B O R E A L I S
An International Journal of Hispanic Linguistics

On Subject and Negative Positioning in Spanish

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ABSTRACT. Negative English sentences ('*Mary does not want apples*') suggest that the order of key elements is TP–NegP–VP. However, negative Spanish sentences ('*María no quiere manzanas*') suggest the order Subject–NegP–Tense/VP. Regarding subject positioning, some claim that subjects in Spanish are located in Rizzi's (1997) Split CP. Others maintain that Spanish subjects are located in SpecTP or SpecAgrSP. In either case, utilizing Pollock's (1989) split IP proposal, locating Neg(P) between AgrSP and TenseP would result in the placement of Neg(P) above TenseP, as Spanish seems to display. Thus, Spanish and English would appear to differ in the structure underlying negative sentences. Further, such accounts often involve additional structural elaboration, though minimalist syntax emphasizes structural simplicity. We propose an analysis of negative sentences in Spanish based on top–down syntax. In both English and Spanish, there is no NegP. Neg is a component of T. The creation both of negative sentences in Spanish and of expanded (uncontracted) negative sentences in English involves internal merger downward of the (verb)/T/Neg head. In Spanish, the Neg portion of the higher copy of this head (~~verb/T/~~Neg) is spelled out as *no*, and the lower copy (verb/T~~/Neg~~) is spelled out as the finite verb. In English, the opposite is true. The higher copy (T~~/Neg~~) is spelled out as T, and the lower copy (~~T/~~Neg) is spelled out as *not*. That is, Spanish and English negative sentences involve basically the same underlying structure, and the difference between them reduces to a difference in spell out conventions.

Keywords. negative sentences, top–down syntax, spell out, complex lexical items, NegP, negative concord, Spanish

RESUMEN. Las oraciones negativas en inglés ('*Mary does not want apples*') sugieren que el orden de los elementos clave es TP–NegP–VP. Sin embargo, las oraciones negativas en español ('*María no quiere manzanas*') sugieren el orden Sujeto–NegP–Tense/VP. Con respecto a la ubicación del sujeto, algunos afirman que los sujetos en español se ubican en la CP dividida de Rizzi (1997). Otros mantienen que los sujetos en español se ubican en SpecTP o SpecAgrSP. En cualquier caso, utilizando la propuesta de IP dividida de Pollock (1989), ubicar Neg(P) entre AgrSP y TenseP resultaría en la ubicación de Neg(P) por encima de TenseP, como parece mostrar el español. Por lo tanto, el español y el inglés parecerían diferir en la estructura subyacente de las oraciones negativas. Además, tales explicaciones implican elaboración estructural adicional, aunque la sintaxis minimalista enfatiza la simplicidad estructural. Proponemos un análisis de las oraciones negativas en español basado en top-down (descendente). Tanto en inglés como en español, no hay NegP. Neg es un componente de T. La creación de oraciones negativas tanto en español como en inglés implica la fusión interna hacia abajo del núcleo (verbo)/T/Neg. En español, la parte Neg de la copia superior de este núcleo (~~verbo/T/~~Neg) se materializa (spell-out) como *no*, y la copia inferior (verbo/T~~/Neg~~) se materializa como el verbo finito. En inglés, ocurre lo contrario. La copia superior (T~~/Neg~~) se materializa como T, y la copia inferior (~~T/~~Neg) se materializa como *not*. Es decir, las oraciones negativas en español e inglés tienen básicamente la misma estructura subyacente, y la diferencia entre ellas se reduce a una diferencia en las convenciones 'spellout'.

Palabras clave. Oraciones negativas, sintaxis descendente, deletrear, elementos léxicos complejos, NegP, concordia negativa, Español

© Nicholas Sobin & Natalia Mazzaro. *Borealis: An International Journal of Hispanic Linguistics*, 2026, 15 / 1. pp. 119-135. https://doi.org/10.7557/1.15.1.8634

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1. Introduction

Questions about the positioning of subjects and of negative elements in Spanish are far from settled. Sources such as Laka (1990), Zanuttini (2001), Zagona (2002), Ortega–Santos (2018), and Villa–Garcia (2018) discuss various approaches to these open ended questions. Of particular interest in the present work is explaining the order of the elements Subj–Neg–VP typical of basic negative sentences in Spanish. Other approaches which generally assume a bottom–up derivation have tended to rely on elaborated syntactic structure such as split CP (Rizzi 1997), split IP (Pollock 1989), or the ΣP of Laka (1990). It has often been claimed that negative sentences in English and Spanish differ structurally–whereas NegP is below TP in English, it is above TP in Spanish. However, the current minimalist approach to syntax emphasizes structural simplicity and maximal uniformity.

