

Free Merge, negative concord and long-distance scrambling in Russian

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Debates around Agree

Background

Consensus

- feature-defective probes
- feature-complete goals
- c-command

No consensus

- directionality of Agree
- featural oppositions
 - valued/unvalued
 - valued/unvalued + **interpretable/uninterpretable**

- probes always c-command goals (Chomsky 2000, Preminger 2013 etc.)
- goals always c-command probes (Zeijlstra 2012, Bjorkman & Zeijlstra 2019)
- sometimes one way, sometimes the other (Baker 2008)

Strengths and weaknesses

Probes c-command goals

- fares exceptionally well for argument-predicate agreement
- fares significantly less well for anaphor binding, negative and modal concord, sequence of tense

Goals c-command probes

- not very suitable for modelling argument-predicate agreement (Preminger 2013, Preminger & Polinsky 2015, Polinsky & Preminger 2019, Rudnev 2020b, 2021, Barany & van der Wal 2022)
- often used to model binding (Hicks 2009, Sundaresan 2016, Murugesan 2019), negative concord (Zeijlstra 2004, 2012)

An analytical dilemma

If probes always c-command goals, then

- either negative concord isn't syntactic and mustn't be modelled via Agree (Preminger & Polinsky 2015, Kuhn 2021)
- or negative concord must be recast in terms of Downwards Agree

Negative concord in Russian

Strict negative concord and Upwards Agree

Zeijlstra (2004) *et seq.*

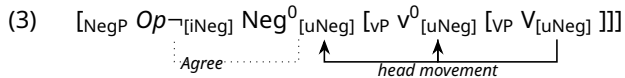
(1) Nikto *(ne) prishël.

no.one not came

'No one came.'

(2) $Op_{\neg[iNeg]}$ $nikto_{[uNeg]}$ $ne_{[uNeg]}$ $prishël$

Negation in the clause (Zeijlstra 2004)



NCI licensing cannot cross finite clause boundaries:

(4) * $Op_{\neg[iNeg]}$ ya ne_[uNeg] govoril [ehto on poedet nikuda_[uNeg]]
I NEG said that he go.FUT nowhere

(‘I did not say that he would go anywhere.’)

Explanation for this is normally sought and found in the locality constraints on Agree.

Interactions with movement

Long-distance scrambling in Russian

- (5) a. Ya govoril chto on poedet v Afriku.
I said that he will.go in Africa
'I said that he would go to Africa.'
- b. Ya govoril v Afriku chto on poedet _____.
I said in Africa that he will.go
- c. Ya v Afriku govoril chto on poedet _____.
I in Africa said that he will.go
- d. V Afriku ya govoril chto on poedet _____.
in Africa I said that he will.go
'I said that he would go to AFRICA.'

Long-distance scrambling and negation

- (6) a. Ya ne govorił chto on poedet v Afriku.
I NEG said that he will.go in Africa
'I did not say that he would go to Africa.'
- b. Ya ne govorił v Afriku chto on poedet _____.
I NEG said in Africa that he will.go
- c. Ya v Afriku ne govorił chto on poedet _____.
I in Africa NEG said that he will.go
- d. V Afriku ya ne govorił chto on poedet _____.
in Africa I NEG said that he will.go
'I did not say that he would go to AFRICA.'

Negative concord and long-distance scrambling

- (7) a. *Ya ne govorił chto on poedet **nikuda**.
I NEG said that he go.FUT nowhere
(‘I did not say that he would go anywhere.’)
- b. *Ya ne govorił **nikuda** chto on poedet _____.
I NEG said nowhere that he go.FUT
- c. Ya **nikuda** ne govorił chto on poedet _____.
I nowhere NEG said that he go.FUT
- d. **Nikuda** ya ne govorił chto on poedet _____.
Nowhere I NEG said that he go.FUT
‘I did not say that he would go anywhere.’

A descriptive generalisation

Scrambling obviates an NCI violation but only if its landing site c-commands *ne* 'not'.

Theoretical implications

- UA predicts available orders to be unavailable
- UA predicts unavailable orders to be available

Available orders and Upwards Agree i

Apparent violation of structural conditions on Agree

- (8) a. Ya nikuda ne govoril chto on poedet.
I nowhere NEG said that he go.FUT
- b. Nikuda ya ne govoril chto on poedet.
Nowhere I NEG said that he go.FUT
'I did not say that he would go anywhere.'

