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 (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 sentential negation

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

b. **Nessuno** ha telefonato.
nobody   PST call
'Nobody called.'

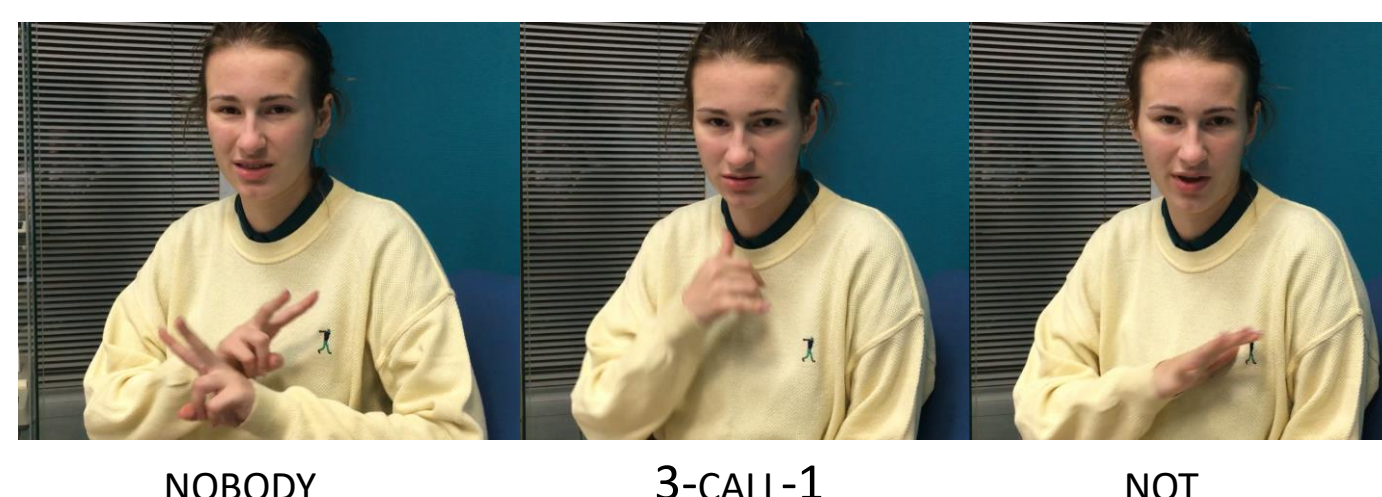**No concord**: NC items always appear without sentential negation

(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.'

NOBODY   3-CALL-1   NOT

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.'

3-CALL-1   NOBODY
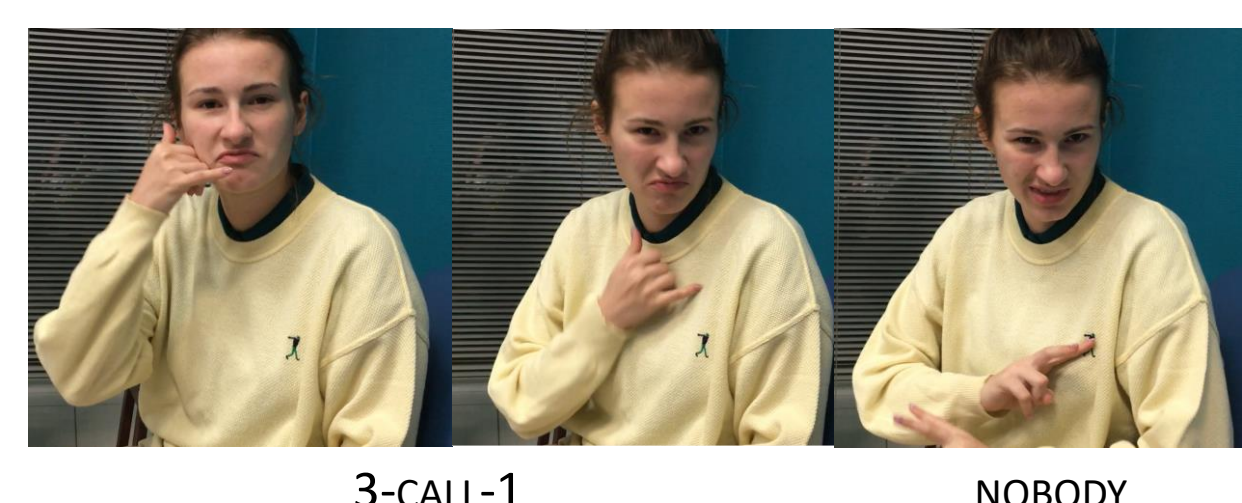
One NC item may license a second

