Genitive of Negation and the Syntax of Scope

This paper presents a new approach to direct objects under sentential negation in Russian based on a set of neglected data. It has long been observed that in Russian, direct objects can receive Genitive case under negation (GN), alternating with the canonical Accusative case (ACC) (see Babby 1980, Pesetsky 1982, Babyonyshev 1996, Brown
1999, et al.) as shown in (1) below.

(1) a. Anna   ne kupila knigi.   b. Anna   ne kupila knig.
    Anna-NOM not bought books-ACC   Anna-NOM not bought books-GEN
    'Anna did not buy the books.'   'Anna did not buy (any) books.'

For many years, the licensing of GN on direct objects was viewed as an optional component of the grammar. However, with the development of Diesing's (1992) Mapping Hypothesis, it became possible to account for the apparent semantic differences exhibited by GN and ACC direct objects in the syntax. Note that in (1a), the ACC object *knigi* receives a definite or referential interpretation, whereas the GN object *knig* in (1b) neutrally receives an indefinite or existential interpretation. Using Diesing's (1992) Mapping Hypothesis, Babyonyshev (1996), Bailyn (1997) and Brown (1999) argue that the semantic differences between GN and ACC direct objects are straightforwardly accounted for if we assume that GN DPs are mapped into the nuclear scope (i.e., VP-internally), while ACC DPs are mapped into the restrictive clause. Moreover, they argue that ACC DPs may potentially be interpreted existentially, i.e., within the domain of existential closure, since the tail of their Case-checking chain is VP-internal. In addition, Babyonyshev argues ÒIn Russian, the nominals that surface with the genitive of negation...are restricted to elements compatible with existential bindingÓ (1996:146-147). Hence, the prediction is that GN cannot surface on definite or referential noun phrases, while ACC can surface on both definites and indefinites.

However, while there is indeed robust evidence from Russian indicating that GN regularly occurs on indefinite/existential noun phrases (in support of Babyonyshev's claim), GN frequently occurs on definite and referential noun phrases as well, as shown in (2-3) below. Furthermore, ACC direct objects under negation seem to disallow the existential reading as shown in (2b).
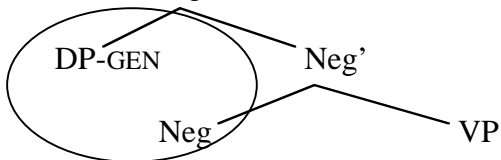
(2) a. On   ne vypil vina.   b. On   ne vypil vino.
    he-NOM not drank wine-GEN   he-NOM not drank wine-ACC
    'He didn't drink the wine.'   'He didn't drink the wine.'
    'He didn't drink any wine.'   *'He didn't drink any wine.'

(3) Ja   davno   ne videla mamy.
   I-NOM long-time not seen   mother-GEN
   'I haven't seen mother for a long time.'

Therefore, I argue that while previous analyses of GN capture a wide range of Russian facts, they are oversimplified and idealized and, thus, unable to truly explain the full range of GN in modern Russian. Instead, I argue that these interpretive facts fall out naturally from an approach that treats relative quantifier scope largely as a property of Case-checking chains, both similar to and different from Hornstein's (1995) proposal. Following Brown (1999), I assume that GN is checked in NegP, a functional projection dominating VP. If we assume that the scope of a
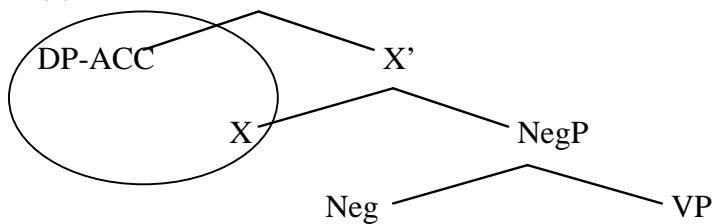
quantificational head is its maximal projection, then the scope of NEG is NegP and all that it contains, including its Specifier. Thus, the Neg-head in Russian can have scope over GN DPs since these DPs check Case in Spec NegP. However, if we also assume that the scope of a quantificational XP is everything it c-commands, then it becomes possible for the Genitive DP to have scope over negation as well. Thus, the potential ambiguity of GN direct objects is accounted for. See the structure in (4) below.

(4)   NegP   --> Domain for GN Case-checking

DP-GEN   Neg'

        Neg   VP

What remains to be accounted for is the obligatory definite interpretation of ACC direct objects under negation. I assume that ACC case is checked in a functional projection that asymmetrically c-commands NegP, placing it outside the domain of Negative Closure of Events. Therefore, following the same logic used above, given that ACC DPs will asymmetrically c-command NegP, they will have scope over negation and be interpreted outside the domain of existential closure. However, negation will be unable to take scope over the quantificational ACC DP since the scope of negation is restricted to NegP, and here, NegP does not contain the ACC DP, as shown in (5) below. Hence, the lack of ambiguity with ACC direct objects under negation is accounted for.

(5)   XP   -->   Domain for ACC Case-checking

DP-ACC   X'

        X   NegP

        Neg   VP

References

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