

The Ban on True Negative Imperatives: new insights from the study of negative concord

I. True Negative Imperatives (TNIs) are constructions in which a verb with imperative morphology is negated. It is a well-known fact that some languages ban TNIs. Languages such as Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Greek or Hebrew do not allow TNIs, whereas Germanic languages (Dutch, German, English) or most Slavic languages (Polish, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian) accept TNIs. In languages of the first kind, a suppletive construction is required in order to express negative imperative illocutionary force, e.g. by using a subjunctive or an infinitival form of the verb:

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|-----|-----------------|----|--------------|----|------------------|----|-------------------|
| (1) | <u>Spanish:</u> | a. | ¡Lee! | b. | *¡No lee! | c. | ¡No leas! |
| | | | Read.2SG.IMP | | Neg read.2SG.IMP | | Neg read.2SG.SUBJ |
| | | | ‘Read!’ | | ‘Don’t read’ | | ‘Don’t read’ |
| (2) | <u>Polish:</u> | a. | Pracuj! | b. | Nie pracuj! | | |
| | | | Work.2SG.IMP | | Work.2SG.IMP | | |
| | | | ‘Work!’ | | ‘Don’t work!’ | | |

II. Several analyses have been proposed in order to account for this phenomenon. Rivero (1994) and Rivero & Terzi (1995) argue that the ban on TNIs is the result of the Head Movement Constraint (HMC) (Travis 1984), thus reducing it to relativized minimality effects. Adopting a hierarchy CP>NegP>IP, they argue that in languages that ban TNIs an imperative verb must move across Neg^o to C^o in order check its [IMP] feature. In languages that allow TNIs Rivero and Terzi claim that the [IMP] feature is hosted in I^o and therefore the verb does not need to move across Neg^o. This analysis faces some problems. First, Han (2001) demonstrates that illocutionary imperative force cannot be induced from a category below Neg^o, as in those cases negation then outscopes this force, yielding a reading ‘it is not imperative that’ instead of an imperative containing a negation ‘it is imperative that not’. Second, it remains unclear why the negative marker cannot attach to the verb and move together as a verbal complex to C^o in languages that ban TNIs.

Zanuttini (1994, 1997) argues that negation selects a MoodP that requires checking by a finite verb that contains [MOOD] features. Since imperatives, contrary to indicative or subjunctive forms, are said to be defective (i.e. morphologically poor), they lack such a [MOOD] feature. Hence TNIs are ruled out since Mood cannot have its [MOOD] feature checked. In affirmative imperatives MoodP is absent, as it is only subcategorized by negation, and affirmative imperatives are thus well-formed. Although this analysis covers the data for languages that ban TNIs it is much harder to explain the fact that other languages do not. One way out would be to assume that negation in those languages has different selectional properties, but this claim is not motivated independently. Although Zanuttini does not claim that her analysis extends to other than the Romance language, the question why other languages allow TNIs remains open.

Han (2001) finally argues that the ban on TNIs is the result of [_v Neg+V] movement to C^o. She argues that if the negation incorporates into V and moves along to C^o, it c-commands V and therefore negation outscopes the imperative operator in C^o, which leads to an incoherent interpretation (‘it is not imperative that’). Therefore these constructions are ruled out. Languages that allow TNIs do not give rise to the complex verbal structures [_vNeg+V] (English or German) or lack V-to-C movement (Slavic languages). In the latter case the imperative verb stands in an AGREE relation to C^o (cf. Chomsky 2001). A problem concerning Han’s approach is that it remains unexplained why imperative verbs have to move to C^o if an AGREE relation is possible as well. Furthermore, Han’s analysis crucially hinges on the assumption that all negative markers that block imperatives are semantically negative. I will demonstrate that this is not always the case

III. In this paper I present some new facts concerning the ban on TNIs. Based on broad cross-linguistic research the following generalization (G) can be drawn: all Non-strict Negative Concord (Non-strict NC) languages forbid TNSs. This does not hold the other way round: some Strict NC languages block TNI (Greek or Hebrew), other do not (e.g. Polish, Bulgarian or Serbo-Croatian). This observation is not predicted by all three previous approaches. Non-strict NC languages, contrary to Strict NC languages, do not allow the formation of an NC relation between an n-word to the left of the negative marker. For example, Spanish is a Non-strict NC language, Polish is a Strict NC language.

