

On negation in yes/no questions in Serbo-Croatian

Nataša Miličević

The phenomenon discussed in this paper is the so-called *expletive negation* in negated yes/no questions in Serbo-Croatian. The term *expletive negation* seems, at this point to be a useful descriptive term for the phenomenon in question. One of the goals of this paper, however, is to show that it is not the correct one. Proposing the existence of semantically vacuous negation is the consequence of the assumption that sentential negation has a fixed position in the clausal hierarchy (Brown and Franks 1995). This approach cannot account for the relevant data in Serbo-Croatian. My claim is that the cases under consideration involve an alternative position of NegP in Serbo-Croatian, above TP. It is confined to the derivation of one semantic type of negated yes/no interrogatives, and it cannot trigger negative concord.

1. Introduction

The status of negation in polar interrogatives is a challenging issue. It has often been noted that, unlike positive yes/no questions, their negative counterparts carry additional implicatures. Though both types can be analyzed as denoting a set of propositions (the set of possible answers; cf. Higginbotham 1993), the negative one expresses a certain bias regarding the expectation of the speaker. Negation in (1b) flashes out the expectation of the speaker regarding the truth of the propositional core of the question, and this expectation is affirmative.

- (1) a. Did she notice a burglar? (*the speaker is neutral*)
b. Didn't she notice a burglar? (*the speaker expected that she DID notice a burglar*)

In the comparable Serbo-Croatian (SC) examples given in (2), we can see that this semantic difference is related to a distinct syntactic problem. It is confined to a subclass of yes/no interrogatives featuring the fronted negated verb before the particle *li*. Although Serbo-Croatian is a negative concord language, the morphologically negated pronouns (which I will refer to as *n-phrases* throughout the paper) cannot occur in this type of clauses. Since their licensing is syntactic in negative concord languages, that is it requires the presence of the negative marker on the verb, what we witness in (2) is unexpected. That the regular indefinites (comparable with *some-* series in English) become licit in negated questions is not surprising, but that *n-phrases* are ungrammatical despite the presence of negation requires a syntactic explanation.

- (2) **Nije li** Vera videla ***nikoga/nekoga?**
 neg+aux Q Vera see.part.F.Sg noone someone
 ‘Didn’t Vera see anyone/someone?’

What is commonly suggested is that the fronted negation in yes/no questions is semantically spurious (expletive)¹. My claim, however, is that the derivation of this class of questions involves a high projection of NegP (above TP), which cannot license negative concord items. The complement TP in these cases expresses the positive presupposition underlying the question. That is, the observed semantic effect follows from the properties of the complement/argument of the negative head. I will argue in favor of the view that the functional projection introducing negation in a clause does not have to have a fixed position in the clausal structure of a language. I will show that, considering the difference in the semantics of different types of yes/no interrogatives in SC, this solution is desirable and does not complicate the grammar.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the relevant data in SC. In 3 I will discuss the proposals dealing with the *expletive negation* in Slavic by Franks and Brown (1995), Abels (2004), and Progovic (2005). Section 4 is an outline of a solution proposed in this paper. Section 5 accommodates the view presented here in the broader view on the syntactic micro-variation in expressing sentential negation.

2. The licensing of negative concord and polarity items in Serbo-Croatian

2.1. The usual assumptions

Serbo-Croatian is a negative concord language. *N-phrases* can only be licensed by a negated verb:

- (3) a. Marija ***(nije)** videla **nikoga**.
 Maria not-AUX see.PRT noone
 ‘Maria saw noone.’

In this configuration they lead to a single sentential negation reading which makes them negative concord (NC) elements. Since there is a strict syntactic condition (the presence of negative preverbal marker) on their licensing, they can be viewed as a subclass of polarity items class. Unlike polarity items in English for example, they are compatible only with the sub-type of non-veridical contexts: the proper sentential negation.

Serbo-Croatian also has *i-phrases* (comparable to the *any*-series in English), which are (according to Progovic 2005) licensed in non-veridical contexts other than sentential negation. Thus, in terms of distribution they partially overlap with the English *any*-series. I will refer to them as polarity items (PI) in the remainder in the text.² Examples (4a-b) illustrate their distribution in the two types of positive yes/no questions. The difference between the

¹ For an overview of the different terms and approaches dealing with this type of negation the reader is referred to the Introduction of Portner and Zanuttini (2000).

² The traditional term would be negative polarity item (NPI). However, it suggests that these elements can be licensed only in the scope of negation, which has long been shown not to be the case crosslinguistically, and is especially not the case in Serbo-Croatian, where *i-phrases* are incompatible with the proper sentential negation.

two types is purely syntactic. In (4a) there is a complementizer *da* followed by *li*, whereas in (4b) the auxiliary verb inverts with the question marker *li*.³ The facts about *PI* licensing do not differ in these two constructions. Example (4c) shows the compatibility of *i-phrases* with a superordinate non-veridical operator *doubt*.⁴

- (4) a. Da li je **iko** bio ovde?
 Comp Q AUX anyone be here
 ‘Has anyone been here?’
- b. Je li **iko** bio ovde?
 AUX Q anyone be.PART here
 ‘Has anyone been here?’
- c. Sumnjam da je **iko** bio ovde.
 doubt.1.SG that AUX anyone be.PART here
 ‘I doubt that anyone was here.’

To sum up, the generalization regarding the licensing of *n-phrases* and *i-phrases* in Serbo-Croatian is taken to be the following:

- (5) N-phrases are licensed by the clause-mate negation, while *i-phrases* occur in all non-veridical contexts but clause-mate negation.

