

Emphatic Multiple Negation in Substandard Dutch

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Standard Dutch is known to be a Double Negation (DN) language: every two negative expressions within a clause cancel each other out (1).

- (1) Niemand *zei* niets
Nobody said nothing
‘Nobody said nothing’

Yet, in many substandard registers of Dutch, expressions are allowed in which two negative expression yield only one negation in the semantics. As these constructions all have some emphatic flavour, I refer to this phenomenon as Emphatic Multiple Negation (EMN). Examples are in (2).

- (2) a. *Zij heeft* nergens geen *zin in*
She has nowhere no lust in
‘She doesn’t feel like anything at all’
b. *Zij hebben* nooit geen *geld*
They have never no money
‘They never have any money’

Not only do those data occur in Dutch dialects (as has been investigated thoroughly in the Syntactic Atlas of Dutch Dialects (Barbiers 2005)), also speakers of Standard Dutch accept EMN constructions, at least in a passive register (hence the reference to substandard variation rather than dialectal variation). In this paper I show that these data, based on the study of substandard expression that are normally ruled out by speakers on prescriptive grounds, actually show new light on the way that negation and indefinites interact.

In the literature this phenomenon has been treated on a par with the well-known phenomenon of Negative Concord (NC), since this also involves multiple morpho-syntactically negative elements yielding just one semantic negation (Van der Wouden 1994, Giannakidou 2000). Weiss (2002) takes examples as in (2) (which are also substandardly acceptable for most speakers of German) even as evidence for the fact that languages universally exhibit NC. However, despite the strong resemblance to NC constructions, EMNs differ crucially from standard NC.

First, EMNs always have an emphatic reading ('not at all', 'never ever'), whereas in NC languages NC expressions are the unmarked way to express sentential negation in sentences containing an indefinite. Second, EMNs are subject to very strict adjacency requirements. If other elements intervene between two negative elements, they cannot constitute an EMN anymore and the sentence is interpreted as a DN expression (3). This constraint is absent in Standard NC expressions.

- (3) *Hij gaat nooit zaterdag niet naar school*
 He goes never Saturday.GEN NEG to school
 DN: 'On Saturdays it never happens that he does not go to school'
 *EMN: 'On Saturdays he never ever goes to school'

Third, the second part of an EMN construction may never receive stress. Otherwise the sentence is assigned a DN interpretation as well.

- (4) *Zij hebben nooit GEEN geld*
 They have never no money
 'There are never out of money'

Finally, EMN only occur in languages that do not exhibit standard NC. Typologically speaking EMN is a phenomenon that is only available in DN language, such as Dutch and German.

On the basis of the four arguments presented above I conclude that NC and EMN are different phenomena that thus require a distinct explanation. In this paper I will not argue for one of the approaches to account for NC, such as polyadic quantification (De Swart & Sag 2002), NPI licensing (Ladusaw 1992, Giannakidou 2000) or syntactic agreement (Zeijlstra 2004). I only argue that none of these approaches will be successful in accounting for EMN. I adopt the account by Penka & Zeijlstra (2004) that argues that negative indefinites in languages such as German and Dutch are not negative quantifiers, but lexically complex syntactic structures that consist of an abstract negative operator and a non-negative indefinite. The structure for Dutch *geen* ('no') would look like (5).

- (5) Structure of Lexical Item (LI) *geen* ('no'): [_{LI} [*Op*₋ [*a*(n)]]]

The original motivation for this proposal was that it correctly predicts split-scope readings in case of modal or intentional verbs, as is shown in (6), whereby the entire LI may move up to a position higher than the position of the modal verb, but where only the negative operator is interpreted in the higher copy and the indefinite in the lower copy. As the negative operator and the indefinite are different objects such separate interpretations are allowed under the copy theory of movement (Chomsky 1995).

- (6) *Ze mogen geen verpleegkundige ontslaan.* (Rullman 1995: 194)

They may no nurse fire

‘They are not allowed to fire any nurse’

$\neg > \text{may} > \exists$

[_{IP} [_{Op} ~~een ver.kundige~~]_i [_I [_{VP} ze [_{Op} ~~een ver.kundige~~]_i ontslaan] mogen]]

Apparently, DN languages such as Dutch and German allow licensing of indefinites by a negative operator, as long as it takes place in the lexicon and not in the derivation. Now this predicts exactly that licensing multiple negative elements is allowed within LIs and one expects LIs such as *nooit geen* (‘never no’), or other possible combinations (as shown above) to be grammatical.

- (7) Structure of Lexical Item (LI) *nooit geen* (‘never no’): [_{LI} [[_{Op} \neg ever] a(n)]]

Given that EMNs can be LIs, the four properties that distinguish them from NC expressions follow immediately: first, since the second negative indefinite is not necessary to express the sentence (in a DN language such as Dutch the first negation would suffice), the reading with the extra indefinite becomes emphatic; second, the adjacency requirements follow immediately from the fact that EMNs are LIs; third the stress effects follow also from the lexical effects as phonological boundaries (assigned at the PF interface) do respect LIs, as they respect phrasal structure in general; and fourth in NC languages multiple n-words are licensed by other parts of the grammar and there is no need for the lexicon to offer this extra possibility. Even if the lexicon would provide such prefabricated structures they would be recognized as standard NC constructions. Hence only in DN languages one may find EMNs.

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