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On Negation, Negative Concord, and Negative Imperatives in Digor Ossetic[1]

David Erschler, Vitaly Volk

1. Introduction

In this paper, we provide a description of the system of negation and negative indefinites in Digor Ossetic. We will discuss certain phenomena that might be of theoretical and typological interest, and propose a generative analysis of some of them.

Digor Ossetic, along with its immediate congener, Iron Ossetic, is an East Iranian language spoken in the Central Caucasus. Due to the very long absence of contact with the other Iranian languages (THORDARSON 1989:457), Ossetic differs widely in many respects from "standard average Iranian". One salient point of divergence is the system of negation and negative indefinites. Whereas in "usual" Iranian languages, East and West alike, the indefinites used under negation are not intrinsically negative (see, for instance, 1a,b) and require a sentential negation marker for the correct interpretation, Ossetic possesses a series of true negative indefinites, which are incompatible with sentential negation (1c).[2]

(1) Wakhi (East Iranian, Pamir), (ERSCHLER 2010:95)

a. An intrinsically non-negative indefinite

i-čiz	*cə=kʂ̌əji*	*maž-i*	*aga*	*car*
IDF-what	if=hear.2SG	I.OBL-ACC	awakening	do.2SG

"If you hear anything, wake me up."

b. The same pronoun in a negative clause

me	*pʂ̌ad*	***i-čiz***
NEG.IMP	touch.2SG	IDF-what

"Do not touch anything!"

c. Digor Ossetic

urussag-aw	***ne-ked***	***(*ne)***	*is-ʒurd-ta*
Russian-EQ	N-when	NEG	PRV-say.PST-TR.PST.3SG

"He never spoke Russian." @ (from an oral narrative)

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[1] The Digor data used here have been collected in the course of four field trips of the first author (D.E.) to North Ossetia in 2008–2010. We are grateful to Aslan Guriev and Elizaveta Kochieva, without whose constant help these trips would have been unsuccessful if not outright impossible. For this paper, our primary consultants were Sveta Gatieva, Marina Khamitsaeva, and Khasan Maliev. We would like to thank them for the enjoyable cooperation. We would also like to thank our Vladikavkaz colleagues, Tamerlan Kambolov and Fedar Takazov, for their consultations. Finally, we have benefited from the comments of Ora Matushansky, Norvin Richards, Masha Rozhnova and two anonymous reviewers.

[2] Ossetic examples taken from literary texts or from recorded oral narratives are marked with @. The remaining examples are elicited. The language of elicitation was Russian, a language in which most, if not all, Ossetians are fully fluent. The ages of our consultants ranged from eighteen to eighty, two of the principal consultants for this paper are about thirty years old, and one about sixty.

As argued elsewhere (ERSCHLER 2010), it is not implausible that the Ossetic system of negation has been crucially influenced by South Caucasian languages. This paper takes a strictly synchronic approach. We only deal here with Digor Ossetic data, but Iron Ossetic facts are fairly similar. Until very recently, Ossetic syntax was not very much studied, let alone analyzed. This is particularly true in the case of Digor: the two published descriptions of this language, ISSAEV (1966) and TAKAZOV (2009), deal mostly with morphology.

The paper is organized as follows: in Section 2., we present some background information on negation and specify the terms used in this paper. In Section 3., we lay out our basic theoretical premises and our hypotheses about Digor clause structure. In Section 4., we provide a theory-neutral description of the Digor negation system. In Section 5., we proceed to analyze negative concord phenomena and the behavior of negative imperatives in Digor. Section 6. concludes.

2. Background on negation

In this section, we indicate a number of topics for which the Digor data appear to be of some interest. For reviews of the vast literature on negation see, for instance, HORN (2001, 2010), ZEIJLSTRA (2004), and DE SWART (2010). We refer readers to these works for origins of the terms to be introduced in this section (double negation, strict/non-strict negative concord, negative spread, true negative imperatives).

2.1. Negative indefinites and sentential negation

One topic of extensive research is the interaction between negative indefinites (NIs for short) and sentential negation. Following prior literature (see, for instance, HASPELMATH 1997), by NIs we mean those that can be used as negative answers:

(2) A: *Who came?* B: *Nobody / *Anybody*.

On a straightforward approach, it seems reasonable to assume that such indefinites would behave like the logical negation, that is, their negative meanings would cancel out when two such NIs are present in a sentence. This phenomenon came to be called DOUBLE NEGATION EFFECT. It indeed holds, for instance, in Standard English:

(3) ***Nobody*** *understood* ***nothing****. = Everybody understood something.*

Cross-linguistically, however, NIs more often than not fail to meet this expectation and are compatible either with the sentential negation or with each other. This type of phenomenon is called NEGATIVE CONCORD. Two kinds of negative concord have received special names: STRICT NEGATIVE CONCORD, when NIs obligatorily co-occur with each other and require the presence of the sentential negation (4a), and NEGATIVE SPREAD, when multiple NIs co-occur with each other, but not with sentential negation (4b):

(4) a. STRICT NEGATIVE CONCORD, Russian
ni-kto ***ni-čego*** ****(ne)*** *ponjal*
N-who N-what NEG understood
"Nobody understood anything."
b. NEGATIVE SPREAD, German (GIANNAKIDOU 2000: 461)
Hier *hilft* ***keiner*** ***kein-em***
here helps nobody nobody-DAT
"No one helps anyone here."

