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Mary Robinson
New York University

Gary Thoms
New York University

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Abstract

This paper discusses the syntax of English variable negative concord (NC). Considering variation in acceptance and production of both object NC ('I didn't see nothing') and subject NC ('nobody couldn't see me'), we argue in favor of an amended implementation of the theory in Blanchette (2015), where the elements in NC dependencies are connected by movement. Addressing problems with the analysis of subject NC in particular, we propose that NC involves neg-raising of a null negative operator (cf. Zeijlstra 2004) which conditions the variable pronunciation of other heads in the structure with negative morphology.

On the Syntax of English Variable Negative Concord

Mary Robinson and Gary Thoms*

1 Introduction

Negative concord (NC) is where two or more negative elements co-occur in a single sentence but contribute only one semantic negation between them. This can be observed in English sentences such as (1-2), which many speakers accept and produce with a single negation interpretation. For descriptive convenience we will call (1) ‘object NC’ and (2) ‘subject NC’.

- (1) I didn’t see nothing. (= ‘I didn’t see anything’)
(2) Nobody couldn’t see me. (= ‘Nobody could see me’)

Acceptance of NC examples such as these is known to be subject to substantial variation. At the sociolect level, many speakers across dialect regions reject both, and this is typical of speakers of more “standard” Englishes.¹ At the regional level, Smith (2001) notes a broad asymmetry in production data between UK and US varieties with respect to (1) and (2), whereby object NC is found in both but subject NC is found in only American varieties (but see below). At the individual level, speakers are known to vary in their production of NC forms and their non-NC counterparts, with some speakers using NC forms much more than others. Finally, the variability is made all the more complicated by the fact that the alternations are not the same for the two configurations: while object NC varies with object NPI licensing (*I didn’t see anything*), and a NegDP object (*I saw nothing*), typically subject NC only varies with a subject NegDP (*Nobody could see me*), with the NPI counterpart not occurring. This all makes for a complex empirical picture, one that has the potential to provide a rich testing ground for theories of the syntax of NC.

We aim to push this endeavour forward by developing the description of NC systems in English varieties, with a focus on subject NC. We consider how contemporary theories of NC would handle the variation we describe, and we develop a version of the theory in Blanchette (2015) which allows us to capture the distribution of NC without overpredicting with respect to NPI licensing.

2 NC Systems in English

Typological and experimental data shows that NC is pervasive across English dialects. The Electronic World Atlas of English Varieties (<https://ewave-atlas.org>) reports that NC is attested in 80% of English varieties, and even “standard” English speakers have been shown in experiments to generate both NC and double negation interpretations of sentences with two negations (Blanchette 2015, Blanchette and Lukyanenko 2019). We interpret this to mean that speakers of many English varieties possess grammatical knowledge of NC, even if they do not use it.

In this section, we outline the data of interest, collected from a broad survey of the variationist and syntactic literature. The data under consideration in this paper comes from dialects from across the UK, including Scots (Smith 2001, Smith et al. 2019); Reading, England (Cheshire 1982); and Cross-UK colloquial data (Anderwald 2005, Tubau 2016). US data comes from Southern White American English (SWAE; Feagin 1979); Appalachian English (AppE; Wolfram & Christian 1976, Blanchette 2015); African American Language (AAL; Labov 1972, Weldon 1994, Martin & Wolfram 1998). In addition to subject and object NC, we also consider Negative Auxiliary Inversion (NAI), as in *Couldn’t nobody catch him*, since this construction plays a role in some recent accounts of subject NC (e.g. Blanchette 2015).

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¹The term ‘standard’ is somewhat misleading, as there are many speakers who speak varieties which are quite far from the standard but who do not accept or produce NC, including one of the present authors. It is to be read as ‘varieties which are closer to the standard with respect to this particular feature’ throughout.

2.1 Differences between English Dialects

The most widely attested NC configuration is Object NC: if a variety allows NC at all, it allows it with objects. All of the dialects under consideration, with the exception of ‘Standard’ US and UK English, allow Object NC.