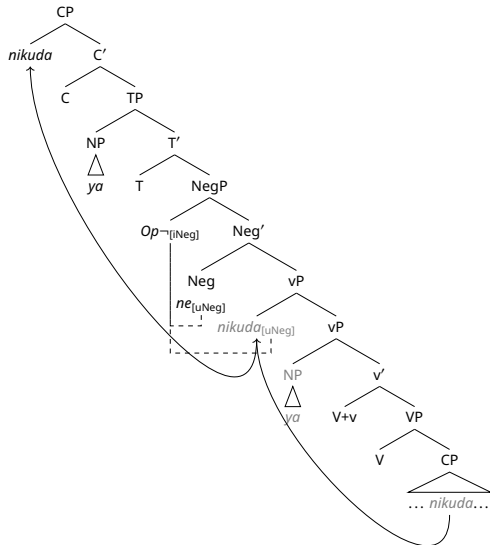
Problem: [uNeg] (*nikuda* 'nowhere') higher than [iNeg] (*Op*→)

→ [uNeg] cannot be checked

yet the sentences are fine

Available orders and Upwards Agree ii

Intermediate stopover below [iNeg]?



Available orders and Upwards Agree iii

This intermediate landing site is both empirically and conceptually plausible, at least given current conceptions of locality (Chomsky 2001, Legate 2003):

- (9) Ya chasto v Afriku govoril chto on poekhal. **[PP in Spec,vP]**
I often in Africa said that he went
‘I often used to say that he had gone to Africa.’

NB: while commonly assumed in the literature, the phasal status of v/Voice is disputed by, amongst others, Keine & Zeijlstra (2021)

Because in addition to scrambling there's also verb movement to Neg, two orderings are possible:

Scrambling precedes verb movement

(10) **Step 1: move PP to Spec,vP**

[_{NegP} *Op*_{¬[iNeg]} *ne*_[uNeg] *nowhere*_[uNeg] [_{vP} I *said that he will.go*
*nowhere*_[uNeg]]]

(11) **Step 2: move V+v to Neg**

[_{TP} I [_{NegP} *Op*_{¬[iNeg]} *ne*_[uNeg] *said nowhere*_[uNeg] [_{CP} that ...]]]

Result: unavailable word order

(12) *Ya ne govoril **nikuda** chto on poedet ____ .

I NEG said nowhere that he go.FUT

Scrambling follows verb movement

- scrambling would have to exceptionally target Spec,NegP rather than Spec,vP, giving the right word order
- but then [uNeg] would appear higher than [iNeg], still unable to be checked

I conclude that Upwards Agree doesn't perform particularly well with respect to modelling the available orders

Unavailable orders and intermediate scrambling

The unavailable NCI > C order is actually structurally ambiguous.

- (13) *Ya ne govoril nikuda chto on poedet ____ .
I NEG said nowhere that he go.FUT

One structural source: NCI in matrix Spec,vP.

The other structural source: NCI in embedded Spec,CP.

Upwards Agree predicts the unavailable NCI > C order to be available.

I've identified two challenges for Upwards Agree:

- UA undergenerates
 - available orders aren't generated
- UA overgenerates
 - unavailable orders are generated

Downwards Agree alternative

Assumptions

- probes c-command goals
- maximal projections can act as probes (Chomsky 1995, Rezac 2003, Rudnev 2020a, Clem 2021, Keine & Dash 2021)
 - phrasal NCIs can probe in their c-command domain
- the sentential negation marker *ne* 'not' is real semantic negation
 - no abstract $Op\neg$ required (Rossyaykin 2020)
- features involved in Agree are **polarity** features $[\Sigma: \neg]$ and $[\Sigma: _]$ (Laka 1990)
 - $[\Sigma: \neg] \leftrightarrow ne / V$
 - $[\Sigma: _] \leftrightarrow ni / elsewhere$
- unvalued features received default values (Preminger 2014)

A simple case

We start with the basic structure:

- (14) On $ne_{[\Sigma: \neg]}$ poedet $nikuda_{[\Sigma: _]}$ → Agree is impossible
he NEG go.FUT nowhere

$[\Sigma: _]$ can now move:

- (15) On $nikuda_{[\Sigma: _]}$ $ne_{[\Sigma: \neg]}$ poedet _____ → Agree is possible
he nowhere NEG go.FUT

'He isn't going anywhere.'

