

Surprise Negation and Ethical Dative

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By “Surprise Negation” (Sneg) we define a particular type of negative marker belonging to the class of “expletive negations” in the sense of Horn (2010), which does not give any contribution to the propositional meaning of the sentence (it does not reverse the polarity of the sentence, it does not license NPI, etc.). The same negative marker can indeed express a genuine negation, as in Italian; in this case, prosody disambiguates between two potentially available readings. Therefore, (1) could have a negative meaning if it is uttered with a declarative prosody (1a), or it could have an affirmative meaning if it is uttered with an interrogative/exclamative prosody (1b).

- (1) Ieri, **non** è scesa dal treno mia sorella
Yesterday Sneg be.3rd sing. pres got off the train my sister
a. ‘Yesterday, my sister didn’t get off the train’
b. ‘Yesterday, my sister got off the train!’

We can distinguish Sneg sentences from more common negative rhetorical questions (NRQ) both for a different intonation (the formers are something between exclamative and interrogative, the latter are only interrogative) and for a different pragmatic force. In fact, if NRQs can legitimate an affirmative answer of the sentence’s addresser (as in 2), Sneg sentences cannot (3).

- (2) A: Non ti avevo detto che sarebbe andata male? (NRQ)
‘Did not I say you that it would be bad?’
B: Sì, è vero: è andata male.
‘Yes, it is true, it went bad’
- (3) A: Ieri, non è scesa dal treno mia sorella?! (Sneg)
‘Yesterday, my sister got off the train!’
B: *Sì è vero: è scesa.
‘Yes, it is true, she got off’

An important fact is that the double reading of a negative marker present in (1) is **always** available in Italian, except when that negative marker co-occurs with an Ethical Dative (ED) as in (4) leaving the surprise reading as the only option:

- (4) Ieri, **non ti** è scesa dal treno mia sorella?!
Yesterday Sneg you.ED be.3rd sing. pres got off the train my sister
a. ‘Yesterday, my sister got off the train!’
b. ‘*Yesterday, my sister didn’t get off the train’

The occurrence of an ED with negation can then be considered as a diagnostics to distinguish canonical negation vs. Sneg. More explicitly, a negative marker can occur with ED only if it yields a Sneg. To understand this, a full analysis of ED is required: we can sketch out some major properties. EDs are Dative non-argumental clitic pronouns used to single out either the speaker or the hearer, **emotionally** involved in the event expressed by the sentence, prototypically limited to the 1st and 2nd singular person as in the case of Italian *mi*-1st sing. (to me) and *ti*- 2nd sing. (to you) (Cf. Berman 1982, Franco and Huidobro 2008, Boneh and Nash 2009). Crucially, an ED cannot co-occur with a focalized element (5a) or occur in a question (5b).

(5) a. *TUA SORELLA *ti* è scesa dal treno (non la mia)
 your sister you.ED be.3rd sing. pres got off the train not mine
 ‘Your sister got off the train (not mine)’

b. *Ieri, *ti* è scesa dal treno mia sorella?
 Yesterday you.ED be.3rd sing. pres got off the train my sister
 ‘Yesterday, my sister got off the train?’

The incompatibility of ED with focused element and yes/no question constructions suggests that ED lies in a Focus position in CP-field (Rizzi 1997). Moreover, like ED, Sneg is also incompatible with a focused element (6):

(6) *TUA SORELLA *non* è scesa dal treno (non la mia)
 your sister Sneg be.3rd sing. pres got off the train not mine
 ‘Your sister got off the train (not mine)’

All in all, we can assume in first approximation that also Sneg competes with FocP for the same position.

A reasonable hypothesis to explain both the ED-Sneg pattern and their common incompatibility with FocP is to assume that ED and Sneg are in a local Spec-Head relation in the high portion of the CP-field (the place usually occupied by Focus). Interestingly, Latin syntax supports this analysis involving a higher position in the Split-Comp field for Snegs in that the Latin neg morpheme (*non*) may show up with an extra negative morpheme (*-ne*) showing up as a suffix, arguably the landing site of *non* (see Ernout and Thomas 1953 for a detailed analysis of Latin *-ne*). This in fact happens only in Snegs: *Non vixi* (S/he not won; ‘S/he did not win’) vs. *Nonne vixi?* (S/he not won-*ne*; ‘Didn’t s/he win?!’).

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