Rethinking strict negative concord: An investigation into double negation readings in Russian

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Abstract This paper investigates the availability of double negation (DN) readings in Russian—traditionally considered to be a strict negative concord (NC) language. A judgment survey of native Russian speakers provides evidence that native speakers do in fact accept DN readings involving the negative marker *ne* and *ni za chto* ("for nothing"). To account for these available DN readings, a proposal based mainly on Zeijlstra's framework of negative concord is presented. We hypothesize that *ni za chto* bears an optionally interpretable NEG feature; consequently, when *ni za chto* is fronted, it checks following uninterpretable NEG features and eliminates the available DN reading. Furthermore, we maintain that the negative marker *ne* is uninterpretably negative and provide support for an abstract negative operator, contrasting proposals similar to Déprez (2011, 2016) which treat the negative marker as the negative licensor in strict NC languages.

Keywords: negative concord; double negation; Russian; micro-parametric analysis; syntaxsemantics interface

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Competing theories of negative concord (NC) have been proposed. One of the most utilized theories, put forward by Zeijlstra (2004, 2007, 2008, 2009), analyzes NC as the presence of a [+NC] macro-parametric setting. Unlike double negation (DN) languages ([NC]), where each negative element carries a semantic negation, NC languages have formal negative features that enable concord through syntactic agreement. In NC languages, negative markers and neg-words[1] bear either a uNEG or iNEG feature. uNEG features must be checked by c-commanding iNEG features within the same domain, while iNEG features introduce interpretable semantic negation.

A further distinction between strict and non-strict languages is made. According to Zeijlstra's account, in a non-strict NC language, negative markers possess iNEG features while neg-words possess uNEG features. This featural distribution allows for both SN and DN readings. The following examples demonstrate feature checking in a non-strict NC language:

(1) *Spanish* (non-strict NC)

a. SN reading

Greta **no**$_{[iNEG]}$ vio a **nadie**$_{[uNEG]}$.

Greta **NEG** saw **nobody**

'Greta saw nobody.'

[1] We will be using the term "neg-word" in this paper, in place of Laka's (1990) term "n-word" and Déprez's (2011, 2016) term "Negative Concord Item (NCI)".

b. DN reading

<Op:iNEG> **Nadie**$_{[uNEG]}$ **no**$_{[iNEG]}$ durmió.[2]

Nobody **NEG** slept

'Nobody did not sleep.' (≈'Everybody slept.')

Zeijlstra's distinction between strict and non-strict NC adopts the definition of the latter category put forth by Giannakidou (1998, 2006). Giannakidou (2006) writes that "another decisive factor [in determining if a language is strict NC] is whether n-words may occur without the presence of the sentential negative marker, or whether the presence of the negative marker is obligatory in all contexts-- the lat[t]er situation is known as 'strict' NC… [and] in strict NC languages double negation readings are never allowed." To explain this exclusion, Zeijlstra supposes that, in strict NC languages, all negative elements bear uNEG features. To check these uNEG elements, Zeijlstra proposes an abstract phonologically null negative operator: Op:iNEG. Op:iNEG is restricted as to when it may be deployed: it may only be triggered when grammatically necessary for feature checking. Since Op:iNEG is the only method to introduce semantic negation in strict NC languages, it follows that DN readings should not exist within this category. Feature checking in a strict NC language is modeled in example (2):

(2) *Russian* (strict NC)

<Op:iNEG> **Никто**$_{[uNEG]}$ **не**$_{[uNEG]}$ спал.

Nikto **ne** spal.

Nobody **NEG** slept

'Nobody slept.'

There are, however, restricted contexts where Biberauer & Zeijlstra (2012) acknowledge the existence of DN readings in strict NC languages; specifically, sentences with Negative Verum Focus are reported to have DN readings. Negative Verum Focus is only felicitous when it directly follows a negative sentence; additionally, it requires a stressed negative element and must operate on full propositions. An example of Negative Verum Focus in Afrikaans (a strict NC language) is demonstrated by Speaker 2's response in example (3):

(3) Speaker 1: Net HANS het *nie* die werk voltooi *nie*, né?

only Hans has NEG the work completed NEG right

'It was just Hans who didn't finish the work, right?'