- (3) They’ve **nae** got **nae** choice (Buckie Scots, Smith 2001:110)
- (4) You **couldn’t** say **nothing** bad about it (Northern England, McDonald 1980:13)
- (5) You **couldn’t** do **no papers** nor nothing (Midlands, England, Tubau 2016:145)
- (6) There **wasn’t no lights** on (Reading, England, Cheshire 1982:65)
- (7) You **didn’t** have **nobody** to learn you in they days (Southern England, Tubau 2016:145)
- (8) I **don’t** want to know **nothin’** (Mid-Atlantic US, Labov and Rosenfelder 2011)
- (9) I **don’t** know **nothing** about that (Appalachian English [AppE], Blanchette 2015:15)
- (10) I **don’t** eat **no biscuit** (Southern White American English [SWAE], Feagin 1979:229)
- (11) He **ain’t** got **no car** (African American Language [AAL], Martin & Wolfram 1998:18)

Subject NC is less commonly attested across US and UK dialects. It has not been widely attested in English spoken in Scotland, Northern England, or the Mid-Atlantic of the USA. Cheshire in fact notes that Subject NC is not found in Reading, England (1982:64), Henry (1995:103) notes the same for Belfast English, and Smith (2001:123) notes the same for Buckie Scots. However, Anderwald (2005:121-122) and Tubau (2016:168-175) note that a non-negligible number of examples of subject NC are attested in the BNC and the FRED corpus, and Anderwald adds the interesting observation that while subject NC does not seem to be tied to specific regions in the UK, it is most likely to be found in areas with higher overall rates of NC usage.²

- (12) **Nobody don’t** bother with them do they? (Northern England, Anderwald 2005:121)
- (13) I know this sounds funny, but **nobody didn’t** notice it (Midlands, England, Tubau 2016:148)
- (14) He was seasick all trip and **no one didn’t** see after him (Southern England, Tubau 2016:148)
- (15) **Nobody didn’t** touch that but her (AppE, Blanchette 2015:105)
- (16) And **neither** of the boys **can’t** play a lick of it (SWAE, Feagin 1979:242)
- (17) **None** of ’em **can’t** fight (AAL, Labov 1972:786)

NAI involves concord between a fronted sentential negation and an NCI subject. Although it is persistently unattested in the UK, it has been widely attested in Appalachian English, Southern White American English and African American Language.

- (18) **Wasn’t nothing** much she could say (AppE, Blanchette 2015:103)
- (19) **Won’t nobody** help her (SWAE, Feagin 1979:347)
- (20) **Didn’t nobody** laugh (AAL, Martin & Wolfram 1998:26)

The following table summarizes the distribution of these configurations across the dialects examined.

²We stop short of endorsing a view that subject NC is the product of high overall NC rates, as this would lead us to expect that subject NC would be attested in the data from Buckie, where NC rates are above average compared to the FRED/BNC data (around 69%, Smith 2001). Therefore there must be some additional factor in the development of negation in the northern conservative varieties which has led to this asymmetry. One possible factor is the asymmetry noted by Walkden and Morrison (2017) between northern and southern English varieties of Middle English with respect to the development of Jespersen’s cycle, whereby the northern varieties of Middle English advanced onto Stage III of the cycle earlier than southern varieties. If the syntax of Stage II negation has an instrumental role to play in licensing subject NC, then the presence of subject NC in southern varieties may be understood as a reflex of the long tail of that change. The matter warrants more investigation.

	Object NC	Subject NC	Negative Auxiliary Inversion
Standardized Eng (US & UK)	0	0	0
Buckie/Scotland	X	0	0
Reading, England	X	0	0
Mid-Atlantic US	X	0	0
Northern England	X	X	0
Midlands, England	X	X	0
Southern England	X	X	0
AppE	X	X	X
SWAE	X	X	X
AAL	X	X	X

We observe that there is an implicational hierarchy of syntactic configurations across dialects, where the presence of one configuration implies the presence of all those to the right of it. Comparing the US and UK dialects, then, we can see that the grammaticality of NAI in a dialect seems to imply the grammaticality of Subject NC. Crucially, however, the reverse is not true.