Negated question with a fronted negation is, thus, in the domain of main clauses featuring sentential negation the only counter-example to the clause-mateness condition as stated in the first part of (5).

2.2. The complementary distribution of *NCs* and *PIs* revisited

The generalization in (5), however, needs modification, if we add examples in (6) into the picture. Sentence (6a) shows that it would be wrong to conclude that *i-phrases* are always incompatible with the co-occurring negated verb. They cannot be c-commanded by the negation in the same clause. We can see that, if the sentential negation is embedded under a non-veridical operator (such as *doubt*, or *yes/no* question), the occurrence of an *i-phrase* in that clause is grammatical as long as it is outside the scope of the clause-mate negation (cf. (6b) and (6d)). As pointed out to me by Alexis Dimitriadis, this also suggests that *i-phrases* can be licensed by the negation (an averdical operator) in the higher clause, which is indeed the case (cf. also Progovac 2005), and it is illustrated in (6e).

³ I will follow the common assumption that the complementizer and the question particle form a complex C head. Also, given that in (2b) a complementizer cannot co-occur with the inverted, aux-Q, sequence I will assume that in (2b) the auxiliary is raised to the C⁰ position.

⁴ A more extensive list of examples of *i-words* occurring with other types of non-veridical operators can be found in Progovac (2005).

- (6) a. Sumnjam da **iko nije** bio ovde.
 doubt.1.SG that anyone not.AUX be.PART here
 ‘I doubt that anyone wasn’t here.’
 (i.e. I think everyone was here)
- b. *Sumnjam da Marko **nije** video **ikoga**.
 doubt.1.SG that Marko not.AUX see.PART anyone
 ‘I doubt that Marko didn’t see anyone.’
- c. Da li **iko nije** video Marka?
 Comp Q anyone not.AUX see.PART Marco
 ‘Is there anyone who hasn’t seen Marco?’
- d. Da li Marko **nije** video **ikoga**?
 Comp Q Marco not.AUX see.PART anyone
 ‘Is there anyone whom Marco hasn’t seen?’
- e. Ne kazem da je Marko video ikoga.
 Not say.Pres.1.Sg that AUX Marco see.Part anyone
 ‘I am not saying that Marco saw anybody.’

We can, therefore state the condition on licensing *i-phrases* in Serbo-Croatian as follows:

- (7) *N-phrases* are licensed by the clause-mate negation, while *i-phrases* have to be c-commanded by a non-veridical operator other than the clause-mate negation, and they cannot occur in c-command domain of the clause-mate negation in declarative sentences.⁵

Introducing these new facts about *i-phrases* leads to a number of new questions. They are, however, beyond the scope of this paper. For the purposes of the present account it is important to establish accurately the background assumptions on the distribution of the polarity sensitive elements in Serbo-Croatian. Having adopted the descriptive generalization (7) about the general picture, we can now focus on the central issue under consideration in the following section.

2.3. Negated yes/no questions

Let us now focus on the licensing of NC and PI items in different types of negative yes/no questions. First, recall that there are two kinds of positive yes/no questions in Serbo-Croatian (4a,b). The two strategies for deriving yes/no questions are also available, when the verb is negated.

- (8) a. Da li stvarno **nikog nije** primetila?
 COMP Q really noone not-AUX notice.PART.F.SG
 ‘Did she really not notice anyone?’

⁵ It will become obvious in the following section that *i-phrases* are indeed banned from the scope of the clause-mate negation only in declaratives.

- b. **Nije** li nekog već primetila?
 not.aux Q someone already notice.PART.F.SG
 'Didn't she already notice someone?'

When fronted, the negated verb is incompatible with *n-phrases* (9a). To preserve the generalization in (7) we could propose that the negation in this case is vacuous. If this is so, why is (9b) ungrammatical? The ungrammaticality of (9b) has not, to my knowledge, been discussed so far in the literature. A theory assuming the possibility of *expletive negation* would, however, have to deal with it. After all, an obvious explanation for the ungrammaticality of (9b) is that *i-phrases* are disallowed in the scope of sentential (that is, non-vacuous) negation (generalization 7). It seems that the parallel consideration of the distribution of NC and PI series negated questions does not allow us to claim neither the expletive nature of the negation nor its usual negating force.

- (9) a. * **Nije** li Vera videla **nikoga**?
 neg+AUX Q Vera see.PART.F.SG noone
 'Didn't Vera see anyone?'
 b. * **Nije** li Vera videla **ikoga**?
 neg+AUX Q Vera see.PART.F.SG anyone
 'Didn't Vera see anyone?'

Another example is highly relevant for the complete picture of how negation interacts with polarity sensitive items in Serbo-Croatian questions. This is the example which questions everything we know about the negative concord and negative polarity licensing in a strict negative concord language such as Serbo-Croatian:

- (10) Da nije Vera videla ikoga / *nikoga?
 COMP not.AUX Vera see.PART anyone noone
 'Is it possible that Vera saw someone?'
 'Could Vera have seen someone?'

What we are witnessing in (10) is the following: the *i-phrase* is fine in the scope of negation, while the *n-phrase* cannot be licensed. The meaning of this question is properly translated into English if we avoid the negation (for example by using the complex construction whose main predicate is *be possible* or the epistemic modal *could* as in (10)). In other words, the negative morphology on the auxiliary in (10) does not seem to contribute any negative meaning in the proper sense, but brings to the listener's attention that the affirmative value of the underlying proposition could be true. It renders the positive proposition as the speaker's assumption. In accordance with this special function of negation, which resembles the function of interrogative particles, the negative marking on the auxiliary in this type of questions is obligatory. The positive counterpart of (10) does not exist, as can be witnessed in (11).