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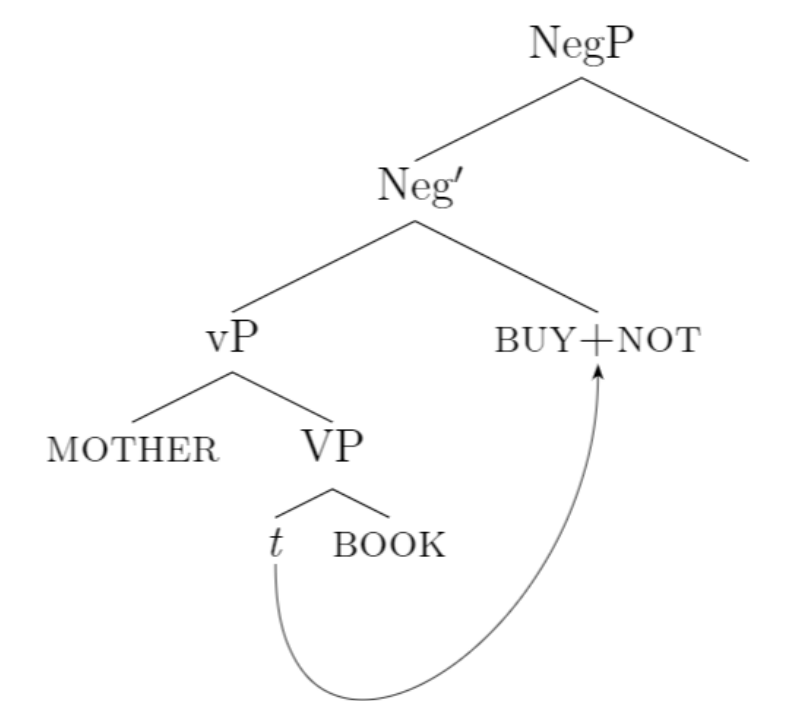
ANALYSIS

I. Word order

Facts:

→ SVO → SOVNeg

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

→ V-Neg compounding:
○ The loss of repetition of the predicate
○ Mouthing change

Explanation:

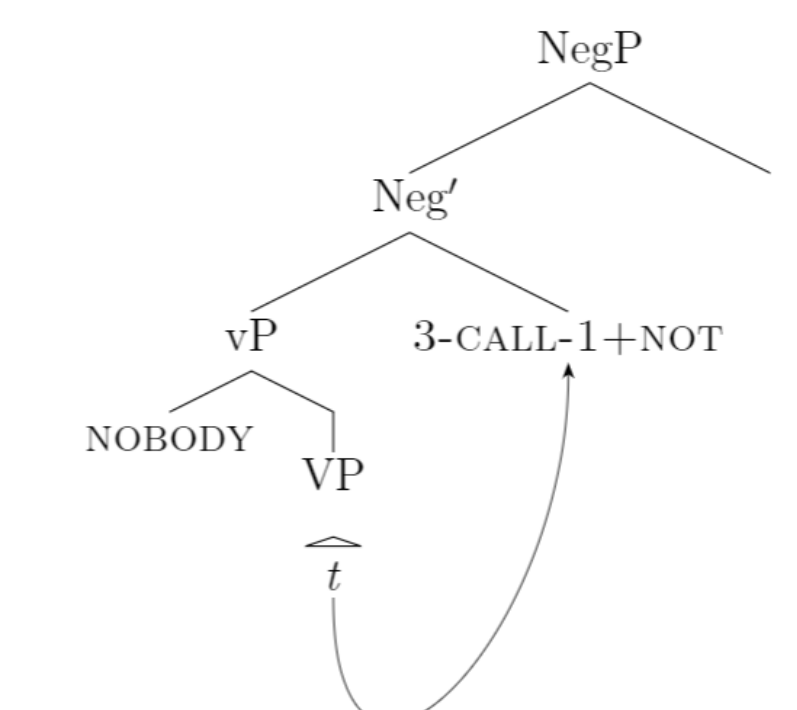→ Movement to NegP on the right
→ Cf. LIS, DGS, TID, HKSL