- (21) Negative Auxiliary Inversion > Subject NC > Object NC

2.2 The Variability of English NC within Dialects

An important fact about English NC across varieties is that it is variable: all uses of NCIs vary with a non-NCI counterpart, which may be a structure with an *any*-NPI or one with an NegDP with no pronounced sentential negative. The rate of use of the NC variants differ across varieties quite substantially; for instance, Smith (2001) reports that the overall rate of NC in Buckie Scots is around 69%, whereas Childs (2017) reports that the rate for Glasgow Scots is just 7%. This variation is also known to be highly stratified by social class, with speakers of lower socio-economic status using NC much more than those in the middle or upper classes across varieties (see e.g. Wolfram 1969, Feagin 1979). It is therefore unsurprising that NC is not only socially salient, but also heavily stigmatized. Although there is not sufficient research to directly compare the social evaluation of NC to that of other putative syntactic variables in English, its salience is high enough that it is used to construe social meaning among some social groups: for example Reading adolescents using NC to construct a ‘bad’ girl persona (Cheshire 1982), or Bolton adolescents using NC to show an anti-school orientation (Moore 2020). NC’s outlier status as a highly socially salient variable has led some to claim it is the exception to the generalization that abstract linguistic structures cannot be socially evaluated (Labov 1993), or even to reclassify NC as a morphological or lexical variable. While this is not straightforward for some theories of NC which make the variation between NCIs and NPIs a matter of syntactic structure (e.g. Zeijlstra 2004), an analysis of NC as a morphological variable is readily compatible with the theory of NC in Blanchette (2015), according to which the underlying syntax of sentences like *I didn’t see anything/nothing* is the same, with the only difference being the morphological realization of the negative item. We will come back to Blanchette’s theory below.

The variability of NC production can also be seen in the distribution of NPIs and NCIs within example sentences. Blanchette (2015) shows that speakers of AppE use *any* and *no* in parallel syntactic and semantic conditions and within the same utterance, as (22) illustrates.

- (22) I **didn’t** have **no** lice, and I **didn’t** have **any** itch (Blanchette 2015:10)

In addition, individuals mix NCIs and NPIs, sometimes even ‘skipping’ possible targets of concord, as in the following examples.

- (23) We **never** had **any** luck there **neither** (CBC podcast “Somebody knows something”)
 (24) Way back yonder **didn’t anybody** have **nothin’** then (Myrtice J., Feagin 1979:235)

Facts such as these suggest that the variation with NC is not to be captured in terms of a syntactic approach which treats NC and non-NC sentences as being derived by distinct grammars (in the sense

of Kroch 1989) or dialects (standard vs nonstandard); rather, variation seems to be at the level of the individual polarity item, whereby the choice of variant is locally determined.

One seeming counterexample to the claim that NCIs and NPIs are in variation is the inability of NPIs to appear in subject position, as in (26).

- (25) Nobody didn't take the bus.
 (26) *Anybody didn't take the bus.

We want to point out that some dialects can have *any* and *no* vary in subject position, in the NAI configuration in particular. This is shown in the examples of Myrtice J.'s individual variation above in (24), and is shown as a more general pattern in the SWAE dialect below.

- (27) An' he kept tellin' her tha', y'know, it was all in her mind, that **wadn't anything** wrong
 with her (Feagin 1979:346)
 (28) But the doctor said it **wadn't nothin'** the matter with his heart, it was all right. (Feagin
 1979:241)

Foreman (2001:12) confirms that NAI with an NPI subject is also grammatical in West Texas English. Therefore, some NC varieties do in fact show an *any-no* alternation in subject position, albeit only when the negative auxiliary has been inverted.

In addition, we want to draw attention to the fact that some Irish English varieties do show alternations in NCIs and NPIs in subject position (Lunny 1981; Duffield 1993; Hickey 2007). Take, for example, the following parallel examples:

- (29) **Anyone doesn't go** to mass there. (Lunny 1981: 140)
 (30) **No one goes** without a job who wants one at a basic wage. (Ireland data set, Davies 2013)

Examples such as (29) are also noted as being possible in Belfast English by Henry (1995), and they are described by Hickey (2007) as being part of a more general trends towards "failure of negative attraction" in Irish Englishes. Data such as this should ward us off ruling out subject NPIs by some hard grammatical constraint, and so our theory should have some flexibility in this domain.