To further complicate any systematic theory of negative concord, there are also non-strict negative concord languages, which show both negative concord and negative spread. This applies to some Romance and Germanic languages:

(5) Spanish (LAKA 1990:120)
a. *María* ****(no)*** *viene* ***nunca***. b. *María* ***nunca*** *viene.*
PN NEG comes never PN never comes
"Mary never comes."
c. *María* ***nunca*** ***no*** *viene.*
"Mary never doesn't come." (i.e. Mary always comes.)

However, "[i]t seems that almost none of the NC [= Negative Concord, D.E. & V.V.] languages that have been thoroughly studied in the literature makes exclusive use of negative spread" (GIANNAKIDOU 2000:460). Actually, there are several such languages in the Central Caucasus: Digor and Iron Ossetic, and Svan, but none of these languages has received much (or for that matter any) attention in theoretical literature on negation.

2.2. Negation and imperative clauses

Another topic of active research in the field of negation studies is the interaction of negation with the imperative mood. In a considerable number of languages, imperative verb forms may not be used in prohibitive sentences (ZANUTTINI 1997, HAN 2001, ZEIJLSTRA 2006):

(6) Spanish (ZEIJLSTRA 2006:406)
a. *¡Lee!* b. *no* *leas /* **no* *lee*
read.2SG.IMP NEG read.2SG.SUB / NEG read.IMP.2SG
"Read!" "Don't read!"

Specific verb forms that are used in imperative as well as in prohibitive clauses have been dubbed "true negative imperatives" (TNIs):

(7) Russian
a. *čita-j* b. *ne* *čita-j*
read-2SG.IMP NEG read-2SG.IMP
"Read!" "Don't read!"

A number of explanations have been advanced for the fact that TNIs seem to be rare or non-existent in languages that show negative spread (see ZEIJLSTRA 2006 and the references there). The most recent analysis known to us proposes the following generalization (coached in minimalist terms): "Every language with an overt negative marker X^0 that carries [iNEG] [i.e. an interpretable negative feature, D.E. & V.V.] bans TNIs" (ZEIJLSTRA 2006:414). Admittedly, the questions whether a certain element is an X^0 or XP and, in particular, whether some semantic feature is interpretable or not, are highly theory-internal. At any rate, it might be of some interest to see an example of a negative spread language with preverbal negative markers which does have TNIs.[3]

2.3. The syntactic status of the negative marker

The third topic, although highly theory-internal, is of high importance in generative analyses of negation. It concerns the status of negative markers in X-bar theory. There seems to be a consensus that preverbal negative markers which can negate a sentence alone are X^0's (see HAEGEMANN / ZANUTTINI 1996:122, ZANUTTINI 1997:23, ZEIJLSTRA 2008:6). Digor data appear problematic to this generalization, see Section 5.2.1.

3. On Digor clause structure

Descriptively, the pragmatically neutral word order in Digor is SOV (8) although the constituent order is in principle fairly free.

(8) *Mɐdinɐ Soslan-i* ***nɐ*** *warz-uj*
PN PN-OBL NEG love-PRS.3SG
"Madina doesn't love Soslan."

The few extant rigid constraints on constituent order include the following: the NP is unsplittable, strictly head final, and its modifiers appear always in the same order (possessor / demonstrative; adjectives; noun): *mɐ=xwɐzdɐr ɐmbal* (POSS.1SG=best friend) "my best friend"; wh-phrases and most complementizers[4] are adjacent to the predicate and can only be separated from it by NIs (9), enclitics, and certain adverbs.

(9) a. *kizgɐ zonuj* [*kino-mɐ=ɐj* ***ke*** *nɐ ra-waʒ-ʒɐnɐncɐ*]
girl knows movies-ALL=ACC.3SG COMPL NEG PRV-let-FUT.3PL
"The girl knows that they won't let her go to the movies."
b. **kizgɐ zonuj* [***ke*** *kino-mɐ=ɐj nɐ ra-waʒ-ʒɐnɐncɐ*]
girl knows COMPL movies-ALL=ACC.3SG NEG PRV-let-FUT.3PL

[3] Importantly, the notions of negative spread and TNIs are theory-independent.

[4] An anonymous reviewer suggests that Digor preverbal complementizers, like *ke* in (9), could be analyzed as nominalizers (and thus Ossetic is in a transitional stage from finite to non-finite subordination, the latter typical of Turkic and North Caucasian languages). Such an analysis would force us to posit a series of verb forms of the type *neči fedta* "nothing saw", *ke neke fedta* "that nobody saw", *ke neke neči fedta* "that nobody nothing saw", etc., along, say, with a "nominalization" *ke fedta* "that (he) saw" (or otherwise assume that n-words are infixed or incorporated in this tentative nominalization – hardly a welcome consequence).

The existence of clause-internal complementizers in Digor makes it hard to assume the standard clause structure [CP ... [TP... [VP]...]]. In this paper, we will stay agnostic as to the position of complementizers and will only discuss the relative position of VP (or its extended projections) and NegP. In particular, we will assume that VP and NegP do exist in Digor, although distributional evidence for a non-flat clause structure in this language is admittedly scanty.

