

A typology of negation in Optimality Theory  
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Abstract:

Negation and negative indefinites raise problems for the principle of compositionality of meaning, because we find both double and single negation readings in natural language, as illustrated in (i)-(iii):

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|-------|--|--|
| (i)   | Nobody said nothing  | English: double negation                                 |
| (ii)  | Nadie miraba a nadie<br>Nobody looked at nobody.<br>= Nobody looked at anybody   | Spanish: negative concord                                |
| (iii) | Personne n'est le fils de personne.<br>Nobody is the son of nobody.<br>= Nobody is the son of anybody<br>= Nobody is the son of nobody | French: ambiguous<br>negative concord<br>double negation |

De Swart and Sag (2002) solve the compositionality problem in a polyadic quantifier framework. All negative quantifiers are collected into an N-store, and are interpreted by means of iteration (double negation) or resumption (negative concord) upon retrieval. This analysis works well for languages like French, that display ambiguities (cf. iii), but does not explain why languages like English (i) and Spanish (ii) show only one of the two possible patterns. This paper extends the earlier analysis with a typology of negation and negative indefinites using bi-directional optimality theory (OT). The constraints defined are universal, but their ranking varies from one language to the next. In negative concord languages, the functional motivation for the marking of 'negative variables' wins out. Double negation languages value first-order iteration. In languages that display ambiguities, we find constraints with an overlapping range. The bi-directional set-up is essential, for syntactic and semantic variation go hand in hand.