- (11) *Da je Vera videla ikoga/ nekoga?⁶
 COMPL AUX Vera see.PART anyone someone
 ‘Is it possible that Vera DID see anyone/someone?’

Although, to my knowledge, the construction in (10) has not been discussed in the literature, the inability of sentential negation in it to license n-phrases may lead us to the conclusion that we are dealing with yet another instance of *expletive negation*. The apparent semantic spuriousness of negation in both types of negated yes/no questions (those with fronted negation (8b) and those with negation following the complementizer (10)) leads to such a conclusion. However, its obligatoriness in forming (10) and its special semantic properties, make any theory of spurious negation highly implausible.

Before we indulge in the possible solutions of the problems indicated by the data so far, let us articulate the questions a proper solution should address:

- i) Do we derive the negated yes/no questions with fronted auxiliary from the *proper* sentential negation projection (TP internal); i.e. are (8a) and (8b) derived from the same underlying structure?
- ii) Given the semantic similarity of negated questions with fronted negation and those with negation following the complementizer, are these two types of interrogatives derived from the same underlying structure?
- iii) Given the ungrammaticality of *i-phrases* with fronted negation questions, which are compatible with those where negation follows the complementizer, what is the difference between the two types of questions?
- iv) Is negation in these cases really vacuous?

Anticipating the discussion to follow, the question (iv) can already be answered. In both of the constructions the negation is non-vacuous. In the auxiliary-initial case the *i*-pronouns cannot be licensed, which indicates that negation is not semantically inactive. Otherwise, the *i*-pronouns would be perfectly acceptable, as they always are in interrogatives. In the case exemplified in (10) the negation is obligatory and corresponds to a distinct interpretation of the construction as a whole, which can hardly indicate its vacuousness. Rather than treating the negation in these cases as expletive, it should be treated as a projection whose position in the structure yields a specific interpretation of the clause. The approach to the meaning of negation proposed in the present paper is reminiscent of the approach which makes the hierarchical distinction in a clause between epistemic (high) and deontic (low) modals in English. This line of argumentation will be pursued further in section 4. In the following section I will discuss the existing theories of the phenomenon in question.

⁶ One may think that the ungrammaticality of this example can stem from an independent source, since the auxiliary here is a clitic, which could have special lexical properties that bar it from this position. This is not the case since the full-fledged, emphatic, form of the auxiliary does not save the given structure:

- i) *Da jeste Vera videla ikoga / nekoga?
 that AUX Vera see.PART anyone someone
 ‘Is it possible that Vera DID see anyone/someone?’

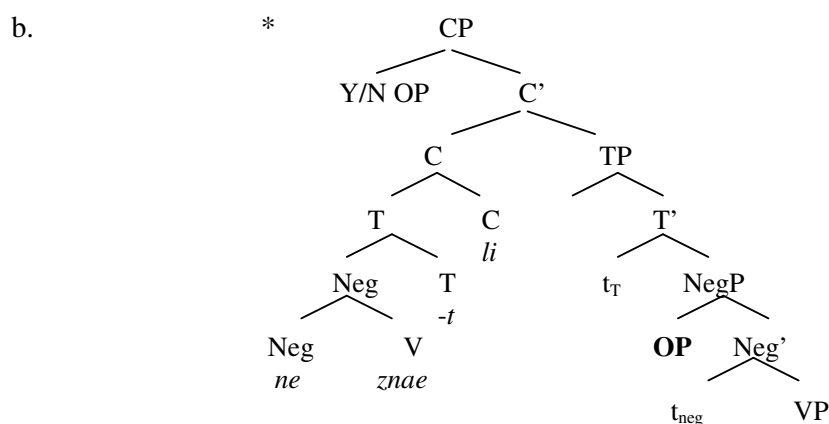
3. The expletive negation theory or not

3.1. One NegP per clause

As previously mentioned, the different theories on what is going on in (9) focus on the ungrammaticality of (9a), trying to answer how the fronted negation becomes or is semantically different from the ordinary, sentential negation. I will outline here two theories which propose basically the same derivation for (9a), the raising of Neg^0 from below T^0 to C^0 . They differ, however, in their view of the semantics associated with the structure.

On the basis of Russian, Brown and Franks (1995) propose a solution for (9a) in which the raised negative auxiliary loses its negative force. Being semantically vacuous, the negative head cannot support anymore the occurrence of *n-phrases*. The relevant Russian example is given in (12a) and the failure of its derivation is given in the simplified structure in (12b).

- (12) a. ***Ne** znaet li **nikto** iz vas kak èto delaetsja?
 not know Q ni-who of you how this is-done
 ‘Do(n’t) any of you know how to do this?’



This purely formal presence of negation is structurally related to the fact that the negative operator residing in the specifier of the negative head cannot raise to the specifier of C^0 , since the yes/no operator already resides in this position. The negative operator also cannot cross the yes/no operator on its way to some higher position which excludes the possibility of movement altogether.