4. Data

As the Digor negation has not been described in a sufficiently systematic fashion, we lay out here a somewhat fuller account of data than would be necessary for our further theoretical considerations.

4.1. Negative items: An inventory

SENTENTIAL NEGATION MARKERS are *nɐ* (indicative) and *ma* (imperative), see (8) and (10a) below. In non-indicative clauses, the negation may either pattern with imperatives, or with indicative clauses, as in (10b,c). These issues are discussed in more detail in Section 5.4.

(10) a. ***ma***=*mi* *tɐrs-ɐ*
N.IMP=ABL.1SG afraid-IMP.2SG
"Don't be afraid of me!"

b. *cɐmɐj* *i* *suvɐllon* ***ma*** / ****nɐ*** *kɐw-**a***
COMPL DEF child NEG.IMP / NEG cry-SUB.FUT.3SG
woj *tuxxɐj*=*in* *ravard-ton* *k'anfet*
that for=DAT.3SG give.PST-TR.PST.1SG candy
"So that the child wouldn't cry, I gave it a candy."

c. ***ʁɐwama*** *kino-mɐ* ***ma*** / ***?nɐ*** *fɐ-ccud-ajsɐ*
should movies-ALL N.IMP / NEG PRV-go.PST-SUB.PST.2SG
"You shouldn't have gone to the movies."

Other NEGATIVE MARKERS AND NEGATIVE INDEFINITES are formed by attaching a negative prefix (*ne-* or *ma-*) to a wh-word: *ne-ke* / *ma-ke* (N-who) "no-one"; *ne-kumɐ* / *ma-kumɐ* (N-where.to) "to nowhere", etc.[5] Moreover, the phasal adverbs =*ma* "while, still" and =*bal* "yet, meanwhile" can encliticize to NIs as well as to the negation markers themselves. The meaning of the phasal adverbs falls under the scope of negation, yielding *nɐ*=*ma* / *ma*=*ma* "not yet", *nɐ*=*bal* / *ma*=*bal* "not any more", *ne-či*=*ma* / *ma-či*=*ma* (N-what=yet) "nothing yet", etc.[6] We will take account of this switch of meaning in the interlinear translations by glossing, for instance, *nɐ*=*bal* as "NEG=more" and *nɐ*=*ma* as "NEG=yet".

In addition, Digor also has a number of other negative items. One of them is a NEGATIVE WH-WORD *cɐmɐn-nɐ* "why not".[7] The negative conjunctions *nɐ-dɐr … nɐ-dɐr* / *ma-dɐr …*

[5] The case inflection of Digor NIs is described in ISSAEV (1966:56) and TAKAZOV (2009:80).

[6] For some speakers, the enclitics are attached to the right edge of the NP, i.e. to the head noun itself, when *ne-či(w)avɐr* (N-which) "no, of no kind" and *ne-cal* (N-how.many) "none, of no quantity" serve as NP modifiers.

[7] Its would-be imperative counterpart *cɐmɐn-ma* does not exist. The "usual" non-negative "why" is *cɐ-mɐn* (what.OBL-DAT). It cannot occur in negative clauses.

ma-dər "neither... nor" interact with the sentential negation differently from NIs (11a,b), that is, the negative marker is obligatory when the negated verb precedes the negative conjunctions and optional otherwise.

(11) a. ***nə-dər*** *kiunug-utə* ***nə-dər*** *tetrəd-tə* *(nə)* *balxədton*
N-CNJ book-PL N-CNJ notebook-PL NEG I.bought
"I bought neither books, nor notebooks."
b. ****(nə)*** *balxədton* ***nə-dər*** *kiunug-utə* ***nə-dər*** *tetrəd-tə*
NEG I.bought N-CNJ book-PL N-CNJ notebook-PL
"I bought neither books, nor notebooks."
c. ***ma-dər*** *araq* ***ma-dər*** *bəgəni* *(ma)* *ba-niwaz-ə*
N.IMP-CNJ arak N.IMP-CNJ beer N.IMP PRV-drink-IMP.2SG
"Don't drink either arak or beer."

Besides NIs, there exist several *bona fide* negative polarity items (NPI, that is, items licensed in the presence of negation and perhaps also in some specific contexts, see HORN (2001) and DE SWART (2010) for details), these include *mor=dər* (piece=EMPH) "even a bit" (12a) and *əppundər* / *əgirittər* "at all" (12c).

(12) a. ***mor=dər*** *ne-cə-məj* *tərs-un*
piece=EMPH N-what-ABL be.afraid-PRS.1SG
"I am not even a bit afraid of anything." @
b. **sabi* ***mor(=dər)*** *kərk-it-əj* *tərs-uj*
baby piece=EMPH chicken-PL-ABL be.afraid-PRS.1SG
"The baby is (even) a bit afraid of chickens." (intended reading)
c. ***əppundər*** *ma-cə-bəl* *tuxš-etə*
at.all NEG.IMP-what-SUP worry-IMP.2PL
"Don't worry about anything at all." @

The contrast between (12a) and (12b) shows that *mor=dər* is indeed polarity sensitive. Moreover, it can be argued that *kand* "not only", *əvi* "interrogative or" (and probably even *cəməmmə* "why not" and the negative conjunction *nə/ma-dər*) may be considered NPIs as well.

