The Effect of Negation on Subject Position

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It is widely assumed that the movement of a subject from its base-position in [SPEC, vP] or [SPEC, VP] to [SPEC, IP] is related to the EPP, proposed in Chomsky 1982. In SVO languages like French and English this movement is generally obligatory.

There is evidence that not all languages are subject to the EPP. It has been argued in McCloskey 1996, for example, that some languages, like Irish, lack an EPP altogether, as is evidenced not only by their VSO word order but by their apparent lack of expletives.

Languages like Italian and Spanish constitute yet another linguistic category. They are SVO, meaning that they probably have EPP effects, but they also allow VS word order, which indicates that the EPP is not always obligatory. The following Italian sentences illustrate:

(1) a. Tutti gli ospiti sono arrivati.
      all the guests are arrived

   b. Sono arrivati tutti gli ospiti.
      are   arrived   all the guests

It is interesting that whereas a subject may under certain circumstances have the option of remaining in its base-position, a negated subject does not have this option:

(2) a. Non tutti gli ospiti sono arrivati.
      not   all the guests are arrived

   b. *Sono arrivati non tutti gli ospiti.
      are arrived not   all the guests

This restriction also applies to subject quantifiers that have been stranded in the manner proposed in Sportiche 1988 and Giusti 1990. That is, a subject quantifier may be stranded, but not if it is negated:

(3) a. Gli ospiti sono tutti arrivati.
      the guests are   all   arrived.

   b. *Gli ospiti sono non tutti arrivati.
      the guests are not   all   arrived

In contrast to Romance SVO languages like Italian and Spanish, in the Germanic SVO language English a negated subject quantifier can be stranded:

(4) a. Not all the guests have arrived.
    b. The guests have not all arrived.

Some readers may suggest that the negation marker in (4b) is a sentential negation marker and not part of a negated constituent. One need only insert a sentential negation marker into the sentence to prove that (4b) contains a negated constituent and not sentential negation:

(5) The guests have not all not arrived.

In this presentation I will argue that the contrast between (2b) and (3b) on the one hand and (4b) on the other can be explained by adapting the theory of sentential negation in Zeijlstra 2004 to constituent negation. In Zeijlstra 2004 it is argued that sentential negation in the Germanic languages occupies the SPEC position of the phrase headed by the finite verb while in the Romance languages it occupies the head or SPEC position of a highly positioned NegP. In applying this concept to constituent negation, I will argue that a negated subject DP or QP in the Germanic languages, such as the one in (4a), is base-generated with a negation marker in its SPEC position, while a negated subject in the Romance languages, such as the one in (2a), instead of being base-generated with a negation marker in its SPEC position bears an uninterpretable negative feature [uNeg]. This feature forces movement of the subject to [SPEC, NegP], where it eliminates [uNeg] and combines with the negation marker to form a negated constituent. This approach correctly predicts that negated subjects and negated stranded subject quantifiers will not occur below NegP in the Romance languages, blocking (2b) and (3b), but that a negated quantifier will occur in stranding position in Germanic.

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