The notion of vacuous negation, however, is quite vague in their analysis. The lack of negative force is the ‘semantic fate’ of negation in questions in general, but that stems from the denotation of questions, and not the semantics of negation per se. The lack of negative force, so defined cannot explain the difference between (8a) and (9a). Also, if the negative operator is erased from the picture in (12b) due to improper movement, why are *i-phrasess* (9b) impossible in the given context in Serbo-Croatian?⁷

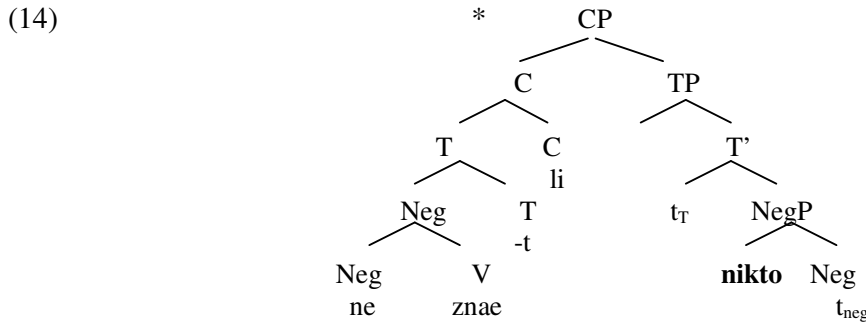
Abels (2004) points to a number of problems that resorting to expletive negation theory creates. In addition, he points out that the proper understanding of the properties of *n-phrases*

⁷ Note that this type of questions still licenses Genvive of Negation in Russian, which indicates the non-vacuousness of negation in russian as well.

and the syntactic conditions on their licensing makes such a theory redundant. These properties and conditions can be summarized as follows:

- (13) a. *n*-phrases are negative universal quantifiers, which track the scope of negation
 b. *n*-phrases are licensed by Neg^0 in the TP domain
 c. *n*-phrases cannot leave their licensing (TP) domain

The generalizations in (13) yield a different understanding of (12). Given (13a), the position of the *n*-phrase is always in the specifier of the projection hosting negation (14). In other words, the *n*-phrase has to c-command the negative head. When the negative head raises outside the TP domain, the requirement in (13a) is in conflict with (13c). The negative quantifier cannot raise to the Spec C^0 because it cannot leave its licensing domain. Under an assumption that the negative head cannot reconstruct after raising, the example (12a) is ungrammatical.



Since Abels independently supports the claim that *n*-phrases in Russian are universal quantifiers rather than existentials, and that there must not be an intervening operator between the universal quantifier and its licensing head, his account represents a welcome theoretical simplification. The inability of the negative head to reconstruct is an assumption underlying both of the theories. Although it is legitimate to ask why it does not reconstruct, stipulating semantic vacuousness for the negative head does not bring us closer to the answer.

However, it is not clear if Abels's account properly extends to the ungrammaticality of (9b), that is to the ungrammaticality of the *i*-phrases in these questions in Serbo-Croatian. If the generalization in (7) were true for every occurrence of sentential negation, and not just the one in declarative sentences, the answer to this dilemma would depend on how we treat the particle *li*. Consider the structure in (15).

- (15) a. * [CP $nije_i$ li [TP Vera t_i videla ikoga]]
 not.AUX Q Vera see anyone

If the particle *li* is an instance of C^0 (as assumed in the accounts above), then it c-commands the *i*-phrase (*anyone*). Since the raised negation does not interfere, the structure in (15) is in all relevant respects identical to (5), that is it should allow the *i*-phrase just as positive yes/no questions do.

The other option is to treat *li* as syntactically preceding the negated auxiliary.

- (16) a. * *li* [CP *nije*_i [TP Vera *t*_i *videla* *ikoga*]]
 Q not.AUX Vera see.PART anyone

In that case its placement to the right of the auxiliary is purely phonological. It would be possible to incorporate this idea into Abels's theory, and claim that the raised negation does c-command the *i*-phrase and violates (7). Such a solution would further support the non-vacuousness of the negative head. However, the example (10) repeated for convenience as (17) shows that *i*-phrases are indeed fine in the scope of negation in questions.

- (17) a. *Da nije Vera videla ikoga / *nikoga?*
 COMP not.AUX Vera see.PART anyone noone
 'Is it possible that Vera saw anyone?'

In the light of counterexample like (17) the conclusion is inevitable that the ban on the c-command relation between the negative head and an *i*-phrase is indeed not sufficient for explaining its distribution. Furthermore, the similar semantics of fronted negated auxiliary questions (with *li*) and (17) begs the question if we are not dealing with the special function of negation here after all⁸.

3.2. Two PolPs per clause

Another theory, by Progovac (2005), claims that the polarity value of a clause (positive or negative) can be determined via two polarity phrases within it. The two positions these phrases have in the clausal structure are given in (18).

- (18) [PolP₁ [CP [TP [PolP₂.....]]]]

On her view, every clause contains at least one polarity phrase since the polarity value of a sentence is obligatorily encoded via a separate functional projection. She postulates the following two criteria regarding the projection of PolP(s):

- (19) a. There is at least one projection of Pol⁰ per clause.
 b. If there is only one polarity phrase in a clause it is contained within TP.

Condition (19b) ensures that the high PolP₁ (18) is always an additional projection. The two phrases, therefore, share the burden of licensing polarity items (both positive and negative). The licensing itself is always local, under Spec-Head configuration. The feature-checking mechanism that she proposes deletes the uninterpretable polarity features on the polarity items once they are in the right configuration with the syntactic polarity head that bears the same interpretable feature. The *n*-phrases and *i*-phrases carry the uninterpretable polarity features as in (20).

