

Negation, Word Order, and Interpretation

Sandra K. Wood
(McDaniel College)

There have been cycles of interest in negation across both signed and spoken languages, looking at negation from different perspectives in each cycle. Zeshan (2006) provides an extensive typology of negation cross-linguistically in signed languages. Pfau, along with Quer, examines negation in various signed languages from a syntactic perspective, questioning where the NegP is positioned syntactically (2004, in press, among others). As Zeshan (2004, 2006) notes, despite an extensive typological study on negative constructions in signed languages, questions still remain regarding the syntactic position of negative elements with respect to word order. Dryer (1992) examined this question typologically for spoken languages, looking at whether word orders OV or VO predict the syntactic position of a negative particle, i.e. Negation Verb (NegV) or Verb Negation (VNeg) and did not find a strong correlation between the word order and the verb-negative particle ordering. Likewise, comparing different signed languages (ASL, DGS, OGS, TID, HZJ, LSC, LIS) with respect to the word ordering and verb-negative particle ordering exhibits no correlational pattern, confirming Dryer's (1992) assumption that the verb and the negative particle do not constitute a 'correlational pair'.

Negation in spoken languages is typically expressed in three ways: as an affix on the verb, as a separate particle, and as verbal negatives (Dryer 1992). Cross-linguistically, most signed languages express negation through non-manuals such as headshake, head-tilted-back, or head-tilted-sideways and through lexical negation. Zeshan (2006) categorizes signed languages as being non-manual dominant (NMD) or manual dominant (MD). Some signed languages such as ASL and DGS require the non-manual negative element to occur with the lexical negative, i.e. NMD. ASL and DGS also allow the negation to be expressed via non-manual negation without the co-occurring lexical negative, whereas HKSL does not. However, ASL and DGS differ with respect to the scope of the negative non-manual co-occurring with the lexical negative or verb (Pfau and Quer 2004, Pfau and Quer 2003, and Pfau 2002,). Others such as HKSL do not require the non-manual element but do require the lexical negative, i.e. MD (Pfau 2014, Tang 2006). An important issue that has not yet been addressed in the literature regarding negative nonmanuals is that oftentimes the same form is used with wh-questions, particularly in ASL. There are also other types of negative nonmanuals used for contrastive negation that do not include typical headshakes but are produced with a particular mouth shape co-occurring with different types of head movement, which we label as Neg-swish and Neg-zig, leading to the observation that all headshakes cannot be conflated under one category of 'headshake'. The main consideration here is that syntax-directed interpretations of negation can occur in non-manual and lexical forms within the respective signed language.

Lexical negation with regards to sentence-level ordering in ASL has been covered extensively in the signed language literature (Gokgoz 2013, Fischer 2006, Pfau & Quer 2004, and Wood 1999, among others), primarily with respect to NegP in the syntactic structure. Wood (1999) examines four ASL lexical negatives: NOT, NOO, NOTHING, and NEVER with respect to their ordering. All four occur both pre- and post-verbally, with a strong preference for sentence-final

position. Each has its own paradigm of syntactic behavior. For instance, NOTHING has scope only over the internal argument while NOO may have scope over either the internal or external argument. NEVER has a particular interpretation directed by the syntactic position in which it is placed. NEVER pre-verbally negates the following verb phrase or proposition. However, NEVER sentence-finally has scope over the subject only, changing the interpretation of the negative proposition. Fischer (2006) suggests that it is a negative adverb, while Wood (1999) analyzes it as a negative modal. Most of the focus on negation in signed language is on the existence of lexical negative signs, nonmanual negative cues, and the position of the negative element within the clause. With a rich base of typological comparison amongst signed languages, we can move further to syntax-directed interpretation of negative lexical items, with an eye towards understanding more about parametric differences and universals in NegP.