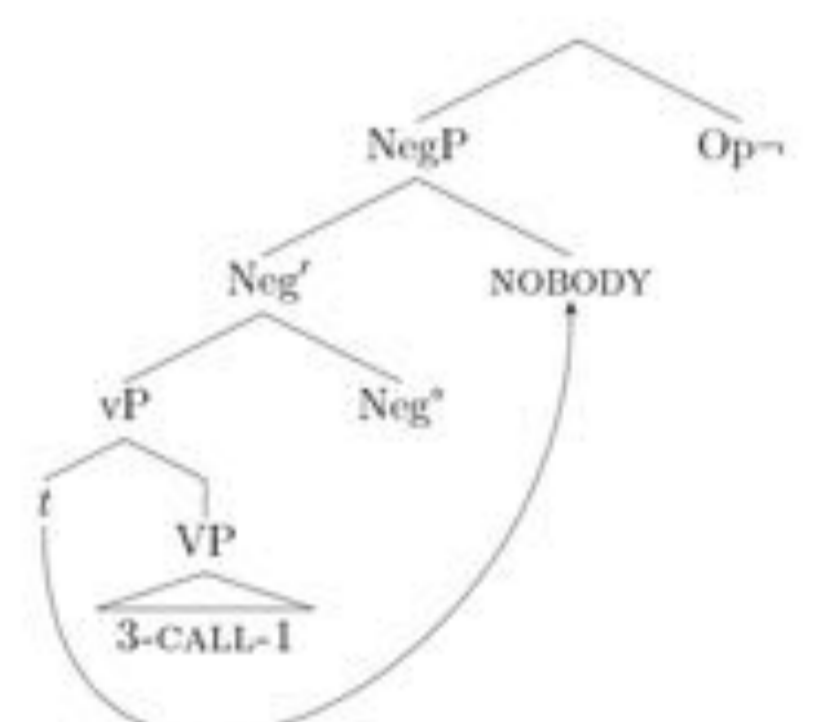
1. Negation must appear higher than the NC item to check a syntactic feature

NOT_[INEG] NOBODY_[UNEG]
[[NOBODY_[UNEG]3-CALL-1 NOT_[INEG]]



2. If this is *not possible*, then silent negation may appear as a *last resort*.

Op_[INEG]
[[[3-CALL-1]NOBODY_[UNEG]] Op_[INEG]]



NON-MANUALS

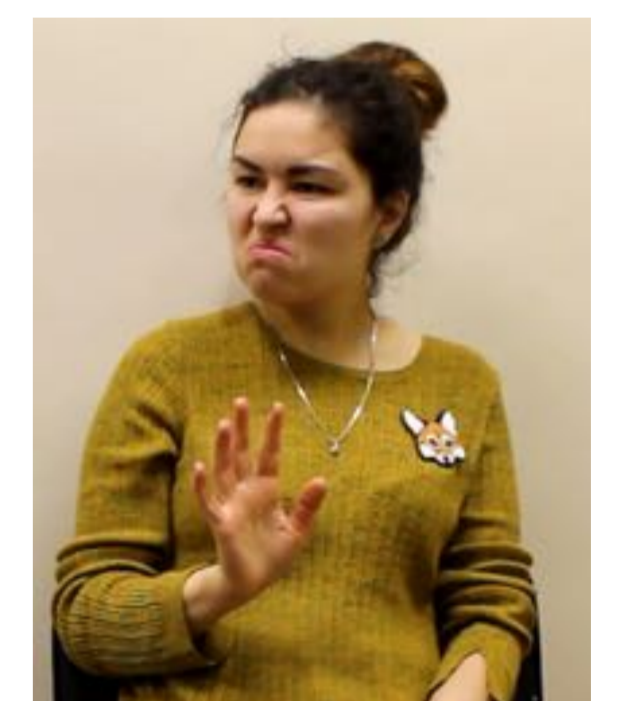
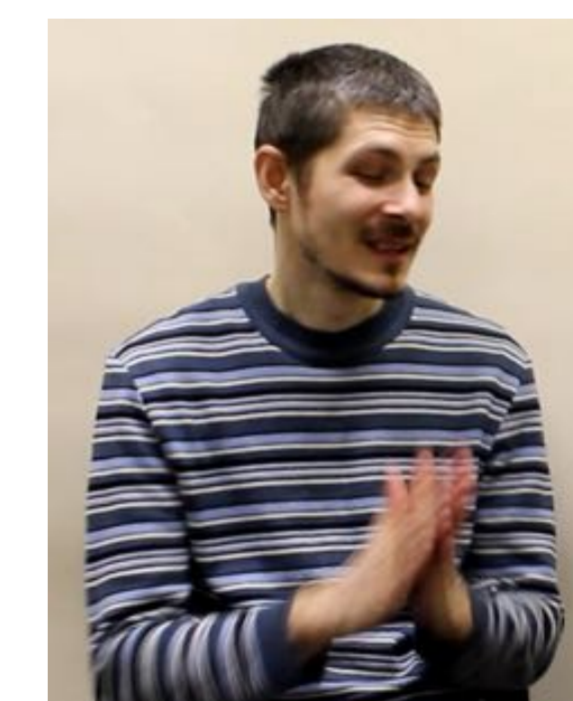
Could this be topicalization?

- (10) 3-CALL-1 NOBODY
'As for calling me, nobody did.'

→ This would contradict our analysis: 'NOBODY' is lower than the rest

Facts:

- (11) neg
head-tilt
3-CALL-1 NOBODY
'Nobody called me.'
- (12) neg
squint
NOBODY 3-CALL-1 NOT



Non-manuals for topicalization

Non-manuals for negation

Inferences:

- Sometimes a prosodic break between right-dislocated negative word and the rest: Neutral between either analysis.
- No apparent eyebrow raise, so no evidence for topicalization. (But there is relatively little eyebrow movement in general in our data.)

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