⁸ One of Abels's main arguments for deriving the fronted auxiliary questions from the NegP within TP domain is the Genitive of Negation that is available in this structure in Russian. I will put this argument aside in here, and deal exclusively with Serbo-Croatian data. It is important to mention at this point that it is not so clear that GoN is licensed locally as Abels assumes. The reader is referred to the original paper for some of the problematic data.

- (20) n-phrases (+neg)
i-phrases (-pos,-neg)

Having adopted the assumptions above for the sake of the argument, we can now compare the derivation of a negated declarative and the negated yes/no question (21).

- (21) a. Vera nije nikoga videla.
Vera not.AUX noone see.PART
'Vera didn't see anyone.'

a'. [TP Vera nije_i [PolP(+neg) nikoga t_i [VP videla]]]

- b. Nije li Vera videla *nikoga / nekoga?
not.AUX Q Vera see.PART noone / someone
'Didn't Vera see someone?'

b'. *[PolP (-pos, +neg) nije [CP li [TP Vera t_i [PolP(-pos,-neg) nikoga [VP videla]]]]

In (21a) the *n-phrase* comes with an uninterpretable negative feature which is successfully checked against a (-pos, +neg) polarity head. (21b) involves the lower underspecified polarity head (-neg, -pos) and an additional, high polarity head with the interpretable (+neg) feature. The negative particle, which carries the interpretable *neg* feature can identify the (+neg) feature, in this case the higher polarity head. At the same time, the uninterpretable (+neg) feature on the *n-phrase* cannot be checked against the lower head because it does not contain the right interpretable feature. In other words the licensing of *n-phrases* is impossible in the given syntactic configuration.

Although this theory is radically different in the type of assumptions it rests on, note that it essentially, tacitly assumes that the sentential negation can be spurious. Namely, in (21b') we can see that the high negative head has the proper lexical specification but still cannot license *n-phrases*. Nothing in the proposed account suggests why this should be so. Essentially, the same conceptual objection was raised against the idea of distinguishing purely formal (expletive) and semantically active negation in the previous discussion. In other words, without a special semantic role that this high negation has, the postulation of a high PolP is still as stipulative as the theory of *semantically inactive* negation is.

Again, the account under consideration cannot tackle the ungrammaticality of (9b). Actually, as (22b) shows, it straightforwardly predicts that (9b) is grammatical since the lower polarity head is equipped with the right set of interpretable features for licensing *i-phrases*.

- (22) a. *Nije li Vera videla ikoga?
neg+AUX Q Vera see.PART.F.SG anyone
'Didn't Vera see anyone?'

b. [PolP (+neg) nije_i [CP li [TP Vera t_i [PolP(-pos,-neg) ikoga t_i [VP videla]]]]

In addition, this proposal cannot account for the case of (10) where the occurrence of *i-phrases* in the scope of negation **is** possible. This is due to the fact that the higher polarity

phrase is too high. Recall that in (10) the negated auxiliary follows the complementizer, which indicates that the position of the Neg⁰ is lower than C⁰.

3.3. Summary

In this section we have considered three different approaches to the negated yes/no questions with *li*. They all assume raising of the negative head from the projection below Tense phrase. It has been shown that none of them can deal adequately with the distribution of *i-phrases* in yes/no questions. Also, it has become clear that introducing the notion of semantically vacuous or *expletive* negation into the picture is not justified and leads to serious problems, which is why it should be abandoned.

The raising theory of Abels (2004) is a welcome simplification of the one proposed by Brown and Franks (1995), but cannot straightforwardly extend to the data in Serbo-Croatian. This is especially true for the construction in which the negated auxiliary in a yes/no question does not raise above C⁰ (cf. (10)).

The feature-checking account by Progovac, fails to account for that same example, and straightforwardly makes the wrong prediction regarding the availability of *i-phrases* in negated yes/no questions with *li*.

All of the above indicates that although non-vacuous at any point, sentential negation in Serbo-Croatian exhibits non-consistent properties due to something other than just movement to the C domain. This movement would invariably have to be connected to the complete semantic bleaching of negation, which is an unwelcome result. In the following section I will argue for the high NegP, which shares the functional burden of the C projection in deriving one semantic type of interrogatives. It is a non-veridical operator in the sense of Giannakidou (1997), which does not license n-words (it is not an averidical operator in Giannakidou's terms) and cannot give rise to negative concord interpretation.

4. High negation

4.1. Syntactic arguments for high NegP

Let us go back to the three types of negated yes/no questions:

- (23) a. Da li (stvarno) **nikog** **nije** primetila?
 COMPQ really noone not.AUX notice.PART.F.SG
 'Did she really not notice anyone?'
- b. **Nije** li **nekog** već primetila?
 not.AUX Q someone already notice.PART.F.SG
 'Didn't she already notice someone?'

- c. Da **nije** Vera videla **ikoga** / *nikoga?
 COMP not.AUX Vera see.PART anyone noone
 ‘Is it possible that Vera saw anyone?’

Since enough of reasonable doubt has been cast on the idea that the questions in (23a) and (23b) have the same underlying structure, I will argue for an account which would structurally relate examples (23b) and (23c). My claim is that the NegP in both cases is located above TP.

One argument for the high location of NegP in (23c) comes from the following set of data, where we can compare the embedded declaratives (24a,b) with (23c) repeated here as (24c):

- (24) a. Rekla je da **je** Vera (*je) videla nekoga.
 say.PART AUX COMP AUX Vera AUX see.Part. someone
 ‘She said that Vera saw someone.’

