A puzzle of *ko*-occurrence: negative indefinites in San Martín Peras Mixtec

The issue: Every language has some way of expressing negation, but the ways that they do so vary greatly, especially in the realm of negative quantifiers. This difference is traditionally boiled down to a two-way distinction: negative quantifiers in negative concord languages, called **NEG**-words (Laka, 1990), are dependent on negation. Negative quantifiers in double negation languages, called negative indefinites (NIs), are not dependent on negation. While much literature focuses on the difference between **NEG**-words and NIs (De Swart and Sag, 2002; Zeijlstra, 2004, among others), other negative quantifiers straddle the classificatory line. These are positionally-restricted NIs, like those in Scandinavian languages. Here, I examine positionally-restricted NIs in San Martín Peras Mixtec (SMPM). I show that they are made up of two separate items brought together by movement, and I suggest that there is no formal dependency between them.

Background: Positionally-restricted NIs are most famously described in Scandinavian, where object NIs must occur in the linear position where negation would normally be expressed. Despite the breadth of theoretical work on the nature of the grammatical dependency between negation and these NIs, little consensus has been reached in the literature (Christensen, 1986; Rögnvaldsson, 1987; Sells, 2000; Svenonius, 2002; Penka, 2011). Positionally-restricted NIs are also present in SMPM, a VSO, Oto-Manguean language of Oaxaca, Mexico. Like in Scandinavian, NIs in SMPM can only occur in the position where sentential negation is expressed, which is obligatorily pre-verbal. They cannot surface in the canonical object position.\(^1\)

\[1\] Throughout, an acute accent (´) marks high tone, a grave accent (ˇ) marks low tone, a háček (ˇ) marks rising tone, and a tilde (˜) marks nasality.

\[
\begin{align*}
(1) & \quad \left(\check{\text{k}o\-\text{-ña}}\ yíbì\right) \text{ kání} \text{ Pedro} \left(\text{\`k}o\-\text{-ña} \ yíbì\right) \\
& \quad \text{NEG-3SG.NEUT person hit.CONT Pedro NEG-3SG.NEUT person} \\
& \quad \text{“Pedro hit nobody.”}
\end{align*}
\]

SMPM is a negative concord language, unlike Scandinavian languages. Aside from positionally-restricted NIs, which I term *ko*-NPs, it has a class of **NEG**-words that obligatorily co-occur with the negative marker. They are unlikely to be negative polarity items, since they are licit as fragment answers and illicit outside of anti-morphic contexts (Zwarts, 1998).

\[
\begin{align*}
(2) & \quad \text{ko-káni} \quad \text{Pedro ní-\text{-}í-na} \\
& \quad \text{NEG-hit.CONT Pedro not-one-3PL.NEUT} \\
& \quad \text{“Pedro isn’t hitting anybody.”}
\end{align*}
\]

The presence of both **NEG**-words and positionally-restricted NIs in SMPM allows us to compare the dependency between negation and **NEG**-words with the dependency between negation and positionally-restricted NIs.

Proposal: While there is analytical uncertainty regarding the Scandinavian data, SMPM’s characteristics make NI formation a relatively transparent process. Somewhat surprisingly, *ko*-NPs are not the result of a formal dependency between negation and a NI. Instead, they are the result of optional movement of a non-negative indefinite to a position right-adjacent to negation. This theory has three crucial ingredients:

**Ingredient one:** *ko*-NPs are not a single lexical unit. They contain a (somewhat) transparent spell-out of SMPM’s negative morpheme and a clearly moved indefinite. Negation is a single **NEG**-head expressed throughout the language by the prefix *ko*-, a rising contour tone, or a combination of the two. While these affixes are absent from the **NEG**-words (2), they are present on all *ko*-NPs (1). Additionally, polarity-sensitive material, such as polarity-sensitive responses, degree words, and **NEG**-words, are all licensed by *ko*-NPs, showing that they contribute sentential negation. Finally, *ko*-NPs cannot co-occur with any other expression of the negative morpheme, which squares with...
an independent restriction in SMPM that, though multiple lexical items may host the negative morpheme, it may only be exponed once in a clause.

**Ingredient two: The indefinite movement that feeds ko-NP formation is optional.** Whenever a ko-NP is possible, a construction in which negation and the indefinite are spelled out separately is also possible. In these constructions, negation obligatorily outscopes the indefinite, and the NI reading is preserved:

(3) a. \( \text{kō:-ña } \) yíbi ni-shini Pebro  
   NEG-3SG.NEUT person COMPL-see Pedro  
   “Pedro didn’t see anyone”  

b. ko-ní-shini Pebro ña yíbi  
   NEG-NEG.COMPL-see Pedro 3SG.NEUT person  
   “Pedro didn’t see anyone” \((\exists > \exists)\); “Pedro didn’t see someone” \((\exists > \neg)\)

The indefinite in (3b) is not dependent on negation—unlike the NEG-words, it is licit in non-negative, non-downward entailing contexts. Because the indefinite is not dependent on negation for licensing, and because NEG-words in SMPM do not move to the position of negation, ko-NP formation cannot be driven by negative licensing.

**Ingredient three: ko-NPs are not syntactic constituents.** In SMPM, negation leans on whatever item occurs immediately to its right at PF. This behavior can be seen in that the leftmost lexical item in the fronted vP hosts the negative morpheme:

(4) \( \text{vP[ ntāhsha kahta ] Pebro} \)  
   NEG.loud sing.POT Pedro  
   “Pedro will not sing loud.”

(5) \( \text{vP[ kāhta ntásha ] Pebro} \)  
   NEG.sing.POT loud Pedro  
   “Pedro will not sing loud.”

This fact suggests that the syntactic process of ko-NP formation involves movement of the NP to a position right-adjacent to negation, after which the negative morpheme prosodically leans on it. This derivation predicts that ko-NPs are not syntactic constituents. If true, they should only appear in clauses that host sentence negation because they cannot undergo further movement. This prediction appears to be preliminarily borne out: indefinites from an embedded clause can front to the matrix clause if it is negated, but they front to the left-periphery of the embedded clause if the embedded clause is negated.

(6) \( \text{kō:-na tāsh̨i Juã CP[ kā’ã Pebro shí’ï _]} \)  
   NEG-3PL.NEUT allow.CONT Juan speak.POT Pedro with _  
   “Juan does not allow Pedro to speak with anyone.”

(7) \( \text{kā’ī CP[ ko-mí-ña’ã kasá’a Pebro _]} \)  
   think.CONT-1SG NEG-EMPH-thing cook.POT Pedro _  
   “I think that Pedro will not cook anything.”

**Conclusion:** Positionally-restricted NIs in Scandinavian have given rise to disparate analytical approaches. Here, I show that a similar construction in SMPM is best analyzed as the result of optional movement of a non-negative indefinite to a position right-adjacent to negation. While the trigger for indefinite movement is uncertain, this approach can be extended to Scandinavian and, if on the right track, may point to a theory of negative licensing that never involves movement.