In this vein, we propose an account of Spanish Subj–Neg–VP order within a phase–based top–down approach to syntax (Sobin 2020, 2024; Sobin & Zavala 2021). In this analysis, Neg does not head a NegP, but instead is initially a component of the head T (in both English and Spanish). In English, the T/Neg head may internally merge downward. Pronouncing the T portion of the higher copy, and the Neg portion of the lower copy yields negative sentences with *not* (e.g., *Mary did not sing*) (Sobin 2024). If T/Neg is not internally merged downward, contracted negative forms result (*Mary didn't sing*). Spanish also has T/Neg as the initial form; however, when this head is internally merged downward, it is the Neg portion that is pronounced high, and the T portion (combined with the verb) that is pronounced low. That is, the difference between English and Spanish regarding the surface ordering of the elements subject, negative, and verb reduces to a difference in spell out conventions. This system straightforwardly accounts for the basic negative word orders of both languages, as well as for the basic facts of subject Case marking, Subject–Verb Agreement, and tense marking of V.

Section 2 briefly sketches key aspects of the various bottom–up approaches to subject positioning and to negative positioning in Spanish which are relevant to explaining Subj–Neg–VP order. Section 3 reviews background dimensions of the top–down approach. Section 4 offers details of the top–down system of derivation, including examples of affirmative and negative derivations in English. Section 5 deals with the derivation of affirmative and negative sentences in Spanish, demonstrating that the apparent different ordering of the elements of negative sentences in each language can be reduced to a difference in spell out conventions. Section 6 offers concluding remarks.

2. Earlier analyses of subjects and negative elements in Spanish

There is an extremely extensive literature concerning issues such as the positioning of the subject in Spanish, far more extensive than can be dealt with directly here. Instead, relying on the excellent discussions of Zanuttini (2001), Zagona (2002), Villa–Garcia (2018), Ortega–Santos (2018), and others, we will note the major proposals that have been advanced which relate to explaining Subj–Neg–VP order in Spanish negative sentences. These approaches generally assume a bottom–derivation.

First, the two major lines of thought concerning subject position are (i) that the subject in Spanish occupies either SpecTP/SpecAgrSP, or (ii) that the subject occupies a position in Rizzi's (1997) expanded CP, perhaps SpecTopP. In either case, the subject is either generated in or raises to a position high in the structure.

Second, in contrast to English main verbs, those in Spanish are attracted to T and appear preceding the subject in interrogatives, as in (1).

(1) ¿ Quiere usted una manzana?
want.2sg you a apple
'Do you want an apple?'

Third, NegP in English is generally thought to appear below TP and above vP as in (2).

(2) [$_{TP}$ Mary could$_{T}$ [$_{NegP}$ not [$_{vP}$ see the ball]]]

However, the canonical Subj–Neg–VP order in Spanish has led to the proposal that NegP in Spanish resides within the Split IP (= TP) of Pollock (1989). That is, if IP is split into a higher AgrSP, whose Spec is occupied by the subject, and TenseP headed by T(ense), then NegP in Spanish may appear between these two yielding Subj–Neg–VP order, as in '…*[$_{AgrSP}$ María [$_{NegP}$ no [$_{TnsP}$ quiere manzanas]]]…*' Note that even if the subject appears higher in the structure, as in the CP range, the Subj–Neg–VP order is still accounted for.

In yet another approach, Laka (1990) proposes another phrase, ΣP, hosting subjects, in this case, negative–word (n–word) [1] subjects. N–words move to SpecΣP, with ΣP positioned between CP and IP (= TP). ΣP is argued to account not only for negative sentences but also for emphatic affirmative sentences.

There are other approaches to the question of subject and negative positioning. These proposals generally assume a bottom–up derivation. The matter is not yet settled. One feature that many of these proposals have in common is structural elaboration. This goes against the minimalist standard that simple, less elaborated structure should be preferred. The proposal to follow offers a structurally simple analysis of SUBJ–Neg–VP order for Spanish, with English and Spanish having essentially identical sentence structure.

3. Top–down syntax and negation: background considerations

Chomsky (2013, 2015) proposes that derivation proceeds by a general process Merge, which combines two syntactic objects into a single syntactic object. The system of derivation that Chomsky proposes is carried out in 'phases' (small structural domains) and operates 'bottom–up'. Recursive application of Merge results in hierarchically structured sentences. The discussion to follow assumes familiarity with the core concepts and conventions of minimalist syntax.

