Negative changes: a parametric account of the diachrony of Afrikaans negation

Theresa Biberauer & Hedde Zeijlstra

I Negation systems are traditionally classified as either Double Negation/DN or Negative Concord/NC systems, with the difference being that every morphosyntactically negative element in the former corresponds to a semantic negation, whereas the same is not true in the latter. Diachronically, we observe that DN systems may become NC ones (cf. the DN 17th century varieties of Dutch which gave rise to NC Afrikaans), while the reverse change is also possible (cf. the changes that have occurred during the history of English). Here, we focus on a previously undiscussed negative change, one that has taken place in the recent history of Afrikaans (since its 1925 standardisation), resulting in a dialectal split in modern Afrikaans.

II Standard Afrikaans (Afrikaans A) is an NC language which necessarily requires both the sentential negative marker/NM *nie* (1) and n-words (2) to co-occur with clause-final *nie*:

(1) Hy verstaan *nie* Afrikaans *nie*
he understand NEG Afrikaans NEG = "He doesn't understand Afrikaans"

(2) Ons wil *nooit* ophou *nie*
us want n-ever stop NEG = "We never want to stop"

This variety, spoken by a dwindling number of speakers in South Africa, contrasts with an innovative variety, Afrikaans B, spoken in particular by younger speakers and also by the Cape Coloured community (Kaaps). First, whereas a pair of n-words necessarily delivers a DN reading (3a) in Afrikaans A, the same Afrikaans B string results in an NC reading (3b):

(3) a. *Niemand* verstaan *niks* nie [Afrikaans A]
n-one understand n-thing NEG = "No-one understands nothing"

b. *Niemand* verstaan *niks* nie [Afrikaans B]
n-one understand n-thing NEG = "No-one understands anything"

Second, Afrikaans A does not permit clause-internal concord elements in the presence of n-words (4a), whereas Afrikaans B optionally does (4b). As indicated, the presence of the "extra" *nie* results in an emphatic effect (cf. Dahl 2001, Kiparsky & Condoravdi 2006):

(4) a. Hy het *niks* *(*nie)* gedoen *nie* [Afrikaans A]
He has nothing NEG done NEG = "He didn't do anything"

b. Hy het *niks* *(nie)* gedoen *nie* [Afrikaans B]
He has nothing NEG done NEG = "He didn't do ANYTHING"

Given this difference, the question that arises is whether the NC phenomenon in (3b) gave rise to the "extra" *nie*-permitting structure in (4b) or vice versa. Here, we will show (i) that the latter sequence can plausibly be shown to have given rise to the synchronic properties of Afrikaans B, and (ii) that this sequence can be readily understood in terms of Zeijlstra's formal characterisation of negative markers and n-words, a fact with wider implications.

III Although Afrikaans A does not permit n-words to co-occur with a clause-internal concord element, there is one context in this variety where an n-word is often followed by final *nie*: fragment answers as in (5) (prescriptively, final *nie* is obligatory, but it is very commonly omitted in spoken standard Afrikaans, the variety under consideration here), where the answer with *nie* can be more emphatic (an expected outcome, following proposals on the interaction between negation emphasis in Kiparsky & Condoravdi 2006):

(5) Wie het my boek gesien? *Niemand* (*nie*)
who has my book seen? n-body NEG = "Who saw my book? No-one (at all)"

Further, Afrikaans A speakers also permit clause-internal *nie* in emphatic structures like (6):

(6) Die opdrag moet *nie* langer *nie* as 10 000 woorde wees *nie*
the assignment must no longer NEG than 10 000 words be NEG
"The assignment must be NO longer than 10 000 words"

Afrikaans A, then, features two contexts in which *nie*-inclusion yields an emphatic effect.