- b. Rekla je da (*nije) Vera **nije** videla nikoga.
 say.PART AUX COMP not.AUX Vera not.AUX see.PART noone
 ‘She said that Vera didn’t see anyone.’

- c. Da {**nije**} Vera {**nije**} videla ikoga?
 COMP not.AUX Vera not.AUX see.PART anyone
 ‘Is it possible that Vera saw anyone?’

Examples (24a-b) illustrate how negation in declaratives influences clitic-raising in Serbo-Croatian. The auxiliary clitic obligatorily climbs to C^0 in positive embedded declaratives (24a). When the auxiliary is negated this movement is not possible (24b). Since the negated auxiliary is not a clitic, it does not need a phonological host, so that no raising to C^0 takes place. In (24c), however, the negation can occur right after the complementizer or after the subject. This optionality is only possible if there is a projection below C^0 whose specifier can host the subject and whose head is not T^0 (otherwise the nominative subject would obligatorily precede negative auxiliary). The derivations of the embedded declaratives are given in (24a-b), and the derivation of the facts in (24c) in (25c-c’). Since the order in (25c’) is more natural/common than (25c), the optionality illustrated in these examples should be taken with some reserve.⁹

- (25) a.[CP da+je_j [TP Vera t_j [VP videla nekoga]]]
 COMP+AUX Vera see.PART someone
- b.[CP da [TP Vera ni_j +je [NegP t_j [VP videla nekoga]]]
 COMP Vera not+AUX see.PART someone
- c. [CP da [NegP Vera_i ni+je_j [TP t_i t_j [VP videla nekoga]]]
 COMP Vera not+AUX see.PART someone

⁹ The motivation for the movement of the subject to the SpecNegP is another problematic issue. The possibility of an additional projection above NegP is an option that I will not explore here. Both questions are a matter of more extensive considerations which I will leave aside at this point.

c' [CP da [NegP ni +je_j [TP Vera t_j [VP videla nekoga]]]
 COMP not+AUX Vera see.PART someone

That the projection between CP and TP is indeed a NegP is evident from the previously mentioned fact that the type of questions discussed in this section can only be derived via negation. This is illustrated by the ungrammatical example (9) repeated below:

- (26) a. *Da je(ste) Vera videla ikoga / nekoga?
 COMP AUX Vera see.PART anyone someone
 'Is it possible that Vera saw/DID see anyone/someone?'

Note, also that high negation seems to be in complementary distribution with the question particle *li* in neutral yes/no questions. In addition to having a similar syntactic function, it plays a similar semantic role as the particle: it renders a proposition as the speaker's presupposition or likelihood assumption. This semantic role of the high-negation is what will be discussed in the following section.

4.2. High NegP is semantically Outer Negation

So far we have related the ungrammaticality of n-phrases in the type of question discussed above to the fact that negation is introduced later into the structure. Let us now consider the distinct semantic effect that arises from the structure: the apparent spuriousness of the high negation. In both (23b) and (23c) negation brings out the speaker's positive presupposition underlying the question. In other terms, using negation, the speaker is asking for the confirmation for a certain positive assumption. The logical form of these examples is given in (27).

- (27) It is not the case that p

I will adopt the view expressed by Ladd (1981), and Büring and Gunlogson (2000), that the two logical representations of a negated question (28) are not synonymous.

- (28) a. It is not the case that p
 b. It is the case that $\neg p$

Ladd refers to the case (28a) as outer negation, and to (28b) as inner negation. A negated yes/no question in English is ambiguous between the two readings.

- (29) Isn't there a coffee shop around?

According to Ladd the ambiguity rests on the possibility of questioning two types of inferences (p or $\neg p$) drawn from the context. Suppose the speaker believes that p holds ('there is a coffee shop around') and then infers from the context that this is not the case. He can utter (29) questioning that new inference in (28b), namely, the inference $\neg p$. In case that the new inference is not available, she or he can stick to their old belief and, thus, question the positive

one (28a), namely *p*. The question is now if the distinction described here is anything more than the description of two different pragmatic strategies available to the same form.

Büring and Gunlogson (2000) show that the distinction between the inner and outer negation has a distinct syntactic reflex in German:

- (30) a. Gibt es **kein** vegetarisches Restaurant in dieser Ecke?
 gives EXPL no vegetarian restaurant in this corner
 'Is there **no** vegetarian restaurant around here?'
- b. Gibt es **nicht ein** vegetarisches Restaurant in dieser Ecke?
 gives EXPL not a vegetarian restaurant in this corner
 'Isn't there **some** vegetarian restaurant around here?'

(Büring and Gunlogson 2000;p.4)

The sentential negation and the indefinite article in German always occur within the single form *kein* in declarative sentences. With interrogatives however, the negation can occur separately, that is precede the DP, as can be seen in (30b). This is the case when the outer negation reading as described above is the only available reading. The example in (30b), thus, cannot be used to question an inference of the form $\neg p$.

The same is true for the amalgamated and non-amalgamated *Neg-Det* form in Dutch:

- (31) a. Is dat **geen** aardige jongen?
 is that no nice boy
 'Is that not a nice boy?'
- b. Is dat **niet een** aardige jongen?
 is that not a nice boy
 'Isn't that a nice boy?'