The pioneering work of Phillips (1996, 1997) in top–down syntax demonstrated the natural ability of this approach to deal with constituency conflicts. Taking inspiration from key aspects of Chomsky's proposals, as well as from the proposals concerning top–down derivation by Phillips (1996, 1997) and Chessi (2007), Sobin (2020) offers a phase–based system of top–down derivation which accounts for key aspects of expletive constructions in English and in a variety of Scandinavian languages, of root and embedded questions, and of the Comp-trace effect. Sobin & Zavala (2021) applies this

[1] Laka (1990) uses the term 'n–word' to refer to negative expressions such as *nadie* and *nada*.

top–down system to Spanish, offering an explanation of Verb–Object–Subject word order in terms of normal operations of the top–down grammatical system.[2]

Relevant to the question of the syntax of negation in Spanish, Sobin (2024) offers a top–down analysis of negation in English. One of the motivations for this analysis is the peculiar behavior of Neg as an independent head. Neg/*not* appears to be transparent with respect to certain syntactic processes. For example, raising the first auxiliary verb following *not* to T (simply bypassing *not*) as in (3) apparently violates the Head Movement Constraint.

(3) a. Mary has$_T$ not ~~has~~ been dancing.
b. Mary is$_T$ not ~~is~~ the culprit.
c. Mary was$_T$ not ~~was~~ surprised.

Further, the following sentences show that Neg/*not* does not block transmission of inflectional features to the finite verb, which it should do if it were an intervening head.

(4) a. Mary is not singing.
b. Mary has not sung.
c. Mary was not seen.

Such facts are explained in Sobin (2024) by claiming that Neg is not an independent head but instead is initially a component of T. As explained further in section 4, there is no underlying NegP.[3] Following normal top–down derivation, *not* may in effect be internally merged downward forming expanded negative forms. In Spanish, Neg is also

[2] Beyond the resolution of constituency conflicts, a variety of other phenomena favour a top–down approach to derivation. As noted in Sobin (2020) and Sobin & Zavala (2021), top–down derivation explains why a quantifier associated with a complement cannot appear following the verb, as in (i).

(i) (All) the books (all) were (all) taken (*all).

Whereas in bottom–up derivation the complement originates in post–verbal position leaving this fact unexplained, in top–down derivation, the complement generated in initial position merges downward to Specv_{unacc}, where the argument structure of the verb is satisfied. That is, it never reaches the syntactic complement position.

Richards (1999) argues that top–down derivation correctly predicts the wide scope of *who$_2$* in (ii) by analyzing the matrix clause first. In contrast, bottom–up derivation which analyses the embedded clause first incorrectly predicts narrow scope for *who$_2$*.

(ii) Who$_1$ knows what who$_2$ bought?

Limitations of space prevent detailed discussion here. Please refer to the sources cited for these and other phenomena favouring top–down derivation.

[3] The initial inspiration for claiming that T/Neg may be the initial form of negation (Sobin 2024) is based on the fact that children learning English produce *no*, *not*, and contracted forms (*can't*, *won't*, *don't*) well before they produce expanded negative forms (*cannot*, *will not*, *do not*) (Capdevila–Batet & Llinás–Grau 1995). Capdevila–Batet & Llinás–Grau claim that learners initially treat these negative forms as individual lexical items categorized as Neg and later abandon that analysis in favour of a X-bar NegP analysis when functional categories become available. That is, there is a discontinuity in the acquisition of negation. Sobin (2024) offers a top–down analysis (to be discussed below) in which there is no discontinuity in acquiring negation; the initial analysis is expanded upon. That is, learners don't get it wrong. Of further interest is the finding here that the analysis can extend to Spanish suggesting that the difference between English negation and Spanish negation is reducible to a difference in spell out conventions. There is no necessity to posit NegP.

initially combined with T. However, it is T rather than Neg which is in effect internally merged downward, accounting for the SUBJ–Neg–VP order seen in Spanish, along with other related facts. After considering the core aspects of this top–down system of derivation, and before turning to Spanish, we illustrate how the system operates to derive some affirmative and negative English sentences.

4. A system of top–down derivation

4.1. Basic dimensions of the system of derivation

In this system, derivation takes place in phases. Unlike earlier top–down proposals in which structure is developed left–to–right, in the present system, directionality may be rightward or leftward (e.g., Japanese), depending on the conventions of the language being considered. Both English and Spanish involve rightward derivation. The operation Merge is specified in (5), and the branching that results is illustrated in (6–7).

(5) **MERGE AT THE EDGE**
Merge an element β with an edge element α forming a new set {α, β} (rightward merge) or {β, α} (leftward merge).

Merge in top–down derivation is structure–altering. With recursive 'rightward' merging and branching, as in English, we get the structures in (6).

(6) a. Merge Y with X (External Merge) ==> {X, Y}
b. Merge Z with {X, Y} (External Merge) ==> {X {Y, Z}}
c. Merge Q with {X {Y, Z}} (External Merge) ==> {X {Y {Z, Q}}}
d. Merge X with {X, Y} (Internal Merge) ==> {X {Y, Xc}} (Xc a copy of X)[4]

Recursive leftward merging and branching, as in Japanese, results in the structures in (7).

