

Genitive of Negation in Russian: Blocking of Case-licensing by Negation

Genitive of negation (GN) in Russian is a phenomenon in which an argument that bears structural Case in an affirmative sentence can surface bearing Genitive Case (GEN) in the corresponding negative sentence, as shown in (1). GN occurs only on Theme arguments, as shown in (2-4), and GN-marked DPs refer to non-presupposed entities, whereas their structural Case-marked counterparts refer to presupposed things, as shown in (5-6).

GN has received numerous accounts from various perspectives (See, for example, Gundel 1978, Babby 1980, Pesetsky 1982, Bailyn 1995, and Brown 1999, and Borshev and Partee 2001, and the references therein). In this paper, I offer a syntactic account of the Case-alternation facts about GN in Russian, with insights from the previous research that there is a correlation between Case on DPs and their presupposed or non-presupposed interpretations. I show that a proper treatment of GN is possible by utilizing the ingredients already available in recent linguistic theory, such as Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990) and the Mapping Hypothesis (Diesing 1992) (cf. Babyonyshev 1996, Bailyn 1997, and Brown 1999). I propose that GN instantiates a case of *like blocks like*: that is, NEG, being a Case-licensing head, blocks the Case-checking by other Case-licensing heads when it intervenes between these heads and their target DPs.

I argue that what lies at the heart of GN in Russian is the blocking by NEG of structural Case-licensing on DPs which stay inside VP, when Case-checking occurs. In order to formalize this idea, I adopt Bailyn's (1997) argument that, in Russian, NEG licenses GEN and that Negation Phrase is located above VP and below Aspect Phrase, which is assumed to license Accusative Case in Russian (e.g., Yaddroff 1994, Bailyn 1997, and Brown 1999). Applying the principle of Relativized Minimality to GN in Russian, I propose that a Case-licensing head X can license Case feature F on Y if and only if there is no intervening Case-licensing head Z which c-commands Y but does not c-command X.

Under the new proposal, the occurrence of GN on DPs with non-presupposed interpretations, as shown in (2-3) and (5), is expected as follows. Since NEG blocks structural Case-licensing on DPs inside VP by higher heads such as Aspect and Tense, the only way in which these DPs can satisfy the Case Filter is by having their Case features checked by NEG. Hence, they surface bearing GEN. Since these DPs stay inside VP (although they can move later for other reasons such as the EPP), they will get mapped into the nuclear scope and receive non-presupposed interpretations, as predicted by the Mapping Hypothesis.

In order to account for the occurrence of structural Case on DPs with presupposed interpretations, as shown in (6), I posit that these DPs raise out of VP in overt syntax, and, by moving above NegP, they escape the blocking effects of NEG and thus surface with structural Case. To motivate this movement, I posit that [+presupposed] is a syntactic feature (cf. Diesing and Jelinek 1995), and, in Russian, it is a strong feature. Hence, DPs base-generated with this feature must raise out of VP in overt syntax (cf. Chomsky (1993)), to have it checked off.

The proposed analysis has some additional welcome results. First, it makes desirable predictions about typological correlates in other languages: For example, it predicts that in some languages, [+presupposed] will be a weak feature, and, hence, in those languages, DPs under negation will always occur with GEN. This prediction is borne out, as Polish instantiates such a language. Second, the new proposal sheds light on the outstanding problem of GN in Russian, namely, the obligatory occurrence of GN in existential sentences: that is, the THEME argument of an existential verb must bear GN, even if it refers to a unique individual like Vova, as shown in (7). Borshev and Partee (2001) argue that, in existential sentences, the LOCATION argument of the verb functions as the "Perspectival Center" of the sentence, for it is always presupposed to exist. If we adopt B&P's analysis and assume that from the point of the Perspectival Center, the THEME argument is not presupposed to exist, it is then predicted that THEME, being a non-presupposed entity, will stay inside VP, and, hence, will always surface bearing GN.

Data¹:

- (1) a. Ja nashel tzvety/***tzvetov** (from Pereltsvaig 1998:2)
I found flowers:ACC/***flowers:GEN**
'I found (the) flowers'
b. Ja **ne** nashel tzvety/tzvetov
I **NEG** found flowers:ACC/**flowers:GEN**
'I didn't find (the) flowers'
- (2) Ja **ne čitaju žurnalov** (from Brown 1999:46)
I **NEG read magazine:GEN**
'I don't read (any) magazines.'
- (3) **Otveta** **ne prišlo** (from Brown 1999:46)
answer:GEN, M NEG came:NEUT
'No answer came'
- (4) **Studenty/*studentov** **ne spjat** (from Brown 1999:46)
students:NOM/*students:GEN NEG sleep:3rd, PL
'Students don't sleep.'
- (5) **Moroza** **ne čuvstovoalos** (from Babby 1980)
Frost:GEN, M NEG felt: NEUT
'No frost was felt'
- (6) **Moroz** **ne čuvstvovalsja** (from Babby 1980)
Frost:NOM, M NEG felt:M
'The frost was not felt'
- (7)a. Vovy **netu doma** (from Babyonyshev 1996:139)
Vova: GEN, SG, M NEG-be home
'Vova is not at home'
b. *Vova **netu doma**
Vova: NOM, SG, M NEG-be home

Selected References

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¹ For the transcription of the data, the following abbreviations are used:

ACC: accusative Case; GEN; genitive; M: masculine; N: neuter; NEG: negation; NOM: nominative Case; PL: Plural; SG: singular.