IV Biberauer & Zeijlstra (2009) analyse Afrikaans A as an NC language in which all n-words carry an interpretable formal negative feature ([iNEG]), which may then establish an Agree

relation with the NM, *nie*, the bearer of a [uNEG] feature. This analysis directly accounts for the Afrikaans A property that no n-word may be stacked without giving rise to an additional semantic negation. Moreover, it also explains why the negative marker *nie* may show up multiple times: adding an additional negative marker *nie* does not involve adding an element that is semantically interpretable as a negation. Finally, the reading in (1)-type structures follows from Zeijlstra's (2004, 2008) proposals (inspired by Ladusaw 1992) that overt elements carrying [uNEG] license the presence of a covert negative operator Op¬, which carries [iNEG]. The properties of the NM in NC Afrikaans B are the same as in Afrikaans A: it is [uNEG]. N-words, however, are crucially different, beariing [uNEG]; hence the NC readings in (3b)-type structures. Afrikaans B, then, is a Strict NC language (cf. Giannakidou 2000), i.e. one in which semantic negation is always introduced by an abstract negative operator. Afrikaans A, by contrast, is a previously unnoticed type of NC language.

V The question that now arises is why Afrikaans B has changed w.r.t. the phenomena illustrated in (3) and (4). We propose that the emphatic role that "extra" *nie*s already play in restricted contexts in Afrikaans A is the source of the change, with speakers opting to extend this option in particular to the domain of n-words. In effect, we thus have a Jespersen Cycle-development in the domain of n-words (cf. Biberauer 2008). A consequence of this extension is that n-word+*nie* combinations are analysed as single constituents by a new generation of speakers. This is clearly shown by the fact that *nooit nie* in Afrikaans B can undergo fronting to the initial position in V2 structures (7), where only one constituent may precede the verb:

(7) *NOOIT nie* kom jy terug *nie* !
never NEG come you back NEG = "You're NEVER coming back!"

The rise of clear n-word+*nie* constituents (cf. (4b) and (7)), however, prevents acquirers postulating the Afrikaans A featural analysis for n-words: since *nooit* is now located inside a larger constituent [$_{DP}$ nooit nie], it is no longer possible for an [iNEG] feature on the n-word to enter into an Agree relation with the *sentential* NM (clause-final *nie*); the c-command relation between *nooit* and sentence-final *nie* which is a prerequisite for Agree is thus unavailable. Language learners confronted with such sentences nevertheless have to account for their grammaticality, which they do by assigning n-words the feature [uNEG], and postulating a c-commanding abstract negative operator not just in the case of NMs (as in Afrikaans A), but also in n-word-containing structures. This reanalysis renders Afrikaans B a Strict NC language, with the result that we predict multiple n-words (all carrying [uNEG]) to be able to co-occur without giving rise to additional semantic negations. The second discrepancy between Afrikaans A and B is thus also accounted for.

VI The analysis proposed here is of wider significance for the understanding of DN→NC changes. Specifically, it shows that a previously unnoticed type of NC language (Afrikaans A) represents an intermediate stage in DN→Strict NC changes. Viewed in terms of Zeijlstra's (2004, 2008) system, this change seems to reflect a natural *pathway*, one defined in terms of increasing formal non-negativity (Dutch: NM & n-words=[+neg]→Afrikaans A: n-words=[+neg]; NMs=[-neg]; Afrikaans B: n-words & NM=[-neg]). If this is correct, we might expect to find other NC languages fitting Afrikaans A's *partial* Strict NC profile. Jaggar's (2007) discussion of Hausa negation suggests the existence of a partial Strict NC variety of this language. Our proposal also entails that properties of negative elements, i.e. (classes of) lexical items, constitute the locus of negation-related parametric variation (cf. also Déprez 2000, Roberts & Roussou 2003). If [+neg] features are necessarily associated with the substantive core of n-word nominal structure, while [-neg] features are associated with the functional periphery, a natural assumption in the Probe-Goal framework (Chomsky 2001), the changes discussed here in fact represent a further case of upward reanalysis (cf. Roberts & Roussou 2003, van Gelderen 2004).