(7) a. Merge Y with X ==> {Y, X}
b. Merge Z with {Y, X} (External Merge) ==> {{Z, Y} X}
c. Merge Q with [{Z, Y} X} (External Merge) ==> {{{Q, Z} Y} X}
d. Merge X with {Y, X} (Internal Merge) ==> {{Xc, Y} X} (Xc a copy of X)

Generally following Chomsky's proposals (2013, 2014, 2015, 2019a–b) (i) that derivation should involve a small set of category–neutral operations, and (ii) that derivation should take place in small structural domains, Sobin (2020) offers the derivational cycle illustrated here in (8) with rightward orientation.

[4] Although, as a reviewer points out, this internal merger appears not to comply with antilocality constraints as proposed by Abels 2003 and Bošković 2014, such constraints are proposed in the specific context of questions involving phase–based bottom–up derivation. Such downward internal merger has been a staple of top–down derivation since Phillips 1996. For example, the downward merger of a ditransitive verb such as *give* is central to accounting for the asymmetric structure of double object constructions. The role and scope of antilocality constraints in the context of top–down derivation is a topic of interest for further research.

(8) **THE TOP-DOWN DERIVATIONAL CYCLE:**

select an active head	X	Active head	(AH)
merge a selected non-head element	[X, Y]	Merge1	(M1)
merge a selected active head	[X [Y, Z]]	Merge2	(M2)
value features	[$X_{(y, z)}$ [$Y_{(x)}$, $Z_{(x, y)}$]	Valuation	(Val)
select an active head	$Z_{(x, y)}$		AH
merge a selected non-head element	[$Z_{(x, y)}$, W]		M1
etc.			

The derivation of a sentence begins with the selection of a C head (AH), followed by external merger of a surface subject (M1). External merger of the next head T (M2) effectively leads to creation of the SpecTP position of the subject. As the derivation proceeds, a lexical subject is internally merged downward to its point of interpretation in SpecvP. Along the way, Case marking, agreement, and argument structure requirements are satisfied. The features assumed here are those common to minimalist derivation (e.g., Adger 2003).

4.2. A sample derivation

Consider first the derivation of an affirmative English sentence in (9) (= (18) in Sobin 2024).[5]

(9) *John saw a dragon*

a. C_{Decl} AH
[*u*Nom]

b. [C_{Decl} John] M1
[*u*Nom] [*u*Case:]
[φ: 3SG]

c. [C_{Decl} [John T_{past}]] M2
[*u*Nom] [*u*Case:] [*u*φ:]
[φ: 3SG]

d. [C_{Decl} [John $T_{past(John)}$]] Val
[~~*u*Nom~~] [~~*u*Case~~: Nom] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]
[φ: 3SG]

---

e. $T_{past(John)}$] AH
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]

[5] In these and other representations, EA refers to the 'external argument'/subject, and IA refers to the 'internal argument'/object. "*u*" designates an uninterpretable feature that requires valuation/checking.

f. [$T_{past(John)}$, ~~John~~]]] M1
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]

g. [$T_{past(John)}$, [~~John~~, √see–$Voice_v$]]]] M2
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [*u*EA:]
[*u*IA:]
[*u*Acc]
[*u*Infl:]
[*u*T:]

h. [$T_{past(John)}$, [~~John~~, √see–$Voice_v$]]]] Val
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~*u*EA~~: John]
[*u*IA:]
[*u*Acc]
[~~*u*Infl~~: 3SG]
[~~*u*T~~: past]

---

i. √see–$Voice_v$ AH
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]
[~~*u*EA~~: John]
[*u*IA:]
[*u*Acc]
[~~*u*Infl~~: 3SG]
[~~*u*T~~: past]

j. [√see–$Voice_v$, [a dragon]] M1
[~~*u*EA~~: John] [φ: 3SG]
[~~*u*IA~~:] [*u*Case:]
[*u*Acc]
[~~*u*Infl~~: 3SG]
[~~*u*T~~: past]

k. [√see–$Voice_v$, [a dragon]] Val
[~~*u*EA~~: John] [φ: 3SG]
[~~*u*IA~~: dragon] [~~*u*Case~~: Acc]
[~~*u*Acc~~]
[~~*u*Infl~~: 3SG]
[~~*u*T~~: past]

The resulting structure for *John saw a dragon*:

[C_{Decl} [John [$T_{past(John)}$, [~~John~~ [√see–$Voice_v$, [a dragon]]]]]]
[~~*u*Nom~~] [~~*u*Case~~: Nom] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~*u*EA~~: John] [φ: 3SG]
[φ: 3SG] [~~*u*IA~~: dragon] [~~*u*Case~~: Acc]
[~~*u*Acc~~]
[~~*u*Infl~~: 3SG]
[~~*u*T~~: past]