2.3 Summary

Given the data presented in this section, an analysis of NC in English should not only be able to account for the cross-dialectal implicational hierarchy of syntactic configurations, but also the intra-speaker variation in the pronunciation of a negative item as either *any* or *no*. Our account must not predict that NCIs will vary with NPIs in the subject position like they do in postverbal positions, but it should have some degree of flexibility to account for the possibility of Subject NPIs in declarative sentences in some varieties.

3 Previous Theories

Here we review two well-known theories of NC, Zeijlstra (2004) and Blanchette (2015), and consider how each fares in accounting for variation in the licensing of subject NC.

3.1 Zeijlstra (2004, 2008a, 2008b)

Zeijlstra (2004, 2008a,b) proposes that the dependency between negative elements in NC is to be understood as a form of agreement, and he models this with an implementation of Chomsky's (2001) Agree, where the NCIs bear uninterpretable Neg features (uNeg) which must be valued by a matching interpretable Neg feature (iNeg) on some higher operator, for instance the head of NegP. (31) schematizes a simple case of object NC.

- (31) [_{TP} subj T [_{NEGP} iNeg [_{VP} V DP_{uNeg}]]]
-

As for the variation with subject NC, this is a bit more complicated and bound up with Zeijlstra's account of the distinction between 'strict' and 'non-strict' NC languages. This distinction can be exemplified by a comparison of Polish, a strict language, and Spanish, a non-strict one. In Polish, NCIs may occur in subject or object position but only if the sentential negation is present, and leaving out the sentential negative leads to ungrammaticality. In Spanish, subjects do not seem to participate in NC, in that having an NCI in subject position means that the sentential negation cannot be included without inducing a double negation reading (i.e. without NC).

- (32) **Nikt** *(**nie**) przyjechał
Nobody not come.3.SG.PAST
 'Nobody came.' Polish
- (33) **Nadie** (***no**) vino
 Nobody not come.3.SG.PAST
 'Nobody came.' Spanish

Zeijlstra argues that negative subjects in both strict and non-strict NC languages are NCIs, just like their object counterparts, in that they bear uNeg features which are checked by a higher iNeg feature, and he puts this feature on a covert negative operator $\neg Op$ which is adjoined to TP. He then captures the strict/non-strict distinction in terms of a difference in the syntactic status of the sentential negative marker. In strict languages, it bears a uNeg feature and is licensed by a $\neg Op$ which is generated above TP and licences all NCIs (including subject NCIs). In non-strict languages, the sentential negation always bears iNeg, and so introducing it alongside a subject NCI (and its accompanying $\neg Op$) leads to a double negation interpretation. Consequently, the subject NCI must appear without the overt sentential negative. (34) and (35) schematize structures with negative subjects for Polish and Spanish.

- (34) [$\neg Op_{iNeg}$ [_{TP} DP_{uNeg} T [_{NEGP} nie_{uNeg} VP]]] Polish: overt sentential negative *nie*
- (35) [$\neg Op_{iNeg}$ [_{TP} DP_{uNeg} T VP]] Spanish: no overt NegP head with NegDP subject

Turning now to the English data, varieties which have object NC but lack subject NC can be understood as being more akin to Spanish, where the sentential negator *not/n't* necessarily bears iNeg. The fact that NegDP subjects and indeed objects are possible without sentential negation in these varieties would then require an analysis where $\neg Op$ is allowed to be generated in some clause-medial position; see Childs (2017:50-51) for one such proposal. As for varieties which allow subject NC, the main difference would be that they would have a variant of *not/n't* which bears uNeg rather than iNeg, and this would be deployed in subject NC structures and licensed by a higher $\neg Op$. Thus the analysis of object NC would be just the same as in (31) above across varieties, the analysis of NegDP subjects would be as in (35), and the analysis of subject NC would be as in (34).