II. Negative concord

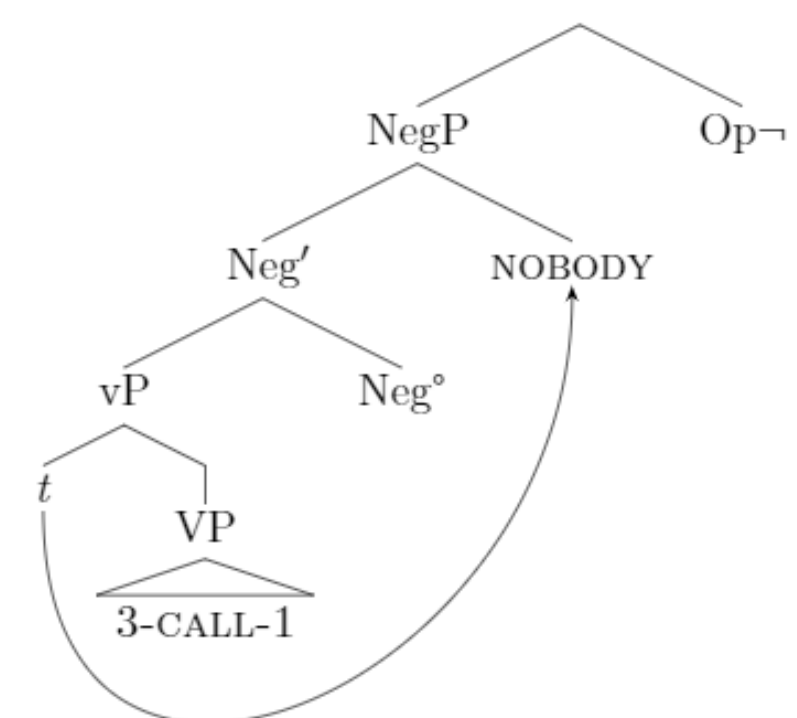Two parts of the analysis (Zeijlstra 2004)

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

$$NOT_{[iNEG]} \; NOBODY_{[uNEG]}$$
$$[[NOBODY_{[uNEG]}]3\text{-}CALL\text{-}1 \; NOT_{[iNEG]}]$$

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

$$Op\neg_{[iNEG]}$$
$$[[[3\text{-}CALL\text{-}1]NOBODY_{[uNEG]}] \; Op\neg_{[iNEG]}]$$

NON-MANUALS

Could this be *topicalization*?