In the first cycle, C_{Decl} is selected (AH), and the subject *John* is externally merged (M1). Next, the head T is externally merged (M2), and subsequently valuation (Val) takes place, with C_{Decl} Case marking *John* as Nom and *John* assigning its φ features to T.[6] T "knows" the element that has occupied its Spec position, so it carries this information into the next cycle in the form '$T_{past(John)}$', preserving locality. The second cycle starts with the head '$T_{past(John)}$' (AH), followed internal merger (M1) of *John* and external merger (M2) of the verb complex $\sqrt{see–Voice_v}$. Under valuation, *John* is positioned to satisfy the external argument requirement of the verb complex, and the verb complex acquires tense and φ feature values from T. In the last cycle, starting with the active head $\sqrt{see–Voice_v}$, the object *a dragon*, is externally merged (M1), and with no work for M2, valuation tales place, with *a dragon* satisfying the internal argument requirement of the verb complex and receiving Acc from the verb complex. The pronunciation of tense/agreement on the verb rather than on T is a result of Adger's (2003) Pronounce Tense Rule (PTR), which will be revised so as to deal efficiently with both affirmative and negative sentences.

4.3. Negative derivations

To deal with negative sentences, some preliminary comments and revisions are in order. Sobin (2024) argues that the PTR and the representation of T should be revised as follows. First, for English, the tense head is '*do*–T'. Second, the PTR is revised as in (10).

(10) **LEXICAL PTR (LPTR)**

Pronounce tense/agreement on V+v (= verb + $Voice_v$) only if V+v is the head of '*do*–T''s sister constituent.

Except for tense specification, the form '*do*–T' is a semantically neutral form. According to LPTR, tense/agreement is pronounced on the verb only if semantically neutral '*do*–T' is present in the structure described in (10). If tense is made emphatic, ('*DO*–T'), then it is not semantically neutral, and LPTR will not apply, leaving tense/agreement to be pronounced on *DO*–T, as in '*Mary DID sing!*'. This resolves what would otherwise be an exception to PTR. The form '*do–T*/Neg' is also not semantically neutral; LPTR will not apply, and tense/agreement will be pronounced on '*do–T*/Neg' as in '*Mary did not sing*'.

Further, generally following Sobin (2024)[7], we propose that there is no underlying NegP in either English or Spanish. In English, Neg is initially a component of the tense head *do*–T, reflecting the learner's early use of contracted negative forms (e.g., *can't*, *don't*) when expanded negative forms (e.g., *cannot*, *do not*) are not yet produced. (Capdevila–Batet & Llinás–Grau 1995). With these modifications, the sentence '*She didn't sing*' is derived as in (11) in abbreviated form.

[6] This system assumes that C_{Decl} rather than T assigns Nom Case, and that 'v' is not merged separately into a derivation. See Sobin (2024) for details.

[7] The proposal in Sobin (2024) is that the T/Neg head splits, so that Neg portion of T/Neg internally merges downward. In the current proposal, the entire head internally merges downward, leading to the spell out proposals to be detailed below.

(11) a. [C_{Decl} , she] AH&M1
[φ: 3SG]

b. [C_{Decl} [she, [do–$T_{past(she)}$/Neg]] M2&Val
[φ: 3SG] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]

---

c. [do–$T_{past(she)}$/Neg , ~~she~~] AH &M1
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]

d. [do–$T_{past(she)}$/Neg , [~~she~~, √sing–$Voice_v$]] M2&Val
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~EA~~: she]
[~~*u*Tns~~: past]
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]

The resulting structure for '*She didn't sing*'

[C_{Decl} [she, [do–$T_{past(she)}$/Neg [~~she~~, √sing–$Voice_v$]]]
[φ: 3SG] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~EA~~: she]
[~~*u*Tns~~: past]
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]
'*didn't*' *'sing'*

For sentences with expanded negative form such as '*She did not sing*', the *do*–T/Neg head is internally merged downward. In English, the *do*–T portion is pronounced on the higher copy (subject to LPTR), and the Neg portion is pronounced on the lower copy. In terms of the pronounced surface form, this essentially creates the surface appearance of splitting of Neg from *do*–T. Since *do*–$T_{(she)}$ is present (though unpronounced) on the lower copy, it nonetheless bears the feature values of *do*–T, preserving locality of agreement with V+v. This is illustrated in (12) (a revised version of (28) in Sobin (2024)).

