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Negative concord in Serbo-Croat APs

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Sproat and Shih (1990) and Larson (2000), among others, propose analyses in which Adjective phrases (AP’s) are derived as relative clauses. I will present data from Serbo-Croat (S-C) supporting this view.

S-C is a negative concord language. I will borrow the term n-words for the items showing negative concord from Laka (1990), and take the definition for n-words from Giannakidou (in press), that an expression is an n-word iff it can be used in structures containing sentential negation or another n-word yielding a reading equivalent to one of logical negation and if it can provide a negative fragment answer.

As illustrated in (1), n-words which give universally quantified fragment negation can be used in S-C only if the finite verb in the clause is negated (a requirement of the negative concord).

(1) a. Niko nikoga nikad nigde *(ne) zove.
   NEG.who NEG.who.ACC NEG.when NEG.where not invite
   No one invites anyone anywhere ever.

      Who does see Jovan?          No one.
      When does Jovan come? Never.

The n-word ‘nimalo’ not at all (lit. not-even-little) is another negative universal quantifier, and modifies mass nouns, (bare) plurals and adjectives.

(2) a. Jovan *(ne) pokazuje nimalo milosti.
      Jovan not shows not-at-all mercy.GEN
      Jovan doesn’t show any mercy.

   b. Jovan *(ne) izgleda nimalo naivan / naivno.
      Jovan not looks not-at-all naive.MASC / naive.NEUTR
      Jovan doesn’t seem to be naive at all.

      How much brandy has Jovan? No (brandy) at all.

Interestingly, however, ‘nimalo’ can appear in sentences that have no negated verb, on condition that it modifies an adjective. The same n-word yields ungrammaticality when it modifies a property realized by a mass or plural noun as shown in (3).
(3) a. Jovan je dobio nimalo naivno pitanje o rekurziji.
   Jovan got the not-naive-at-all question about recursion
   Jovan got the not-naive-at-all question about recursion.

   b. Nimalo naivno pitanje o rekurziji je sasvim zbunilo Jovana.
   The not-naive-at-all question about recursion AUX completely confused Jovan.

This is expected if AP’s are derived as relative clauses (potentially reduced and/or preposed, depending on one’s favorite analysis) in which the n-word is in a proper environment with a negated verb. On this view, the facts involving noun modification in (2) are unsurprising: while the sentences with ‘nimalo’ in AP’s in (3) can be rephrased as in (4), no such rephrasing is possible for the examples in (2).

(4) a. Jovan je dobio pitanje o rekurziji, koje nije nimalo naivno.
   Jovan AUX gotten question about recursion which is not naive at all.
   Jovan got the question about recursion, which isn’t naive at all.

   b. Pitanje o rekurziji, koje nije nimalo naivno, question about recursion which isn’t naive at all.
   je sasvim zbunilo Jovana.
   AUX completely confused Jovan
   The question about recursion, which isn’t naive at all, totally confused Jovan.

Notice that in participial reduced relatives as well, n-words can appear without the overt presence of negation:

(5) a. To su bile ničim izazvane sankcije.
   that AUX been nothingINST provoked sanctions.
   Those were fully unprovoked sanctions. (lit. by nothing provoked)

   cf. b. Sankcije *(ni-*)su bile ničim izazvane.
   sanctions NEG-AUX been nothingINST provoked.
   The sanctions were not provoked by anything.

References