4.2. Syntax of negation

Negative markers and NIs are strictly preverbal (13a,b), the only exception being the contrastive negation construction, where the n-word is clause-final, see (24) below. N-words can be separated from the verb only by clitics (14).

(13) a. ***nečі*** ***(*nə)*** *zon-un*
N-what NEG know-PRS.1SG
"I don't know anything."
b. **zon-un* ***nə-čі /*** ****nə*** *zon-un* ***nečі***
know-PRS.1SG N-what NEG know-PRS.1SG N-what
Idem (intended reading)

(14) ***nɐ=min=ɐj*** *ni-ffins-ta*
NEG=DAT.1SG=ACC.3SG PRV-write.PST-TR.PST.3SG
"(S)he has not written it for me."

NIs may freely co-occur with each other[8] (15a), and in that case all NIs are preverbal (15b,c). However, as already mentioned, NIs are incompatible with plain negative markers (1c, 13a, 15a), that is, in Digor negative spread is obligatory. Sentences where NIs and a sentential negation marker co-occur do not have a double negation reading: they are simply ungrammatical. (15a) would also be ungrammatical with a preverbal negation marker.

(15) a. *Xažimurž-i fɐšte* ***ne-ke=bal*** ***ne-či****(?=bal)* *(*nɐ)* *zaxta*
PN-OBL after N-who=more N-what=more NEG he.said
"Nobody said anything after Khadzhimurza. /
*Everybody said something after Khadzhimurza." @
b. ****ne-ke=bal*** *Xažimurž-i fɐšte* ***ne-či*** *(*nɐ)* *zax-ta*
Idem (intended reading)
c. **Xažimurž-i fɐšte* ***ne-ke=bal*** *(*nɐ)* *zax-ta* ***ne-či***

Nominalizations may also host NIs (but normally not bare negative markers), although such examples are not particularly frequent:[9]

(16) a. converb
bere-tɐ=jin ***ne-či*** ***zon-gɐ-j***
many-PL=3SG.DAT N-what know-CONV-ABL
"While many were ignorant of that..." @
b. participle (of permanent quality)[10]
ne-kɐd *cɐw-agɐ*
N-when go-PRTC
"one who very rarely (lit. never) comes to visit" @

The only robust restriction on the order of NIs discovered so far is that "nobody" should precede the other NIs in the clause, irrespective of their grammatical functions:

(17) a. ***ne-ke*** ***ne-či*** *ʁigɐ* *dar-uj*
N-who N-what disturbance keep-PRS.3SG
"Nothing disturbs anybody."[11]
b. ****ne-či*** ***ne-ke*** *ʁigɐ* *dar-uj*

NIs can be conjoined:

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[8] Interestingly, this is not so in some potential typological counterparts of Ossetic: in Romance non-strict negative concord languages, the negation marker may not co-occur with preverbal NIs. For instance, in Spanish only one n-word may normally occupy the preverbal position (LAKA 1990:120-121).

[9] For properties of this type of nominalization in Iron, see BELYAEV / VYDRIN in this volume.

[10] This model is productive and similar expressions may be formed with other NIs and verbs.

[11] This example might seem to contradict the generalization that negative indefinites have to be placed in the immediately preverbal position. However, *ʁigɐ darun* "to bother" is a single complex verb.

(18) ***ne-kumɐ*** *ɐma* ***ne-kɐd*** *fɐ-ccud-tɐn*
N-where.to and N-when PRV-go.PST-PST.1SG
"Never did I go anywhere."

Digor lacks translational equivalents of "almost" (like Italian *quasi* or Russian *počti*) and thus Digor NIs cannot be modified by such approximatives. Besides their function as sentential negators, some NIs may be used with the preposition *ɐnɐ* "without" (19). We are not aware of any other implicitly negative contexts where NIs could be used.

(19) *soslan duwɐ čivž-i* ***ɐnɐ*** ***ne-cɐ-mɐj*** *baxwardta*
PN two pepper-OBL without N-what-ABL ate
"Soslan ate two peppers without anything."

The combination of non-negative indefinites with sentential negation yields the "specific unknown" (HASPELMATH 1997) reading:

(20) ?*jes-ke jes-kɐd n=adtɐj Mars-bɐl*
IDF-who IDF-when NEG=be.PST.3SG Mars-SUP
"Once, someone hasn't visited Mars. / *Nobody has ever visited Mars."

The marker used with negative indefinites depends on the modality of the verb:

(21) a. *ɐma won-ɐj* ***ma-kɐd*** ***ma-ke*** *tuxxɐj* ***arʁaw-ɐ***
and they-ABL N.IMP-when N.IMP-who for pray-IMP.2SG
"And never pray for anyone of them." @
b. *****ne-kɐd*** ***ne-ke*** *tuxxɐj* ***arʁaw-ɐ***
c. *****ma-kɐd*** ***ne-ke*** *tuxxɐj* ***arʁaw-ɐ***

For the negative conjunction, this agreement is optional. However, if the "indicative" form of the conjunction is used, the preverbal negative marker cannot be dropped, compare (11c) and (22). At least for some speakers, the adjective NI *ne-či(w)avɐr* (N-which) "no, of no kind" behaves in a similar manner. It is beyond our present purposes to discuss the distribution of the two negation markers in more detail.