(12) a. [C_{Decl} , she] AH&M1
[φ: 3SG]

b. [C_{Decl} [she, [$_T$ do–$T_{past(she)}$/Neg]] M2&Val
[φ: 3SG] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]

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c. [do–$T_{past(she)}$/Neg , ~~she~~] AH&M1
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]

d. [do–$T_{past(she)}$~~/Neg~~ [~~she~~ , ~~do–$T_{past(she)}$/~~Neg]] M2&Val
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]

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e. [~~do–T$_{past(she)}$~~/Neg, ~~she~~] AH&M1
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]

f. [~~do–T$_{past(she)}$~~/Neg [~~she~~ , √sing–Voice$_v$]] M2&Val
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~EA~~: she]
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]
[~~*u*Tns~~: past]

The resulting structure for '*She did not sing*'

[C$_{Decl}$ [she [do/T$_{past(she)}$/~~Neg~~ [~~she~~ [~~do/T$_{past(she)}$~~/Neg [~~she~~, √sing–Voice$_v$]]]
[φ: 3SG] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~EA~~: she]
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]
[~~*u*Tns~~: past]
did *not* *sing*

In (10c), the subject is internally merged downward (M1) toward its position of interpretation. In (10d), *do*–T/Neg has internally merged downward (M2). In (10f), the verb complex is externally merged, and valuation is triggered. Since *do*–T/Neg is not semantically neutral, LPTR does not apply here. Thus, 'do–T$_{past(she)}$/~~[Neg]~~' is spelled out as *did*, and ~~*do–*T$_{(she)}$~~/Neg is spelled out as *not*.

This discussion will suffice to allow us to turn to considering negation in Spanish.

5. Subject and negative positioning in Spanish

In Spanish, as in English, (i) there is no NegP underlying negative Spanish sentences, and (ii) Neg in Spanish is initially combined with the head T. Whereas in English, it is Neg that effectively lowers to produce expanded negative expressions (e.g., '*did not*'), in Spanish it is T that effectively lowers. Thus, with an affirmative subject appearing in SpecTP, Neg is spelled out in the higher position as *no*, and T is spelled out on the verb, as (13a) and (13e) below. The basic result is Subj–Neg–VP order. Below, we consider further the structure of various negative constructions in Spanish.

5.1. Core aspects of Spanish negative constructions

Various basic forms of negative sentences in Spanish are illustrated in (13).

(13) a. María no quiere manzanas. (= *Maria does not want apples.*)
b. Nadie quiere manzanas. (= *No one wants apples.*)
c. Nadie no quiere manzanas (= *No one wants apples*–in varieties such as CS)[8]
d. Nadie quiere nada (= *No one wants anything.*)
e. Maria *(no) quiere nada. (= *Maria does not want anything.*)

As mentioned above, one form of negation is the use of *no* in what would otherwise be an affirmative sentence, as in (13a). In (13b), an n–word subject gives the appearance of triggering a negative interpretation. In Standard Spanish (SS), with an n–word as subject,

[8] Corrientes Spanish (CS) is a variety of Spanish spoken in the Corrientes region of Argentina. See Cuervo & Mazzaro (2013). It is one of a number of varieties of Spanish that allow the possibility of *no* appearing along with a negative preverbal expression, as in (13c) expressing a single negation.

Neg/*no* is not pronounced. However, in other varieties of Spanish such as Corrientes Spanish (CS) (Cuervo & Mazzaro 2013), Neg pronounced as *no* as in (13c) is possible, and the sentence still expresses a single negation. In contrast to English, in a well–formed negative Spanish sentence, a negative element must appear early in the structure, before the verb. Thus, while '*Maria wants nothing*' is a well–formed negative sentence in English, its Spanish counterpart is ungrammatical–*no* is required, as in (13e). Finally, some have claimed that n–words such as *nadie* and *nada* are negative operators which trigger a negative interpretation in pre–verbal position, but that they behave instead like NPIs when they are post–verbal. In the present analysis, we follow Laka in claiming that the n–words are consistently NPIs, and that the only negative operator is Neg, manifest as *no* or its null form $Ø_{Neg}$, one or the other of which is always present in negative sentences. The possibility of expressing Neg as *no* in (13c) supports the claim here that the Neg head is present in the structure of sentences like (13b–d) with n–word subjects.

5.2. The syntax of negative sentences in Spanish

As noted earlier, Spanish main verbs are like English non–modal auxiliary verbs (*have, be*) in that they may be but are sometimes not combined with T.[9] From the top–down perspective, T–related English auxiliary verbs begin a derivation in T. If the treatment of Spanish main verbs is the same, then these main verbs would initially appear in the structure roughly illustrated in (14).

(14) [C_{Decl} [NP [√*quer*/T…

With negation, we have √*quer*/T/Neg, which will internally merge downward. As illustrated in (15), the Neg portion of the higher copy ~~√*quer*/T/~~Neg is spelled out as the appropriate form of Neg, and the √*quer*/T portion of √*quer*/T~~/Neg~~ is spelled out as the finite verb.