- (3) a. Spanish: **Nadie no vino*
 N-body NEG cam
 ‘Nobody came’
- b. Polish: *Nikt nie przyszedł*
 N-body NEG cam
 ‘Nobody came’

I follow Van der Wouden (1994), Herburger (2001) and Zeijlstra (2004) who argue that the difference between (3a) and (3b) is due to the semantics of the negative marker. Spanish *no* is semantically negative, whereas Polish *nie* is semantically empty: it only marks the presence of an abstract negative operator. It then follows that the negative marker in Spanish may not be c-commanded by the negative indefinite subject.

IV. Now let us look at the consequences of the semantics of the negative marker for the position that it is base-generated. In principle negative markers that are a syntactic head may base-generate in a position Neg° dominating VP, but negative markers may also be base-generated inside VP being head-adjoined to V° (cf. Zanuttini 1997). However, given that sentential negation scopes over the entire proposition and not only the verb, semantically negative markers cannot be base-generated inside VP: otherwise a sentential negation reading cannot be yielded. Thus, negative head markers in Non-strict NC languages must be base-generated in Neg° , outscoping VP. Strict NC languages vary with respect to this position: in some languages the negative marker is base-generated in V° , in others in Neg° .

Now the cross-linguistic distribution follows directly as a result of the HMC. I adopt Zanuttini's (1997) and Han's (2001) position that verbs have to move to C° , in order to check its [IMP] features. Now it follows that Non-strict NC languages ban TNIs since the negative head marker blocks verbal movement to a higher position (C°). On the other hand, Strict NC languages allow TNIs if the negative marker is base-generated in V° and disallow TNIs only if their negative marker is base-generated in Neg° . Hence G is explained. Note that this ban can only apply with respect to syntactic heads: if the negative marker is not an X° no blocking due to the HMC is expected. This prediction is borne out (languages with an adverbial negative marker such as Dutch or German allow TNIs)

V. One question has remained open so far: what excludes adjunction of the negative marker to V° so that it moves together with V to C° ? In principle nothing prevents such movement. French *ne* is in fact base-generated in Neg° as has been demonstrated by Rowlett (1998), and moves along with the verb to C° in imperatives :

- (4) $[_C [_V Ne \text{ travaille}]_j [_{\text{NegP}} pas \text{ t}_j [_{\text{VP}} \text{ t}_i]]]$

In (4) *ne* must attach to V_{imp} because of its clitic-like behaviour. French *ne* always has to attach to the finite verb. However, such incorporation is ruled out for non-clitic-like elements. For example, Spanish *no* does not have to cliticize onto other elements. The argument that Spanish *no* behaves like a clitic is mainly based on the fact that very little material may intervene between the negative marker and the verb. However, this results from the fact that NegP immediately dominates VP in order to express sentential negation. Note that *no* is not required to stay in the immediate neighbourhood of a finite verb, as it may also be used to express constituent negation.

Hence only phonological weak elements may attach to the imperative verb. This predicts that negative markers in Non-strict NC languages have to be phonologically strong. This prediction is borne out empirically (cf. Zeijlstra 2004). Moreover, this correlation is theoretically predicted: Jespersen (1917) has already shown that negative markers gradually lose semantic force and as a result undergo a phonological weakening process. Since negative markers in Non-strict NC languages still bear semantic negation, they have not undergone weakening yet. Hence negative markers in Non-strict NC languages cannot head adjoin to the imperative verb and block TNIs.

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