Surprise Negation (Sneg) Sentences

By "Surprise Negation" (Sneg), hence "Sneg sentences", we define a particular type of negative marker belonging to the class of "expletive negations" in the sense of Horn (2010), which do not behave as negative operators, in that they do not reverse the polarity of the sentence, license NPI, etc.. The same negative marker can of course express a genuine negation, as in Italian; in this case, prosody disambiguates between two potentially available readings. Therefore, (1) could have a negative meaning if it is uttered with a declarative prosody (1a), or it could have an affirmative meaning if it is uttered with an interrogative/exclamative prosody (1b).

> (1) Ieri,   **non** è   scesa   dal treno mia sorella (!)
>   Yesterday Sneg be.3rd sing. pres got off the train my sister
>   a. 'Yesterday, my sister didn't get off the train'
>   b. 'Yesterday, my sister got off the train!'

A crucial fact is that the double reading of a negative marker present in (1) is **always** available in Italian, except when a negative marker co-occurs with an Ethical Dative (ED) as in (2) leaving the Sneg reading as the only option:

> (2) Ieri,   **non** *ti*   è   scesa   dal treno mia sorella?!
>   Yesterday Sneg you.ED be.3rd sing. pres got off the train my sister
>   a. 'Yesterday, my sister got off the train!'   (Sneg)
>   b. '*Yesterday, my sister didn't get off the train'   (propositional neg.)

The occurrence of an ED with negation can then be considered as a diagnostics to distinguish canonical negation vs. Sneg. More explicitly, a negative marker can occur with ED only if it is interpreted as a Sneg.

We can also distinguish Snegs from more common negative rhetorical questions (NRQ) both for a different intonation (the former are somewhat between exclamative and interrogative, the latter are only interrogative) and for a different pragmatic force. In fact, NRQs can legitimate an affirmative answer of the sentence's addresser (as in 3), whereas Sneg sentences can not (4).

> (3) A: E Roma non è nel Lazio?   (NRQ)
>   'Well, is not Roma in Lazio?'
>   B: Sì, è vero: hai sempre ragione tu!
>   'Yes, it is true, you are always right'

> (4) A: Ieri, non ti è scesa dal treno mia sorella?!   (Sneg)
>   'Yesterday, my sister got off the train!'
>   B: * Sì, è vero: hai sempre ragione tu!
>   'Yes, it is true, you are always right'

Moreover, Sneg, but not NRQ, can be used as an answer of (5A):

> (5) A: Perchè sei agitato?

'Why are you upset?'
B: Prima di venire qua non ho   incontrato Chomsky?! (Sneg)
    Before of coming here Not have.3^{rd}sing.pass met   Chomsky
    'I met Chomsky before coming here!'
B': * Non ho incontrato Chomsky?   (NRQ)
    'Did not I meet Chomsky?'

From (5) we can assume that Snegs convey new information, exactly as a focus in the traditional distinction between rheme and theme. A syntactic confirm can be the impossible occurrence of Sneg with focalized elements:

(6) *TUA SORELLA *non* è   scesa dal treno (non la mia)
    your sister   Sneg be.3rd sing. pres got off the train not mine
    'Your sister got off the train (not mine)'

All in all, we can assume that Snegs compete with FocP for the same position.
A possible proof that Snegs occupies a high CP position is that it occurs in root clauses, rather than embedded ones (cfr. Andersson 1975). Consider, for example, that Snegs cannot be the object of a factive verb (7)

(7) Mi   dispiace   che non sia   scesa dal treno mia sorella
    To me regret.3^{rd}sing.pres. that not be.3^{rd}sing.pres.subj. got off the train my sister
    '*I regret that my sister got off the train!'   (*Sneg)
    'I regret that my sister didn't get off the train'   (propositional neg.)

According to Haegeman (2004) root clauses only are endowed with a full fledged CP, which includes FocP.
Relying on the data exhibit above, we tentatively assume that the whole IP raised to [Spec, FocP] in Snegs and accordingly that they carry complete new information exactly as an answer. Being Snegs in [Spec, FocP] they can not occurr in a reduced CP context (as in 6); since they are forced to stay in a root clauses. Interestingly, Latin syntax supports this analysis involving a higher position in the Split-Comp field for Snegs in that the Latin neg morpheme (*non*) may show up with an extra negative morpheme *-ne* (See Ernout and Thomas 1953*)* showing up as a suffix; a reasonable hypothesis is that *non* stands as an expletive in the same position as IPs in Snegs are. See *Non vixi* (S/he not won; "S/he did not win") vs. *Non-ne vixi?* (S/he not won-*ne*; "Didn't s/he win?").

References

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