(15) [C_{Decl} [NP [√*quer*/T/Neg…. → [C_{Decl} [NP [~~√*quer*/T/~~Neg [~~NP~~ [√*quer*/T~~/Neg~~ …
no/$Ø_{Neg}$ *quiere*

If the subject NP is an n–word (e.g., *nadie*), then in SS, Neg is spelled out as $Ø_{Neg}$. In such negative sentences in CS, Neg may be spelled out as either $Ø_{Neg}$ or *no*, depending on the dialect. Thus, negative sentences in Spanish both *with* and without n–word subjects have the same basic structure, as shown in (15).

With this in mind, consider first the derivation of the affirmative sentence in (16).

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[9] For example, *have* is combined with T in (i), but not in (ii).

(i) Mary has$_T$ left.

(ii) Mary might$_T$ have left.

In similar fashion, *jugar* is combined with T in (iii) but not in (iv).

(iii) María juega$_T$ al fútbol
María play.3sg at football
'María plays football.'

(iv) María está$_T$ jugando al fútbol
María be.3sg play.presprt at football
'Maria is playing football.'

(16) *María quiere manzanas*

a. C_{Decl} [*u*Nom]			AH
b. [C_{Decl} [*u*Nom]	María [*u*Case:] [φ: 3SG]	]	M1
c. [C_{Decl} [*u*Nom]	[María [*u*Case:] [φ: 3SG]	√quer–v/T_{pres}]] [*u*φ:] [EA:] [IA:] [*u*Acc]	M2
d. [C_{Decl} [~~*u*Nom~~]	[María [~~*u*Case~~: Nom] [φ: 3SG]	√quer–v/$T_{pres(María)}$]] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~EA~~: María] [IA:] [*u*Acc]	Val

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e. √quer–v/$T_{pres(María)}$ [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~EA~~: María] [IA:] [*u*Acc]			AH
f. [√quer–v/$T_{pres(María)}$ [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~EA~~: María] [IA:] [*u*Acc]	manzanas] [φ:3PL] [*u*Case:]		M1
g. [√quer–v/$T_{pres(María)}$ [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~EA~~: María] [~~IA~~: manzanas] [~~*u*Acc~~]	manzanas] [φ:3PL] [~~*u*Case~~: Acc]		Val

Resulting structure: [C_{Decl} [María [quer–v/T_{pres} manzanas]]]
quiere

In (16a–d), the subject *María* is externally merged (M1) followed by M2 merger of the verb. Under valuation, the subject is assigned Nom Case, and the finite verb √quer–v/T acquires φ feature values from the subject, which satisfies the EA requirement of the

verb. In (16e–g), the object *manzanas* is externally merged, and with no work for M2, valuation applies in which the IA *manzanas* is assigned Acc Case and also satisfies the IA requirement of the verb.

Consider next the derivation of the negative sentence (17) (= 13a) presented in abbreviated form.

(17) *María no quiere manzanas*

a. [C_{Decl} María] [φ: 3SG]		AH&M1
b. [C_{Decl} [María [φ: 3SG]	√quer–v/$T_{pres(María)}$/Neg]] [~~*u*~~φ: 3SG] [EA:] [IA:]	M2&Val
c. [√quer–v/$T_{pres(María)}$/Neg [~~*u*~~φ: 3SG] [EA:] [IA:]	~~María~~]	AH&M1
d. [~~√quer–v/$T_{pres(María)}$~~/Neg [~~*u*~~φ: 3SG] [~~EA~~: María] [IA:]	[~~María~~ √quer–v/$T_{pres(María)}$/~~Neg~~] [~~*u*~~φ: 3SG] [~~EA~~: María] [IA:]	M2&Val
e. [√quer–v/$T_{pres(María)}$~~Neg~~ [~~*u*~~φ: 3SG] [~~EA~~: María] [IA:]	manzanas [φ:3PL]	AH&M1
f. [√quer–v/$T_{pres(María)}$/~~Neg~~ [~~*u*~~φ: 3SG] [~~EA~~: María] [~~IA~~: manzanas]	manzanas] [φ:3PL]	Val

Resulting structure:

[C_{Decl} [María [~~√quer–v/T_{pres}~~/Neg [$_{TP}$ ~~María~~ [√quer–v/T_{pres}/~~Neg~~ manzanas]]]]]
no *quiere*

In (17b), the verb (√quer–v) combined with T and Neg is externally merged, reflecting the proposal here that Neg comes into a negative structure as a component of T, as proposed for English. Also, in (17b), partial valuation takes place, but the EA requirement of the verb is not yet satisfied since the verb is not yet in its base position. In (17c), the subject is internally merged downward, followed in (17d) by the internal merger downward of the verb/T/Neg head. As noted earlier, in both English and Spanish,

Neg is introduced as a component of T; however, the languages differ in what is spelled out in each of the copies. Whereas in English it is Neg that is spelled out in the lower copy, in Spanish, it is verb/T that is spelled out in the lower copy. In (17d), the EA requirement of the verb is satisfied. In (17e), the internal argument *manzanas* is externally merged, and in (17f) it satisfies the IA requirement of the verb. The result is the typical Subject–Neg–VP order of negative sentences in Spanish.