Unfortunately this analysis has a number of problems concerning $\neg Op$, and its interaction with subjects in particular. One issue is that by adding $\neg Op$ to the polarity system of English, we predict that this operator will license NPIs in a wide range of contexts where NPIs are clearly impossible. Nothing in the analysis rules out examples such as the following, where $\neg Op$ would need to be inserted to value the uNeg features on the NegDP objects.

- (36) *I gave anybody nothing.
 (37) *Anybody brought nothing.

The NPIs in these examples would not interact featurally with $\neg Op$, since Zeijlstra and Childs both assume that NPIs are only subject to semantic licensing conditions, but they would scope below $\neg Op$ in both cases and thus should be possible for any speaker who accepts cases without the NPI (e.g. *I gave them nothing*). This is clearly not correct, since examples such as these are rejected by almost all English speakers across dialects. The problem of data such as (36-37) is arguably a more general problem with pre-negation NPIs, which can be taken to encompass subject NPIs more generally, including examples such as (29) above; such examples seem not to be attested outside of Irish English, so this is an unwelcome prediction.

3.2 Blanchette (2015)

Blanchette (2015) is embedded in the theory of polarity items in Collins and Postal (2014) (henceforth CP14), so we should take some time to outline the relevant details of that theory first. According to CP14, NPI ‘licensing’ in a simple sentence like *I did not see anything* can be derived from raising of a semantically interpretable NEG element from within the NPI DP to some higher position, with the higher copy being spelled out as *not* and the lower copy conditioning the appearance of an NPI form (e.g. *any*) in the DP. CP14 claim that all dependencies between negation and strict NPIs involve raising of this kind.

- (38) [TP I did NEG [VP see [DP <NEG> SOME thing]]] <NEG> SOME → *any*

The motivation for this theory comes from a comprehensive analysis of the well-known phenomenon of *neg-raising*, which describes the situation where negation of a verb like *think* in a sentence such as *I don't think they'll leave until Thursday* seems to result in a stronger interpretation where the negation applies to the embedded clause (*I think they won't leave until Thursday*). CP14 claim that such “low negation” inferences, and the strict NPI licensing facts that accompany them, can be explained if the overt negation has raised from a position within the embedded clause but reconstructed to its base position.

Developing a suggestion in CP14, Blanchette analyses English NC as a variation on structures such as (38), where the lower copy of the raised NEG is realized variably as either an *any*-form or a *no*-form; in effect, the *any/no* variability of NC is cast as a type of allomorphy. One of Blanchette’s arguments for this approach is that a search of a corpus of Appalachian English, in which NC is richly represented as a vernacular feature, returns examples of NC across finite clause boundaries, but only with clause-embedding predicates such as *think* which are known to be neg-raising predicates (i.e. they allow for the low negation readings mentioned above); examples of NC across clause boundaries with non-neg-raising predicates such as *say*, by contrast, do not show up, as is predicted by her implementation of CP14’s theory. Such data is not accounted for by Zeijlstra’s theory without the addition of some extra syntactic neg-raising mechanism (see Zeijlstra 2004:269), whereas for Blanchette, such a mechanism *is* the theory, to a great extent.

As for subject NC, Blanchette (2015:135) seeks to tie this to the syntax of NAI, such as (18-20) above. Her analysis of NAI involves neg-raising from the subject to the Fin head above TP, and for the extension to subject NC she proposes that the remnant DP then moves to Spec,FinP, as in (40).

- (39) Didn't nobody live in there then. (Blanchette 2015:103) [AppE]

- (40) [FINP [DP <NEG> NP] aux+neg+Fin [TP <DP> <aux+n't> [NEGP Neg t VP]]]

This unification of NAI and subject NC is motivated by the correlation identified by Smith (2001) and Tortora (2007) between the the availability of the two constructions. However, we saw that data from FRED and the BNC indicates that subject NC is available in some traditional British English dialects, in particular in southern England, while NAI remains unattested in those areas and throughout the British Isles. This indicates that NAI cannot be a precondition for subject NC.