(Broekhuis pc)

Whereas in (31a) the positive presupposition of the speaker can be cancelled, in (31b) it cannot. To put it differently, when uttering (31a) the speaker may or may not have previous beliefs regarding the *niceness of the boy*, and the positive implicature can be cancelled, while in (31b) the positive implicature is non-cancelable. According to Romero and Han (2004) the same is true for preposed vs. non-preposed negation in English yes/no questions. The English translations of (31a) and (32b) should mirror the difference in the cancellability of implicatures (speaker's presuppositions) in the given examples.

In these languages the presuppositionality of the indefinite DP cannot be cancelled and this is why they are disallowed in both declarative negative sentences and questions of the form (28b). Serbo-Croatian counterparts of the examples (30b) and (31b) are (23b-c). In other words, the structural expression of the form in (27) is a high NegP. What may be considered as a purely pragmatic strategy in English¹⁰ has a distinct syntactic correlate in Serbo-Croatian.

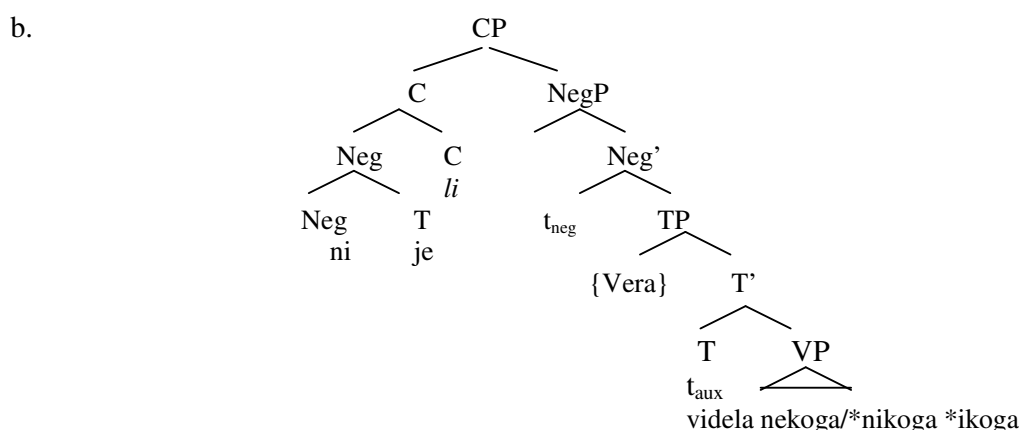
¹⁰ Büring and Gunlogson show, however, that the formal disambiguation is also possible in English through the choice of a determiner. The following example illustrate this possibility:

i) Isn't there some coffee shop around?

4.3. Negated yes/no questions with *li*

We saw that there are two factors that speak in favor of the high NegP in negated polar questions with *li*. They do not license n-phrases and the speaker’s positive presupposition/assumption about the proposition’s positive truth-value is non-cancelable. The simplified tree-structure of this type of interrogatives would, thus, be as in (32b).

- (32) a. Nije li Vera videla * nikoga / * ikoga/ nekoga?
 not.AUX Q Vera see.PART noone anyone someone
 ‘Didn’t Vera see someone?’



The auxiliary raises to Neg⁰, and the negated auxiliary further adjoins to C⁰ hosted by the particle *li*. N-phrases are not licit because high NegP cannot license them.

Recall that there is a remaining question of how this construction differs from the one in which high negation is in complementary distribution with the question marker *li*. Note that in (32) this is not the case. Also, i-phrases are not licit in this construction. In order to answer this question we have to reconsider shortly the role of the *li* particle in Serbo-Croatian.

As in Russian and Bulgarian the *li* particle occurs in questions in Serbo-Croatian, but not obligatorily. Example (33) shows that the question particle *li* can occur in *wh*-questions. While in (33a) the C head carries only the uninterpretable *wh*-feature that drives the *wh*-movement, in (33b) *li* seems to add the focus feature to it. To be more precise it overtly marks the *wh* pronoun as not being part of the underlying speaker’s presupposition/assumption. That is why the *wh-li* questions get the emphatic reading (expressing surprise, shock, disbelief). *Li* adds the information that any choice for the *wh*-variable would be unexpected.

The NP in this example is a PPI. Its presuppositionality is non-cancelable and the utterance cannot be used to question the negative inference. The following paraphrase of (i) is ungrammatical:

ii) *Is it the case that there isn't some coffee shop around?

- (33) a. Ko nosi ovakve cipele?
 who wearssuch shoes
 ‘Who wears such shoes?’
- b. Ko **li** nosi ovakve cipele?
 who Q wears such shoes
 ‘Who could (possibly) wear such shoes?’¹¹

Similarly, the question in (34) again expresses the speaker’s disbelief. It marks the subject pronoun *you* as not being part of his/her assumption.¹²

- (34) Ti **li** si taj?
 you Q are that
 ‘You are the one?!’ / ‘So you are the one!’

In yes/no questions of the type exemplified in (35a) in which no phrase, but the complementizer precedes the *li* particle, there is no *surprise* effect. The proposition (TP complement of the particle) is simply rendered as a question (as an assumption that requires checking).

- (35) a. Da **li** je iko bio ovde?
 COMPQ AUX anyone be.PART here
 ‘Has anyone been here?’
- b. Je **li** iko bio ovde?
 AUX Q anyone be.PART here
 ‘Has anyone been here?’