(11) c.' ***ma-****dɐr araq* ***ma-****dɐr bɐgɐni (ma)* *ba-niwaz-ɐ*
N.IMP-CNJ arak N.IMP-CNJ beer N.IMP PRV-drink-IMP.2SG
(22) ***nɐ-****dɐr araq* ***nɐ-****dɐr bɐgɐni* ****(ma)*** *baniwaz-ɐ*
N-CNJ araq N-CNJ beer N.IMP drink-IMP.2SG
"Don't drink either araq or beer!"

Although preverbal, the scope of the negation may be a specific constituent and not the whole sentence. The factors that make speakers prefer one of the two possible readings appear to be pragmatic.

(23) a. *jermak jeunɐg anz* ***nɐ*** *kusta tukan-i*
PN single year NEG worked shop-OBL
"It is not (just) for a single year that Ermak worked in the shop." @
b. **jermak* ***nɐ*** *jeunɐg anz kusta tukan-i*
Idem (intended reading)

Moreover, there is a separate construction for contrastive negation. As shown in Section 5.1, it has to do with verb ellipsis. In this construction, the negation marker is clause-final.

(24) a. *saukuj max dug* ***næ*** *fal iræf kæs-uj*
PN PN NEG but PN read-PRS.3SG
"Saukuy reads not *Max Dug*, but *Iræf*."[12]
b. *Soslan warzuj Mædin-i* ***næ*** *fal Zalin-i*
PN loves PN-OBL NEG but PN-OBL
"Soslan loves not Madina but Zalina."

Whereas NIs are incompatible with sentential negation, the behavior of "why.not" is peculiar in this respect. When separated from the negative marker by a clitic, it tolerates the negative marker, but when the wh-word and the negative marker are adjacent, it does not:

(25) a. *cæmænnæ=dæ* ***(næ)*** *fæ-llas-ʒænæn?*
why.not=ACC.2SG NEG PRV-carry-FUT.1SG
"Why shouldn't I give you a ride?"
b. *axurgænæg-æj* *cæmænnæ* ***(*næ)*** *koš-is?*
teacher-ABL why.not NEG work-PRS.2SG
"Why don't you work as a teacher?"

However, *cæmænnæ* is compatible with all NIs[13] and even with negative markers, if a phasal adverb is encliticized to the latter:

(26) a. *ači kom-i* ***cæmænnæ*** ***neke*** *cær-uj?*
this gorge-OBL why.not nobody live-PRS.3SG
"Why doesn't anybody live in this gorge?"
b. ***cæmænnæ*** ***næ=bal*** *koš-is?*
why.not NEG=more work-PRS.2SG
"Why don't you work any more?"

5. Analysis

Ideally, a (generative) analysis of the Digor negation would need to explain the following phenomena: the immediate adjacency of negative markers / negative indefinites and the predicate; the ban on the co-occurrence of negative markers and NIs; the lack of such a ban in the case of the negative conjunction *nædær* "neither" and the negative wh-word *cæmænnæ* "why not", and, lastly, the "modality agreement" of n-words with the verb. In this section, we attempt to apply some of the standard techniques proposed in the literature to the analysis of these phenomena. As the authors we quote below apparently share basic theoretical assumptions, and, moreover, concentrate on different aspects of what is relevant for our discussion, we feel justified in drawing on a number of their proposals rather than on a single work.

[12] *Max Dug* (Iron "Our Epoch") and *Iræf* (the name of a river in Digoria) are an Iron and a Digor literary journal, respectively, which appear in Vladikavkaz.

[13] Its Iron equivalent, *sæwynnæ* (etymologically *sæ-wyl-næ*, what.OBL-SUP-NEG), behaves differently in this respect.

5.1. The position of NegP in Digor

We will assume that NegP exists in Digor and that negative markers and NIs are hosted there. Under this assumption, we will localize the NegP with respect to the (extended projections of) VP. The main piece of evidence will come from ellipsis facts:[14] a finite verb can be elided while preserving the negative marker or NI:

(27) a. *Soslan fidguntɐ warzuj Alan=ba* ***nɐ*** ~~*warzuj*~~
PN meat.pies loves PN=CTR NEG
"Soslan likes meat pies, but Alan doesn't."
b. *du* ***ma-kɐmɐn*** ~~*ratt-ɐ*~~
you N.IMP-who.DAT give-IMP.2SG
fal Soslan=ba Mɐdin-ɐn dedengu-tɐ ratt-ɐd
but PN=CTR PN-DAT flower-PL give-IMP.3SG
"Not YOU to anybody, but rather let SOSLAN give flowers to Madina
(i.e. Not you but Soslan should give flowers to Madina)."

Thus, whatever the finer-grained structure[15] of VP and NegP in Digor may be, NegP is higher than VP.

