Motivating head movement: The case of negative inversion in West Texas English

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Negative inversion (or Declarative Negative Auxiliary Inversion) is a phenomenon present in some varieties of North American English such as African American English, Appalachian English, and West Texas English (WTE). Constructions exhibiting negative inversion are declaratives and contain a clause-initial negated auxiliary or modal followed by a quantificational subject, as in (1). The corresponding non-inverted construction is often also possible, as in (2).

(1) Didn't everybody go to the party. (WTE; Foreman, 1999)

(2) Everybody didn't go to the party. (WTE; Foreman, 1999)

The properties of negative inversion: (i) it can only occur in negated clauses containing the sentential negation morpheme n't, (ii) it is licensed in embedded clauses with an overt complementizer, and (iii) it has a restriction on the types of subjects it allows. Regarding the last property, it is typically observed in the literature that definite subjects are disallowed. I show that the subject restriction is more subtle, and argue that negative inversion will only occur with quantificational subjects which interact scopally with negation. Foreman (1999) points out that the sentence in (2) is ambiguous. In one interpretation, the subject quantifier scopes over sentential negation and in the other interpretation, negation scopes over the quantifier. The sentence in (1), however, is unambiguous with only negation scoping over the quantifier. The present analysis builds on these scope facts.

I follow prior movement analyses of negative inversion in assuming that the construction exhibiting negative inversion is derived from its non-inverted counterpart by head movement of the auxiliary to a position higher than the subject (Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis, 1968; Labov, 1972; Martin, 1993; Foreman, 1999; Green, 2008, 2011). Following Foreman (1999), I assume that the auxiliary raises to Neg₂^o, a projection available in the CP layer of WTE which occurs above T^o and below C^o. The structure of (2) is derived as in (3) and the structure of (1) is derived as in (4).

- (3) [TP everybody didn't everybody go to the party]
- (4) $[Neg_2^o \text{ didn't [TP everybody } \text{didn't everybody go to the party]}]$

This analysis differs from other analyses in motivating head movement as a way to resolve scope ambiguity. I propose that negative inversion can only be derived from scopally ambiguous structures and furthermore, that negative inversion will result in negation taking wide scope over the subject. I argue that movement in unambiguous structures is ruled out by positing a scope economy principle in the spirit of Fox (2000), as in (5).

(5) Principle of Scope Economy
A scope-shifting operation can move an operator O overtly only if the resulting structure is less ambiguous than its source, i.e.

$$\left[\begin{array}{c} X \\ \widehat{O \ Y} \\ \widehat{\widehat{t}} \end{array}\right] \subset \left[\begin{array}{c} Y \\ \widehat{\widehat{O}} \end{array}\right]$$

I assume that syntactic structure can be scopally ambiguous and that the interpretation of a structure can be a set of meanings. The interpretation of the pre-movement structure in (3) has two meanings, one in which the quantificational subject scopes over negation and the other in which negation scopes over the quantifier, whereas the interpretation of the post-movement structure (4) contains only the latter meaning.

Structures containing non-quantificational subjects, as in (6), do not have inverted counterparts, as in (7), because derivations containing movement which does not derive a change in meaning are ruled out by economy principles.

Subjects which are not definite but which do not interact scopally with negation, *few* (8) and *some* (9), are not ruled out in previous analyses but they are in the present analysis. Because the pre-movement structure for these sentences is unambiguous, negative inversion is ruled out by the principle of scope economy.

I argue for a movement analysis of negative inversion which resolves scopal ambiguity. Adopting a principle of scope economy provides a uniform account of the properties of negative inversion. Negative inversion is licit when negation interacts scopally with a quantificational subject because the resulting structure is less ambiguous whereas movement in sentences lacking ambiguity is ruled out by economy principles.

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