Hedde Zeijlstra

Sentential Negation and Negative Concord

Sentential Negation and Negative Concord describes and explains a series of phenomena that surface in the study of negation as well the typological correlations between these phenomena.

The study focuses on four issues: (i) the way that sentential negation is expressed syntactically, i.e. what are the syntactic properties of negative markers cross-linguistically; (ii) the occurrence of Negative Concord, i.e. the phenomenon that in many languages multiple morpho-syntactically negative elements yield only one semantic negation; (iii) the question whether imperative forms of verbs are allowed to occur in negative constructions; and (iv) the interpretation of constructions in which a universal quantifier subject precedes a negative marker: in most languages the negation then outscopes the subject.

Based on the results of Dutch diachronic, Dutch dialectological and cross-linguistic research the author shows that all these phenomena can be described in terms of typological implications. For instance, every language that bans true negative imperatives has at least a negative marker that is a syntactic head; and every language with such a negative head marker is on its turn a Negative Concord language.

The author presents a syntax-semantics interface theory of sentential negation and Negative Concord that correctly predicts these typological implications. One of the general conclusions of this study is that n-words (in Negative Concord languages) should not be thought of as negative quantifiers or negative polarity items, but that they should be considered as semantically non-negative indefinites that are syntactically marked for negation.

This study is of relevance to syntacticians, semanticists and scholars in the syntax-semantics interface, as well as to diachronic linguists, dialectologists and typologists.

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Landelijke Onderzoekschool Taalwetenschap