Moreover, in order to explain the immediate adjacency of negation markers and predicates, it is necessary to posit that the (extended) VP is the complement of NegP. Now, the question arises whether the eventual immediate adjacency of n-words and the verb is a result of the verb head-moving into Neg^0 or of the independently motivated movement of all potential interveners. We leave it, however, for future research.

5.2. Internal structure of NegP: Syntactic status of NIs and negative markers

Adopting the standard assumptions of X-bar theory, we need to establish what sits in Neg^0 and what in Spec NegP. It seems obvious that negative indefinites are phrases and not heads: first, they can occur in any number in a given sentence, second, they can be conjoined (18), and, third, adposition phrases with NIs behave identically to bare NIs, that is, they are pied-piped into the immediately preverbal position:

(28) a. *Soslan Mɐdin-i tuxxɐj* [***ne-ke=bal*** *xɐccɐ*] *fɐzgoruj*
PN PN-OBL about N-who=more with talks
"Soslan does not talk about Madina to anybody anymore."
b. **Soslan* [***neke=bal*** *xɐccɐ*] *Mɐdini tuxxɐj fɐzgoruj*

Therefore, NIs (or, more accurately, NI-phrases) are necessarily either in Spec NegP or adjoined to NegP. The already mentioned lack of strict ordering among NIs (the text above (17)) makes us opt for the latter. Therefore, the crucial question is whether the negative markers are heads or phrases.

[14] Moreover, the same facts demonstrate that we indeed need to posit NegP and cannot do away with NIs adjoined to VP (or, say, to TP).

[15] In particular, we disregard here the possible existence of VP-shells in Digor.

5.2.1. Syntactic status of negative markers

To repeat, it is a standard assumption in the modern generative literature that preverbal negative markers are X^0's (see, for instance, ZANUTTINI 1997, ZEIJLSTRA 2004:152-160). Apparently, the main reason for this is that under this assumption, the strict adjacency of the negative marker and the verb falls out of the Head Movement Constraint: the verb cannot move higher than the dominating X^0 without giving it a hitch ride. Below we provide arguments for and against the phrasal status of the Digor negative markers and conclude that the arguments against it are rather weak.

The main piece of evidence showing that Digor negation markers might be X^0's is provided by morphophonology: a certain sandhi is only possible for three types of items, viz. the negation marker *næ*, possessive prefixes and the preverb *fæ-* (ERSCHLER 2009:429). As the preverb and the possessive prefixes are apparently heads it is not unreasonable to suppose that the negation markers are also heads. The sandhi takes place if the verb starts with the vowel *æ*, in which case the *æ*'s of the verb and of the negation markers are contracted into *e*: thus, for instance, instead of ***næ ærba-cudæj*** (NEG PRV-come.PST.3SG) "She/he did not arrive" we get ***ne rba-cudæj***. However, this is admittedly a weak argument.

Several other headhood tests have been proposed for negative markers. Unfortunately they are either inapplicable to Digor, or give ambiguous results. One of these tests concerns ellipsis licensing: "An elided VP must be the complement of a morphologically realized head" (see POTSDAM 1997:534 with references). This test does not produce a clear result: both negative marker and negative indefinites[16] license ellipsis (27).

Another test proposes that negative markers that are X^0 are unable to form the collocation "why not" (MERCHANT 2006). As we have already seen, Digor does have a form *cæmæn-næ* (why-NEG) "why not". However, there is some evidence that *cæmænnæ* is a single word, and not just a collocation of "why" and "not". This is illustrated both by the behavior of clitics (29, 30) and by the inability of *cæmænnæ* to undergo sandhi (31). Normally, a clitic should be able to be placed between the wh-word and the negation in a clause:

(29) *ka=j* ***næ*** *zonuj?*
who=ACC.3SG NEG knows
"Who doesn't know him/her/it?"

This does not apply, however, to *cæmænnæ*.

(30) a. ***cæmænnæ****=mæmæ* *ærba-ʒurd-taj?*
why.not=1SG.ALL PRV-talk.PST-TR.PST.2SG
"Why didn't you call me?"
b. ****cæmæn****=mæmæ* ***næ*** *rbaʒurd-taj?*
Idem (intended reading)

Nor is *cæmænnæ* sensitive to the right edge of the verb, contrary to what would be expected if *-næ* were a separate negation marker:

[16] It is rather uncontroversial that these are always XPs.

(31) a. ***cɐmɐnnɐ*** *ɐrbacudtɐ?* b. ****cɐmɐnnɐ*** *rbacudtɐ?*
why.not you.came why.not you.came
"Why didn't you come?" *Idem* (intended reading)

Thus it seems plausible that *cɐmɐnnɐ* is a single lexeme and Merchant's test is inapplicable in this case. Another piece of evidence seems to indicate that the negative marker *nɐ* is actually an XP, and not an X^0. It comes from the unavailability of double negation in the contrastive negation constructions of the type (24b), or in (32):

(24) b.' *Soslan* *warzuj* *Mɐdin-i* ***nɐ*** *fal*
PN loves PN-OBL NEG but
(32) **Soslan* ***nɐ*** *warzuj* *Mɐdin-i* *nɐ* *fal=in* *ɐ=mojn-i*
PN NEG loves PN-OBL NEG but=DAT.3SG POSS.3SG=husband-OBL
intended reading: "It is not Madina whom Soslan does not like but her husband."[17]

It seems natural to analyze these data as follows: in (24b), the verb raises past the negative marker. Independent of its syntactic status, the latter is hosted in the NegP (33). But NegP is unique in the clause, and thus (32) is ungrammatical. However, if the negative marker were an X^0, the Head Movement Constraint would have rendered (33) ungrammatical.

