Negative indefinites: By DORIS PENKA. (Oxford studies in theoretical linguistics.)

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In *Negative indefinites* Doris Penka focuses on three topics in the syntax and semantics of negation: negative concord, the split scope readings of negative quantifiers in German, and the restricted distribution of the quantifiers in Scandinavian. P argues that in each instance what looks like a negative quantifier is really an indefinite whose apparent negative force derives from a separate, at times tacit, at times overt negation operator with which the indefinite enters an agreement relation. In addition to methodically making a case for analyzing negative quantifiers as *NEGATIVE INDEFINITES*, the book also discusses a large number of existing analyses and paradigms, offering a valuable and timely survey of some of the current literature.

The first third of the book is devoted to negative concord, where what looks like one and the same expression (*N*-WORD) appears to have negative force in certain contexts and merely existential force in others. P rejects various previous accounts, including the view that so-called n-words like Spanish *nadie* or Russian *nikto* are negative quantifiers (e.g. Zanuttini 1991), the view that they are their negative polarity counterparts (e.g. Laka 1990, Ladusaw 1992), and the view that they are ambiguous between the two (Herburger 2001). Adopting Zeijlstra’s (2004) approach instead, she analyzes n-words like *nadie/nikto* as existential quantifiers in need of syntactic agreement with an overt or tacit negation operator. P then extends the analysis to French, which poses particular challenges.

Since the account of negative concord P adopts bears architectural resemblances to the NPI accounts of negative concord, it faces similar challenges. To explain the occurrence of n-words without negation (e.g. in elliptical answers and in preverbal positions in non-strict negative concord languages like Spanish) it posits a silent negation operator. To constrain the distribution of this operator, P appeals to an economy condition that forces the insertion of a silent negation operator if the derivation would otherwise crash.
Because P assumes that the negation with which the n-word agrees always takes scope over the event operator, her account does not capture the occurrence of n-words that appear in postverbal position without a negation and which are interpreted as narrow scope negative quantifiers (Herburger 2001).

In connection with the general resemblance of the negative indefinite and the NPI accounts of negative concord just pointed out, it is worth noting that P insists that negative concord and NPI licensing are separate phenomena. One argument is that n-words do not fit neatly into van der Wouden’s (1997) classification of NPIs. Another reason is that unlicensed n-words result in ungrammaticality, whereas unlicensed NPIs according to the analyses advanced by Kadmon and Landman (1993), Lahiri (1998), for example, are merely pragmatically infelicitous. It may be, however, that the fact that the analyses in question rule out 1 as pragmatically bizarre and not as ungrammatical is a drawback of these analyses and not an independently established fact one should confidently base an argument on (Herburger 2011).

(1) *She ever said that.

Another reason a reader might remain a bit skeptical of P’s assertion that negative concord has nothing to do with NPI licensing are examples where n-words are licensed in comparatives or by predicates like ‘doubt’. These require P to say that the relevant feature ([iNEG]) is not limited to (c)overt negation operators but can also appear on other elements, which happen to be NPI licensors. In one of the last chapters P discussed the various similarities of the account of negative concord she adopts with that put forth in Ladusaw (1992). In that context she makes important observations about how the unselective binding analysis of indefinites Ladusaw adopts has to be to capture all scopal interactions between the negation operator and the n-word. P herself, however, does not commit to any specific semantic analysis of indefinites.

The second third of the book deals with the split scope readings negative and other downward entailing quantifiers. The main emphasis here lies on split readings of the
German negative quantifier *kein-* illustrated in 2; on the most salient reading of 2, the modal seems to take scope between a wide scope negation and narrow scope existential:

(2) Bei der Prüfung muss kein Professor anwesend sein.

at the exam must n-DET professor present be

‘No professor has to be present at the exam.’

P’s analysis of the split readings of *kein-* recasts Jacobs’ (1982) morphological amalgamation account in syntactic terms. She argues that the split scope reading illustrated in 2 arises because at the point relevant to interpretation (LF) the negation is separate from the rest of the quantificational expression: *kein-* is an indefinite determiner that needs to agree with, and be surface adjacent to, a silent negation operator. The negation operator is generally adjoined to VP, except when the negative quantifier appears sentence initially. In that case the silent negation is adjoined to CP, as in Jacobs’ V3 analysis of these examples.

One of the many interesting observations the book discusses is that split scope readings are precisely possible with those modals that tend to take scope under negation in German (all root modals except for *wollen* (‘want’) and *sollen* (‘shall’)). P also addresses in detail the split readings that arise in sentences with universal quantifiers in sentence initial position that are pronounced with the special ‘topic-focus’ intonation.