The analysis of the particle *li* in Russian (King 1994), Bulgarian, Macedonian and Serbo-Croatian (Franks) as a focus marker has been around in various forms. These accounts treat *li* as an element that splits its complement phrase into focus and presupposition, which is to a large extent compatible with the description of the data presented here. This approach may be problematic, however, to account for the formation of (35a-b). Whether the label *focus* is indeed the right one is a debatable issue, which is beyond the scope of the present paper. It suffices for the purpose of the argument presented here to adopt the following informal description of the properties of *li*:

- (36) a. it marks its complement as a presupposition
 b. whatever element is extracted out of the complement of *li* is marked as being non-presuppositional

¹¹ The adequate translation can be conveyed in various ways: *I wonder who wears such shoes; Who on earth wears such shoes!*

¹² The productivity of this type of questions differs substantially from the similar structure in Bulgarian and Macedonian, and it varies across dialects in Serbo-Croatian.

Recall that in section 2 we left open the possibility that the high negation and *li* particle compete for the same syntactic position. Now we can modify this position. It is rather the case that the observed functional similarity is indeed just a similarity. The distributional facts in (33-35) indicate that unless neutralized by insertion of the complementizer (33) the particle has to identify some element of its complement as non-presuppositional. With this in mind we can return to the unavailability of *i*-phrases in (32). High NegP is merged with TP, acting as a non-veridical operator, a special question marker. Then the NegP merges with *li* (C^0). Once, the negated auxiliary raises and left-adjoins to the higher head, it is overtly marked as not being part of the speaker's presupposition. This makes the speaker's **positive** presupposition non-cancelable¹³, and the derived structure becomes semantically the kind of context in which *i*-phrases (polarity sensitive items) cannot be licensed. And indeed, the non-cancelability of the speaker's positive presupposition explains why this type of questions is, in terms of interpretation, more compatible with the tag-question structures in English than the negative yes/no questions:

- (37) a. Nije *li* Vera videla **nikoga* / **ikoga* / *nekoga*?
 not.aux Q Vera see.Part noone anyone someone
 'Didn't Vera see someone?'

- b. Vera saw someone/*anyone, didn't she?

Although (37b) can be considered as a type of question it still does not license NPIs, since the NegP is not contained within the relevant TP, that is within the presuppositional part of the clause.

4.4. Summary

The proposal outlined in this section provides a uniform account of the cases known as *expletive negation* constructions in Serbo-Croatian. It has been shown that the introduction of high NegP is both necessary (in order to account for (10)) and welcome in order to account for (9)). This approach is more successful in accounting for the facts introduced in section 2 than the theories outlined in section 3. It is compatible with the properties of *n*-words as stated in (13a-b) and argued for by Abels (2004). At the same time it gets rid of the stipulative components of his theory. One is the assumption that the inability of *n*-words to raise out of TP is their inherent property (13c), and the other is the assumption that Neg⁰ cannot reconstruct after movement.

5. Alternative Neg positions crosslinguistically

The idea that negation expressed in the verbal domain may be structurally diverse within the same language is by no means novel. The case of French negative markers *ne* and *pas* is a well know example in this respect. Also, Portner and Zanuttini (2000) claim that the phonologically identical negation markers are in fact different syntactic instantiations of

¹³ Instead of the term *non-cancelable speaker's presupposition*, the term *non-cancelable epistemic implicature* introduced by Han and Romero (2004) is also applicable in this context.

sentential negation in Paduan. The Paduan preverbal marker *no* is, thus, on their account either a head of a separate functional projection or an inseparable clitic of the verb.

It is, however, not often assumed that in the grammar of one language, a single phonological expression of negation can host two distinct functional projections in a clause. Interestingly, this option has been proposed for another negative concord language: Bavarian. Weiß (2002) argues that the negated yes/questions in Bavarian (38a), are syntactically and semantically distinct from the negation that gives rise to negative concord in this language.¹⁴

(38) a. Hosd'n'an ned gseng?
 have(-you)-him-Prt not seen
 'Haven't you seen him?'

a'.Doch, i hob'n gseng.
 yes I have-him seen
 'Yes, I have seen him.'

b. Hosd'n gseng?
 have(-you)-him seen
 'Have you seen him?'

b'.Ja, i hob'n gseng.
 yes I have-him seen
 'Yes, I have seen him'

Although he is referring to the negation illustrated in (38a) as expletive, which causes the rhetorical interpretation of the question, he observes that this is not entirely true. The contrast between the answers (38a' and b') to the negated and positive yes/no question respectively, shows that there is semantic difference between them. The particle *doch* is used in the response to negated questions, and the particle *ja* to positive ones. These facts seem to indicate the same as the Serbo-Croatian data, that the syntactic difference that leads to a specific semantic effect does not mean the negation in question is spurious.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the semantic effects usually ascribed to the presence of expletive sentential negation in Serbo-Croatian, stem from the distinct syntactic position of NegP in those cases. It has been shown that the assumption of semantic vacuousness of negation is far from adequate, and that such stipulations stem from the misunderstanding of the structure involved. Semantically, this position leads to Ladd's *outer negation* effect in Serbo-Croatian. This, however, does not mean that such position has to be available cross-linguistically in order for such semantic effect to be derived. The outer-negation interpretations in yes/no interrogatives crucially depends on the availability of the

¹⁴ Weiß assumes as many as three distinct positions for a NegP in Bavarian. Without getting into details of the motivation for this assumption, it suffices to say that the projections that do not give rise to negative concord are assumed to occupy a TP external position.

presuppositional readings of the syntactic elements in the scope of negation. It has also been shown that there is cross-linguistic empirical support for this line of argumentation.

Nataša Miličević
Univeristy of Tilburg
n.m.a.milicevic@uvt.nl

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