Consequence: surface 'Neg > NCI' orders are derived (Brown 2005, Bošković 2009).

NCI stays in embedded clause

Structural condition on Agree is not met, as [Σ : $_$] does not c-command [Σ : \neg]:

- (16) *Ya ne_[Σ : \neg] govoril [ehto on poedet nikuda<sub>[Σ : $_$]]
I NEG said that he go.FUT nowhere
(‘I did not say that he would go anywhere.’)</sub>

Negative concord cannot be licensed.

While movement to embedded Spec,CP is perfectly licit, in the resulting configuration [Σ : $_$] still does not c-command [Σ : \neg]:

- (17) *Ya ne_[\Sigma: \neg] govoril nikuda_[\Sigma: _] chto on poedet.
I NEG said nowhere that he go.FUT
(‘I did not say that he would go anywhere.’)

Negative concord cannot be licensed.

While movement to matrix Spec,vP is perfectly licit, in the resulting configuration [Σ : $_$] still does not c-command [Σ : \neg]:

- (18) *Ya ne_[\Sigma: \neg] govoril nikuda_[\Sigma: _] chto on poedet.
I NEG said nowhere that he go.FUT
(‘I did not say that he would go anywhere.’)

Negative concord cannot be licensed.

The basic structural condition has now been satisfied, as [Σ : _] now c-commands [Σ : \neg].

- (19) a. Ya nikuda_[Σ : _] ne_[Σ : \neg] govoril chto on poedet.
I nowhere NEG said that he go.FUT
- b. Nikuda_[Σ : _] ya ne_[Σ : \neg] govoril chto on poedet.
Nowhere I NEG said that he go.FUT
- 'I did not say that he would go anywhere.'

Negative concord is licensed.

A few consequences

- XPs with unvalued features can escape locality domains until they encounter a valued goal (Bošković 2007)
 - no look-ahead
 - no additional features to trigger successive-cyclic movement
- Agree can proceed from derived positions
- resulting approach compatible with existing analyses of NCI licensing in Slavonic (Abels 2005, Bošković 2009, Rossyaykin 2020)
- n-words/NCIs aren't narrow-scoping indefinites but wide-scoping universals (Giannakidou 1998)

Negative concord in fragments

Treating n-words/NCIs as nonnegative universals has been argued to create a challenge in the context of fragment answers:

- (20) Kto prishël? – Nikto.
 who came nobody

 ‘Who came? – No one.’

If fragments involve ellipsis (Merchant 2005), then, according to Watanabe (2004), this creates a polarity mismatch making ellipsis illicit.

Agreement and ellipsis i

Watanabe's (2004) argument relies on faulty logic because it only regards the antecedent as providing the relevant conditions for ellipsis licensing.

$$(21) \quad \underbrace{\dots XP \dots YP \dots}_{\text{antecedent}} - \underbrace{\text{Probe}_{[F:_]}}_{\text{remnant}} \left[\underbrace{\dots \text{Goal}_{[F:\bar{\alpha}]} \dots}_{\text{ellipsis site}} \right]$$

Argument ellipsis

$$(22) \quad \text{A: } \bar{V}_y \quad \text{uzhe prishl-i?} - \text{B: Prishl}_{[\varphi:_]}\text{-a } [\text{ya}_{[\varphi:\text{1SG.F}]}]$$

you.PL yet came-PL came-F:SG

'Have you come yet? – I have.'

Interpretable φ -feature mismatch.

Sluicing

(23) [C_[decl] I've seen something.] – What_[uQ] [have+C_[IQ] you seen] ?

(24) I've seen something but I'm not sure what_[uQ] [C_[IQ] I've just seen]

Clause-type mismatch.

→ no reason to single out polarity as causing an irreparable mismatch



Conclusions

- Upwards Agree does not fare better than Downwards Agree when it comes to modelling strict negative concord in Russian
 - see also Deal 2021 for a similar conclusion, albeit within a different framework
- this removes a core argument for reversing the directionality of Agree
- ideally, we want crosslinguistic corroboration, at least across Slavonic
 - Pavel Caha (p.c.) confirms the existence of similar facts in Czech, but more work is required

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