While the main focus is on split scope readings with *kein-* P is careful not to neglect split scope readings with merely downward entailing quantifiers (e.g. de Swart 2000). Relevant examples include the following:

(3) a. At MIT one needs to publish fewer than three books in order to get tenure. (Hackl 2000)

b. We can grow very little. (Heim 2006)

c. They were allowed to write few letters.
The relevant split scope readings are: It is not the case that at MIT one needs to publish more than three books to get tenure, it is not the case that we can grow much, and it is not the case that they were allowed to write many letters. Though P is happy to argue that *kein-* is really a ‘one’ that has to agree with an abstract negation, she is not willing to slip down the slope any further and say that *few*, for example, is a ‘many’ that has to agree with an abstract negation operators. She rejects a decomposition account of this sort on grounds that the decomposition would not be morphologically transparent. Instead, she assumes that *fewer than three, little* and *few* are more complex than commonly thought, involving both a degree quantifier and a cardinality quantifier, as argued in Hackl (2000) and Heim (2001, 2006). On this view, *fewer than three* means ‘to a numerical degree d of less than three, an amount of d-many’ and *few* means ‘not to a contextually determined mid-range degree d, an amount of d-many’. Since the degree quantifier and the cardinality quantifier are separate quantifiers, they take scope separately. Split readings arise when the degree quantifier takes scope over the modal verb but the cardinality quantifier, which is the one that combines with the rest of the noun phrase, takes scope below it (cf. ‘fewer than three is the number that you need to publish an amount of that many books at MIT to get tenure.’).

This analysis seems to work well, so well it raises a question (one which the book does not address): Is a combined degree-cardinality quantifier analysis also available for *kein-* and its kin? Can *kein-* for instance, be analyzed as ‘to a numerical degree d smaller than 1, an amount of d-many’ or ‘to a numerical degree d, where d=0, an amount of d-many’? If viable, this would offer the prospect of a more unified account of split scope, one that works the same for negative quantifiers like *kein-* and downward entailing quantifiers of the kind illustrated in 3.

In connection with split scope, P also discusses *only*. Citing Bech (1954/57) she notes that (the German equivalent of) 4 can be seen to have a split scope reading because it is equivalent to saying that he could not understand more than half.

(4) He could only understand half.
She notes, however, that this reading follows independently from a Rooth-style analysis of *only*, where *only* is analyzed as a propositional operator. The chapter also includes an insightful discussion of the semantics of *at most*, which, like *few*, optionally gives rise to split readings (cf. *You need to read at most five books for this class*), but which, P argues, should be thought of as a propositional operator rather than a complex degree+cardinality expression.

The main generalization that P deals with in her chapter on negative quantifiers in Scandinavian is that in these languages negative quantifiers (introduced by *ingen-* and its equivalents) cannot appear as direct objects if an adverb, participle, preposition, or (non-pronominal) indirect object intervenes. In addition, negative quantifiers can never appear as direct objects in embedded clauses. This distributional pattern has been said to reflect a requirement that the negative quantifiers in Scandinavian appear adjacent to the left edge of the VP (e.g. Christensen 1986); P argues that the pattern is explained if one assumes that *ingen-*-, like German *kein-*-, is an indefinite determiner that has to be adjacent to an abstract negation adjoined to VP in the surface syntax. The differences between German and the Scandinavian languages are said to follow independently from the fact that though the Scandinavian languages and German share the V2 property, the Scandinavian languages differ from German in being VO languages and in lacking scrambling. This analysis is compared to several extant ones, including that in Svevonius (2002). It is in this context that P also briefly addresses negative quantifiers in English, which, unlike in German or Scandinavian, do not appear to be surfacing adjacent to the left edge of the VP, cf. *John reads no novels*. To explain this in keeping with the negative indefinite thesis, P suggests, in line with Kayne (1998), that the negative quantifier first adjoins to the VP (below the negation) and that the vacated VP below subsequently preposes.

The last two chapters of the book deal with a variety of issues. These include an in-depth discussion of why the fact that n-words and negative quantifiers can combine with *almost* does not indicate that they have negative force. Also included is a comparison of the relationship between indefinites, negative quantifiers and NPIs in various languages.
(primarily German, Scandinavian and Slavic) and a brief discussion of German light negation. One topic that could perhaps also have been included in these chapters is negative concord in German dialects. Apart from that, however, the terrain that P covers in her monograph is an impressively large one and she covers the ground thoroughly, never losing sight of her central thesis. Anyone interested in current thinking on negation and the syntax semantics interface will find this book interesting and worth reading.

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