One additional ingredient of Blanchette’s analysis is the condition on neg-raising in (41), which rules out remnant movement derivations where a fronted constituent contains a trace of a raised NEG. This speaks to the analysis of subject NC on the assumption (enshrined in the CP14 framework) that the sentential negation in a subject sentence such as *nobody didn't leave* has raised from within the subject DP prior to A-movement to Spec,TP, as schematized by (42).

- (41) The Remnant Raising Condition: If M = [DP [NEG SOME] NP], then no occurrence of M c-commands an occurrence of NEG.

- (42) [TP [DP <NEG> SOME NP] T NEG [VP <DP> V DP]]

The condition in (41) is taken to apply to varieties which disallow subject NC, but not to ones which allow it. This condition alone ought to be sufficient for describing the difference between varieties with and without subject NC, meaning the foregoing facts about NAI are not a fatal blow to Blanchette’s theory. Nevertheless, we see two issues with this. First, it is hard to see how (41)

could be learned by the relevant speakers, since this would require learning on the basis of negative evidence (i.e. the absence of examples of subject NC). Second, Blanchette's proposal seems to incorrectly predict that speakers who allow subject NC would also allow NPIs in subject position, as in *anyone wasn't there*, since the account makes *any/no* variation a matter of allomorphy. It is not clear how the conditioning environment for the allomorphy would differ between subjects and objects, since it is not conditioned by anything outside the DP.

As we see it, these problems are related. Learners must be acquiring subject NC on the basis of positive evidence, and the non-acceptance of *anyone wasn't there* should follow from the absence of any such evidence, or more precisely from the overabundance of the alternative form. In the next section we develop a new theory which allows us to capture this.

4 Proposal

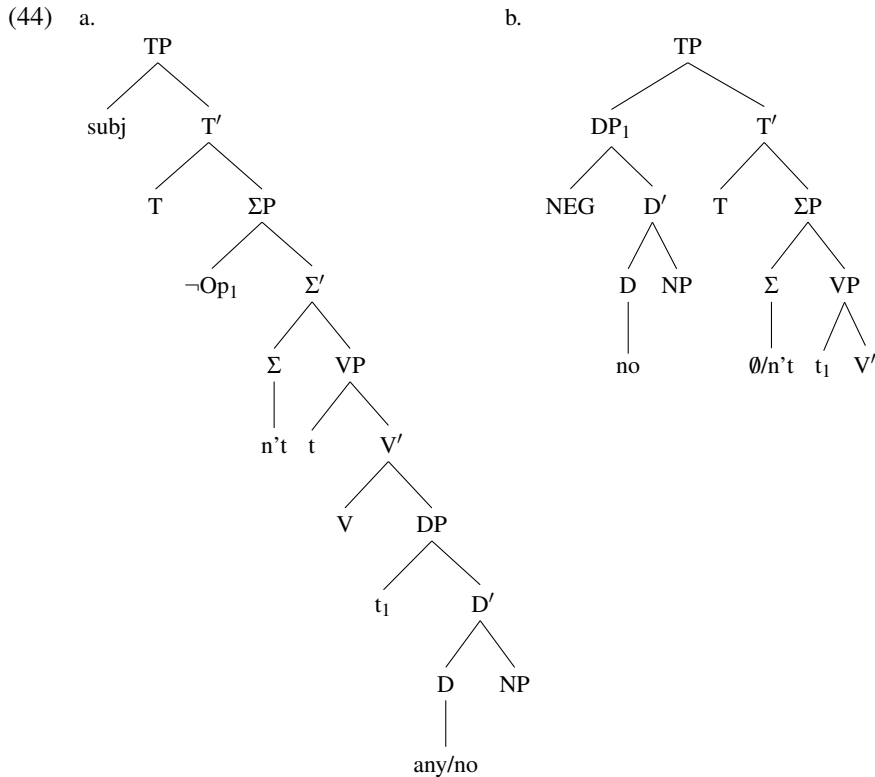
Our alternative proposal is an adapted version of Blanchette (2015) which inherits from it the following key ingredients. First, the licensing of strict NPIs involves the raising of a NEG element from the polarity item to its surface scope position, with the raised NEG conditioning the appearance of an overt sentential negation. Thus we follow Blanchette and CP14 in taking simple cases of NC and NPI licensing with objects to involve raising of a NEG element from within a lower DP, as in the sketched derivation in (43). To this we add a small but (as we will see) significant elaboration which we think would be required for most concrete implementations of this theory, which is to take the movement of NEG to be driven by some syntactic feature F on the head of a polarity projection ΣP , where the function of F is to ensure that negation has sentential scope.