Sentence (18) contains n–words in both subject and object position. Its derivation is as follows, again in abbreviated form.

(18) *Nadie quiere nada.*

a. [C_{Decl} Nadie] AH&M1
[φ: 3SG]
[*u*Neg]

b. [C_{Decl} [Nadie √quer–v/$T_{pres(nadie)}$/Neg]] M2&Val
[φ: 3SG] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]
[~~*u*Neg~~] [EA:]
[IA:]

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c. [√quer–v/$T_{pres(nadie)}$/Neg ~~Nadie~~] AH&M1
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]
[EA:]
[IA:]

d. [~~√quer–v/$T_{pres(nadie)}$~~/Neg [~~Nadie~~ √quer–v/$T_{pres(nadie)}$/~~Neg~~] M2&Val
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [~~*u*φ~~: 3SG]
[~~EA~~: Nadie] [~~EA~~: Nadie]
[IA:] [IA:]

---

e. [√quer–v/T_{pres}~~Neg~~ (nadie) nada AH&M1
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [φ:3PL]
[~~EA~~: Nadie] [*u*Case:]
[IA:] [*u*Neg]

f. [√quer–v/T_{pres}~~Neg~~ (nadie) nada] Val
[~~*u*φ~~: 3SG] [φ:3PL]
[~~EA~~: Nadie] [~~*u*Neg~~]
[~~IA~~: nada]

Resulting structure:

[C_{Decl} [Nadie [~~√quer–v/T_{pres}~~/Neg [$_{TP}$ ~~María~~ [√quer–v/T_{pres}/~~Neg~~ nada]]]]]
[~~*u*~~Neg] *Ø*$_{Neg}$ *quiere* [~~*u*~~Neg]

Derivation (18) is identical to (17) except for the following. First, n–words are introduced, and the [*u*Neg] feature is satisfied under valuation/checking in (18b) and (18f). Second, when Neg licenses a negative element in subject position, SS requires the $Ø_{Neg}$ form. Varieties such as CS allow either the $Ø_{Neg}$ form or the *no* form. Further, if only the object is an n–word, as in '*María no quiere nada*', *no* is the required form of Neg. Thus, negation in Spanish must be overtly marked in the TP realm, either by an element in SpecTP or by Neg being spelled out as *no*. Nonetheless, all n–words are consistently NPIs, and Neg is the sole negative operator.

6. Conclusions

In all Spanish negative sentences, as in English, there is no NegP. Neg is initially a component of the (verb)/T/Neg head in both languages. Though other analyses assuming bottom–up derivation posit structural differences between English and Spanish negative sentences, in the present top–down analysis, English and Spanish negative sentences differ only in the spell out conventions for the (verb)/T/Neg head. In Spanish and in English expanded negative constructions, this head lowers. In English, tense is spelled out on the higher copy, and Neg is spelled out on the lower copy. The reverse is true in Spanish, where the Neg component of verb/T/Neg head is spelled on the higher copy, and verb/T component is spelled out on the lower copy. This explains the surface ordering differences of subject and Neg between these languages, and it does so without structural elaboration and with maximal structural unity.

In Spanish, the Neg element (manifest as either *no* or $Ø_{Neg}$) is the negative operator in the sentence, and following Laka (1990), all n–words are consistently NPIs. With no n–words in the sentence, *no* is the requisite surface expression of negation. With an n–word in subject position, the hearer infers the presence of Neg as $Ø_{Neg}$. A negative sentence in Spanish must contain an overt negative element in the TP realm, SpecTP or T/Neg. Thus, a sentence with an n–word in object position such as (13e) requires overt *no*. This eliminates the paradox of n–words sometimes behaving like negative operators and at other times like NPIs.

In both affirmative and negative sentences in Spanish and English, the major elements of the sentence appear in consistent positions, subjects in SpecTP and objects as verb complements. They are licensed in what are the normal ways posited in minimalist syntax. All in all, this appears to be the simplest analysis of the various alternatives noted above. Of course, there are still numerous aspects of the syntax of Spanish yet to be explored in this theoretical framework, as well as the applicability of these findings to other languages displaying negative concord.

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