(33) *Soslan warzuj Mɐdin-i* [$_{\text{NegP}}$ ***nɐ*** ~~*warzuj*~~] *fal Zalin-i*

An additional argument for the phrase status of negative markers comes from the possibility of using a separate negative marker (with phasal enclitics) in answers:[18]

(34) A: *ba-wolɐf-ɐn?* B: ***nɐ=ma***
PRV-rest-PRS.1SG NEG=yet
A: "Should we take a rest?" B: "Not yet." @

Thus, given the rather unclear status of the morphophonological evidence, it seems more reasonable to assume that the Digor negative marker is an XP, and not an X^0 (or ambiguous between the two, as long as we lack definite evidence one way or the other). It would be possible to try and argue for an altogether different analysis – namely, to deprive the negative markers of any syntactic essence and consider them merely a surface spell-out of certain semantic features (as it is often assumed e.g. for the Hebrew definite article *ha-*, see BORER 2005:39 and the references there). However, a number of facts speak against such an analysis: first, the existence of elliptic constructions (24), where it is not clear which non-null constituent would carry the features spelled out by *nɐ*, second, the ability of the negative marker to host clitics (10a) also seems to militate against the latter analysis.

5.2.2. Missing Neg^0

So far we have argued that both negative markers and NIs are XPs in Digor. That leaves us with a question what is the head of NegP. In the absence of any other candidates, we are forced to posit a phonologically null Neg^0.

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[17] The dative clitic in this sentence is coreferential with the NP Madina. See ERSCHLER (2009:424-425) for a discussion of dative-marked possessors in Ossetic.

[18] However, the translational equivalent of "no" is not *nɐ*, but *nɐʔ(ɐ)*.

5.3. Negative spread

It is relatively straightforward to explain the preverbal position of negative indefinites and their uniform morphology: we only need to assume that the phonologically null Neg^0 carries a strong interpretable feature that attracts negative indefinites. This is very similar to the proposals of LAKA 1990 and ZEIJLSTRA (2004, 2008). A significant difference between the cases they discuss and our approach is that we have to deal with a preverbal negation marker which is an XP.

The negative morphology on the NIs (that is, the prefix *ne-* or *ma-*) is thus a morphological manifestation of this agreement. A side benefit of this approach is that we do not run into semantic problems: it is the null head, and not NIs that carry the negative semantics, thus multiple NIs cannot create double negation effects.

A much harder problem is to explain the fact that NIs cannot co-occur with negation markers (1c, 13a, 15a). One solution is to assume that negative markers sit in Spec NegP, whereas NIs are adjuncts, and to introduce the following analog of the Doubly Filled Comp Filter:

(35) *NegP may not simultaneously have its Spec filled, and host adjuncts.*

Admittedly, the theoretical status of such a constraint is not very clear.[19] It is hoped that it will be possible to re-assess this proposal when and if more languages with obligatory negative spread are analyzed in detail.

Another possible analysis[20] would posit an EPP feature on Neg^0. For this requirement to be satisfied, either the NIs should move into (multiple) Spec's of NegP, or, in the absence of NIs in the enumeration, an expletive negative marker would be merged. An apparent technical problem with this approach is that, in order to account for multiple NIs moving into the preverbal position, we need to assume that the EPP feature remains active after any number of NIs are moved there. And then it is not completely clear why the merger of an additional negative marker is impossible.

A totally different explanation[21] may go along the following lines: as it is enough to have an NI to negate a clause (i.e. to manifest the existence of a null negative head that actually carries the negative semantics), and the negative marker would not contribute to semantic interpretation, it is avoided. On the other hand, each NI carries some meaning of its own, and thus several NIs are allowed to co-occur.

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[19] An anonymous reviewer suggests that such a condition would universally ban NIs from co-occurring with negation markers, that is, it would ban strict negative concord. However, we are not aware of languages that would have XP-type negative markers (i.e. candidates for the SpecNegP position) and would simultaneously obligatorily move all NIs in the preverbal position (which legitimizes the interpretation of those items as adjoined to NegP).

[20] We thank Norvin Richards for drawing our attention to this point.

[21] It can be coached in the terms of bidirectional OT in the spirit of DE SWART 2010. For lack of space we will not work out this analysis in detail.

5.4. Negative imperatives

As illustrated by (10a, 21a, 22), Digor possesses TNIs. Moreover, the imperative is not particularly morphologically deficient: it has separate forms of the 2nd and 3rd person of both numbers. Furthermore, the imperative probably has tense: the future imperative is marked by encliticizing *=jew* to the regular imperative (TAKAZOV 2009:59). It is immaterial for our purposes whether *=jew* is a true tense marker or a temporal adverbial adjoined to T. The question about negative imperatives in Digor can be split into two separate issues: first, which verb forms may host negation, and, second, what is the mechanism that governs "mood agreement" between the verb and the NIs (21).