(43) [_{TP} DP T [_{ΣP} NEG₁ Σ [_{VP} <DP> [_{V'} V [_{DP} <NEG₁> SOME NP]]]]]

Second, variable NC is taken to be the result of socially conditioned allomorphic variation in a specific syntactic context. For a case of object NC, the deleted copy of the raised NEG conditions the form of a determiner, and it may either appear as *any* or *no*. More precisely, the pronounced form of the determiner is the product of a probabilistic disjunctive spellout rule, and the probability of a *no* form is determined by a combination of input and social factors, much like with other famous cases of socially conditioned allomorphy (such as *-ing/-in* variation). The difference in rates of use of object NC between varieties is captured simply by different probabilities being attached to the different variants (see Parrott 2008 and Adger 2014 for implementations). We assume that the same syntax underlies standard varieties which seem to lack NC altogether, and that the absence of NC in these speakers' production is to be captured by a 0% probability for the *no* forms in the spellout rule; this would likely be the product of the lack of NC in the input. This allows us to understand the fact that standard speakers may still show behavioural responses which indicate they have NC in their grammar even when they do not produce NC.

We have referred to NEG's conditioning the form of other elements above, but we need to be more concrete about which forms are conditioned and how the conditioning works. This is one way in which we depart from Blanchette (2015). She takes NC to involve a kind of resumption, where the *no*-form is a realization of the lower copy of the raised NEG (Blanchette 2015:59, see also Collins et al. 2015). On our account, the NEG which moves and the elements in the polarity-based dependencies which are pronounced are *not* identical, and so the conditioning of the pronounced forms by syntax is more indirect. Specifically, we propose that the NEG that raises is in fact a null operator which is generated in the specifier of DP, and occurrences of this operator condition the realization of the overt realizations of multiple items: the D head of the indefinite, which may be realized as *any/no*, and the Σ head bearing F which attracts NEG to its specifier, which is realized as *-n't*. This means that the spellout of D as *any/no* is not an instance of resumption, but rather allomorphy of a head conditioned by the feature specification of its specifier (cf. Weisser 2019), and the overt sentential negative is not a realization of the raised NEG, but rather a form of a polarity head which is realized overtly in the presence of a raised NEG. Ultimately, our analysis of NC has quite a lot in common with McCloskey's (2002) analysis of Irish A'-dependencies, as both involve changes in the form of heads which host extracted elements in their specifiers, with the specific form of the heads varying depending on features on the moving element.

One benefit of this amendment to Blanchette's theory is that it sets up our alternative account of subject NC, to which we now turn. We follow Blanchette in assuming that polarity item subjects start out with an interpretable NEG within them, and so external arguments are much like internal arguments with respect to the beginning of the derivation. The difference is that when Σ is merged, it need not bear the feature F which we took to drive NEG-raising to Spec, Σ P previously, since the NEG within the subject DP gets sentential scope due to raising to Spec,TP (possibly by raising through Spec, Σ P). Therefore, the NEG stays in the subject rather than undergoing Neg-raising. In (44) we present structures for object and subject polarity items side-by-side to highlight this difference.



We assume that a NEG in Spec,DP may scope out of that DP, just like quantificational possessors in Spec,DP may scope out of the highest specifier (*nobody's parents said anything*, see e.g. Kayne 1994). We also assume that in all cases Σ bears a uPol feature which probes its c-command domain and gets a Neg value from the NEG element in the polarity item below, although this is a facet of the analysis that we will not get into in great detail here.