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

Facts:

    _____neg_____
    ___head-tilt___
(11) 3-CALL-1 NOBODY
'Nobody called me.'

    _____neg_____
    ____squint____
(12) NOBODY 3-CALL-1 NOT
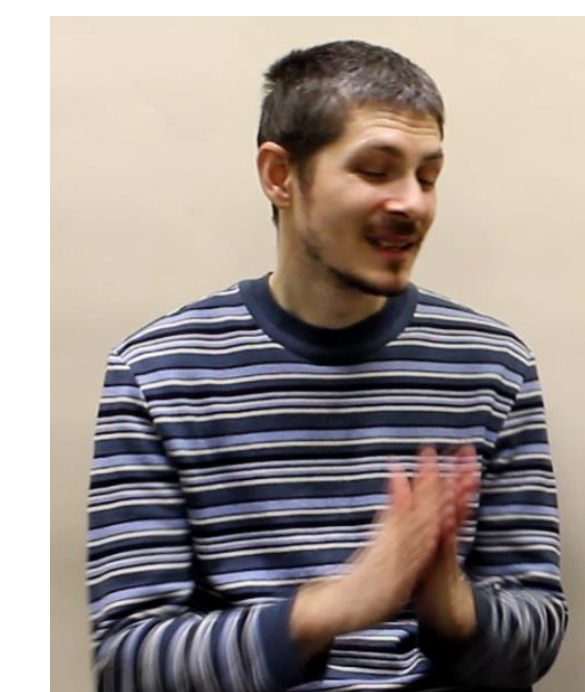
Non-manuals for topicalization   Non-manuals for negation
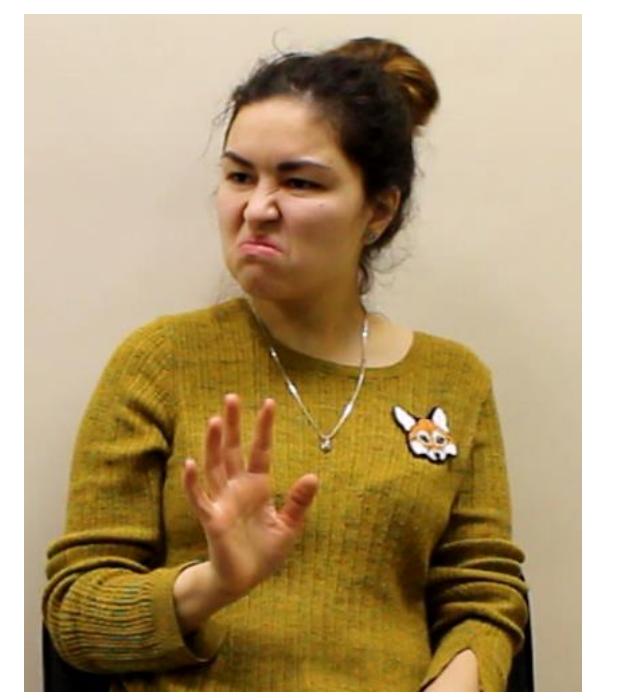
Inferences:

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

→ Sometimes a prosodic break between right-dislocated negative word and the rest:
Neutral between either analysis.

→ No apparent eyebrow raise.
But there is relatively little eyebrow movement in general in our data...

REFERENCES

Burkova, Svetlana. 2015. Russian Sign Language Corpus. (http://rsl.nstu.ru/)
Giannakidou, A. 1997. The landscape of polarity items. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Groningen.
Giannakidou, A. 2000. Negative ... Concord? Natural Language and Linguistic Theory 18: 457-523.
Giannakidou, A.: 2006. N-words and Negative Concord. In The Syntax Companian (volume 3), Everaert, M., Goedemans, R. and Van Riemsdijk, H. (eds), 327-391. London: Blackwell.
Herburger, E. 2001. The negative concord puzzle revisited. Natural Language Semantics 9: 289-333.
Ladusaw, William A. 1979. Polarity sensitivity as inherent scope relations. Ph.D. thesis, Department of Linguistics, University of Massachusetts. Reprinted by New York: Garland, 1980.
Zeijlstra, H. 2004. Sentential Negation and Negative Concord. Ph.D. Diss., University of Amsterdam.
Zeijlstra, H. 2008. Negative concord is syntactic agreement. Ms., University of Amsterdam.