The answer to the first question is that apparently any verb form can be negated in Digor, so it is not particularly surprising that the same applies to the imperative. Moreover, if we assume that it is indeed an X^0-type negation marker (ZEIJLSTRA 2004) or the lack of tense projection in imperatives (ZANUTTINI 1996) that can prevent a language from having TNIs, then Digor has neither of these obstacles.

To answer the second question, it would be natural to suppose that we are dealing with some kind of syntactic agreement. Namely, we can assume that a certain projection in the clause carries a feature [+Imp], which Neg^0 agrees with, and the specifier and adjuncts of NegP in their turn agree with it, forming an agreement chain in the spirit of PESETSKY / TORREGO 2007.

How to identify this projection? Many proposals converge on the idea that imperative sentences host an imperative operator (or an imperative feature) in CP (see HAN 2001, VAN DER WURFF 2007, among others). Although the exact position of CP in Digor clause is not yet known (see Section 3.), it can be reasonably assumed to be higher than VP. The question thus is whether Neg^0 agrees with the verb or with the imperative C (or an imperative operator in CP, which is the same for the purposes of this discussion). The fact that the *ma*-negation is possible when the verb is elided (27b) shows that the agreement is with C.[22]

We still need to show why this "modality concord" can sometimes fail, e.g. in (22) or (36). The most likely explanation lies in certain lexical peculiarities. In (22), we may assume that *nɐdɐr* is underspecified for mood (some speakers even deny the existence of its imperative counterpart *madɐr*), and thus the agreement is covert. On the other hand, the choice of *nɐ* over *ma* in (36) may be motivated by a need to avoid an ambiguity: the prohibitive reading of *ma* here is much less salient than that of its homonym, an enclitic *=ma* "else, still".

[22] It remains to be explained why *ma* surfaces in non-imperative sentences like (10b,c). An anonymous reviewer suggests that *ma* might have a kind of irrealis meaning rather than a specific imperative meaning. However, in certain irrealis contexts it is *nɐ*, and not *ma* that should be used:

(i)	*Soslan*	*ison*	*ɐxca*	*ku*	***nɐ*** / ****ma***	*rajs-a*
	Soslan	tomorrow	money	if	NEG / N.IMP	get-FUT.SUB.3SG
	wɐd	*a=wos-ɐn*		*lɐvar*	***nɐ*** / ****ma***	*balxɐn-gɐj*
	then	POSS.3SG=wife-DAT		gift	NEG / N.IMP	buy-FUT.3SG

"If Soslan does not get money tomorrow, he won't buy a gift for his wife."

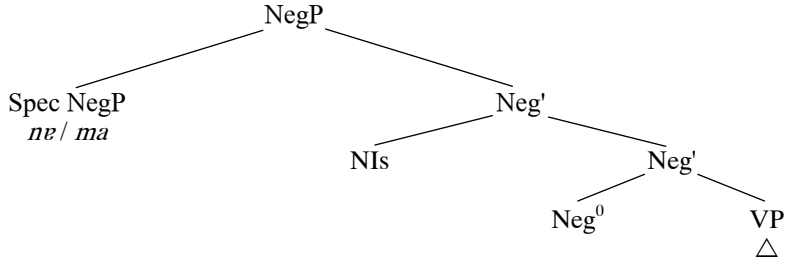
We leave the analysis of the *ma*-negation in non-imperative clauses for future research.

(36) *aboni* ***nɐ*** / ****ma*** *ison=ba* *ʒɐwugiʁɐw-mɐ* *randɐ* *wo*
today NEG / N.IMP tomorrow=CTR Vladikavkaz-ALL gone be.IMP.2SG
"Go to Vladikavkaz not today, but tomorrow."

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we laid out a description and made first steps towards a generative analysis of negation and negative concord in Digor Ossetic. We have argued that the negative marker, although preverbal, is a phrase and not a head. Therefore the Digor system is rather different from those encountered in various Romance idioms with non-strict negative concord, and requires a separate analysis. We provided arguments for positing NegP in Digor and proposed the structure in (37). This structure is subject to the constraint that either the Spec, or the adjunct positions may be filled.

(37)



A number of issues are left for future research. They include the syntactic position of *cɐmɐnnɐ* "why not", the reason why the negative marker may be dropped when negative conjunctions precede the predicate (11a,b), and some others. We hope they will be resolved when the overall structure of Digor clause is better understood.

Abbreviations

1/2/3	1st/2nd/3rd person	EMPH	emphatic	POSS	possessive
ABL	ablative	EQ	equative	PRS	present
ACC	accusative	FUT	future	PRV	preverb
ALL	allative	IDF	indefinite	PRTC	participle
CNJ	conjunction	IMP	imperative	PST	past
COMPL	complementizer	N(EG)	negative	SG	singular
CTR	contrastive topic marker	NI	negative indefinite	SUB	subjunctive
		NPI	negative polarity item	SUP	superessive
CONV	converb	OBL	oblique	TNI	true negative imperative
DAT	dative	PL	plural	TR	transitive
DEF	definite	PN	name		

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