The upshot for subject NC is that the Σ of derivations involving subject polarity items will have a different feature specification than the Σ of other derivations; consequently, these different versions of Σ may be tied to different realization rules. We propose that the realization rule for Σ [+F] is (45) for all Englishes, while the realization rules for Σ with no specification for F is (46).

$$(45) \quad \Sigma[+F, \text{Neg}] \rightarrow [\text{nt}]$$

$$(46) \quad \Sigma[\text{Neg}] \rightarrow \emptyset \text{ or } [\text{nt}]$$

To complete the picture, we provide the realization rules for D in (47-48). (47) is the rule that is involved in realizing neg-raising structures, so it is responsible for object NC (*any/no* variation). (48) derives NegDP subjects and objects.³ Recall that these realization rules differ in the context determined by the specifier: a trace in the case of (47) but not (48).

³We have not discussed cases of object NegDPs such as *I saw nothing* here. We follow CP14 in assuming that they do not involve NEG-raising, and that the NEG stays in Spec,DP, and we furthermore assume that the fact that negation comes to have wide scope with respect to some operators is to be explained either in terms of

- (47) D[Neg] → [ɛni] or [no] / [DP <NEG> --]
 (48) D[Neg] → [no] / [DP NEG --]

The rules in (46) and (47) are disjunctive realization rules, and they are responsible for subject NC and object NC respectively. Learners would acquire these with probabilities attached to each disjunct which would be derived primarily from input, and the rules would be acquired independent of each other. Speakers who lack NC altogether ('standard' English) would have 0% probability for the *-n't* disjunct of (46) and the *no* disjunct of (47). Speakers who have object NC but not subject NC (e.g. Buckie Scots) would have a non-zero probability for the *no* disjunct of (47) (Smith 2001 records NC rates of 69%) and 0% for the *-n't* disjunct in (46); we can note that standard speakers and Buckie Scots speakers would have broadly the same rule for the realization of Σ , since they disallow subject NC just as much as each other.⁴ Speakers with both subject and object NC (e.g. AAL) would have non-zero probabilities for the *-n't* and *no* disjuncts of (46) and (47) respectively, and so they would be able to derive subject NC with the *n't* disjunct of (46) and object NC with the *no* disjunct of (47). But these speakers could still derive cases such as *nobody left* by using the \emptyset disjunct of (46), since this would have a probability of less than 100%. In (49) we summarize some possible settings for the variable rules of three varieties which would derive the range of possible sentences.

- (49) StE: (i) D[Neg] → [ɛni] @ 100% or [no] @ 0%; (ii) Σ [Neg] → \emptyset @ 100% or [nt] @ 0%
 Buckie: (i) D[Neg] → [ɛni] @ 31% or [no] @ 69%; (ii) Σ [Neg] → \emptyset @ 100% or [nt] @ 0%
 AAL: (i) D[Neg] → [ɛni] @ 10% or [no] @ 90%; (ii) Σ [Neg] → \emptyset @ 60% or [nt] @ 40%

Let us conclude by emphasising two points of note. First, nothing about this analysis relies on learners using negative evidence to arrive at some conditioning banning NC of some kind or another, so it solves the problem for Blanchette's theory discussed above. Second, the analysis does not predict there to be *any/no* variation with subject polarity items, since subject NCs do not involve NEG-raising (at least in typical cases) and so the *any/no* rule in (47) would not be relevant.

5 Conclusion

In this work we have examined English variable NC, in particular cases involving subject NCIs. The analysis makes crucial use of probabilistic spellout rules which realize the structures derived by the movement of negation operators in the spirit of Blanchette (2015). Our proposal differs from that theory in that the negative operators and heads that overtly signal the operator's presence are distinct, and so in this respect it incorporates aspects of the theory in Zeijlstra (2004, 2008a,b).

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QR of the NegDP, or in terms of the remnant movement derivations proposed by Kayne (1998). A point to bear in mind in fleshing out this analysis is that while object NegDPs may scope over some modals, such sentences do not always pass the Klima tests for sentential negation (e.g. *I brought nothing and so did Jim*).

⁴We are glossing over the fact that sentential negation in Scots may be variably realized as *n't* or *-na*.

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Department of Linguistics
 New York University
 10 Washington Place
 New York, NY 10003
 mkr361@nyu.edu
 gary.thoms@nyu.edu