Speaker 2: Nee, NIEMAND het *nie* die werk voltooi *nie*

no nobody has NEG the work completed NEG

'No, NO-ONE didn't finish the work' (focused subject)

— example from Biberauer & Zeijlstra (2012)

[2] This DN reading was provided by a native speaker colleague.

Biberauer & Zeijlstra (2012) explain NC through syntactic agreement. They also acknowledge that focus has the ability to disrupt agreement. Thus, they can easily explain the existence of DN readings in these highly restricted contexts (demonstrated by example (3)) by stating that Negative Verum Focus disrupts the agreement of negative features in these cases, resulting in DN readings. Under this type of analysis, these DN readings in strict NC languages are not predicted outside of sentences with Negative Verum Focus. Strict NC languages are therefore still predicted to disallow DN readings in the vast majority of contexts.

Other theories of negative concord do not make use of an abstract negative operator (Déprez 2011, 2016; Longobardi 2014). In particular, Déprez (2016) argues against Zeijstra in her analysis of Haitian Creole (a strict NC language). Similar to Giannakidou (2006), Déprez maintains that there are no DN readings in Haitian Creole. However, she proposes that the negative marker (*pa* in Haitian Creole) is a negative operator itself and is semantically negative, while neg-words in Haitian Creole are non-negative concord items which share core properties with strong negative polarity items (NPIs). [3]

Furthermore, Déprez demonstrates that neg-words in Haitian Creole have positive polarity interpretations; in other words, neg-words such as *pèsonn* may have an interpretation as both a negative indefinite ('no one') and as a positive indefinite ('anyone'). The two possible readings of pèsonn are illustrated in examples (4) and (5):

(4) *Pèsonn* as a negative indefinite:

men ***pèsonn pa*** *t kew li akoz rad li te mete sou li yo*

"but no one believed him because of the clothes he wore"

(5) *Pèsonn* as a positive indefinite:

Eske ***pèsonn*** *konnen kouman pou'm mete aksan nan let yo?*

"Does **anyone** know how I can put accent on the letters?"

— examples from Déprez (2016)

Déprez takes this duality of available readings as evidence that neg-words do not license an abstract negative operator and instead function similarly to NPIs. Déprez argues that, if an abstract NEG existed, *pèsonn* should be able to have a negative interpretation in cases when it does not (shown by example (5)). An abstract negative operator would therefore overgenerate in Haitian Creole.

[3] Déprez argues that Haitian NCIs function more similarly to French NPIs than to French NCIs. In addition to providing evidence that Haitian NCIs have positive polarity interpretations, she observes that "Haitian NCI share their core properties with NPI, in the sense that they are [...] indefinites with no negative force of their own that need to be licensed in anti-additive contexts" (Déprez 2016:15). She also observes that Haitian Creole NCIs can be licensed across clausal boundaries, while NCIs typically must be locally licensed. From this evidence, Déprez concludes that Haitian NCIs function similarly to strong NPIs, as they are both licensed in anti-additive contexts.

In general, Déprez strongly opposes the usage of an abstract negative operator, such as Op:iNEG. She states that "an accurate account of [*pa*'s] distribution and relation to [negative concord items] must do away with the postulation of an abstract NEG operator" (Déprez 2016). Although linguists have used an abstract negative operator to explain how neg-words can appear as fragment answers (Laka 1990; Zeijlstra 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009), Déprez still argues against an operator like Op:iNEG, even in these cases. Instead, to explain fragment answers in Haitian Creole (where the negative marker *pa* is not present), Déprez proposes an elided *pa* which licenses the neg-word.[4] She models this as in (6):

(6) *Kimoun ou te we? [**Pèsonn** [m pa te we pèsonn]]*
Who did you see? **Nobody** [*I NOT past see nobody*]]

— example from Déprez (2016)

Déprez thus raises the question of the necessity of an abstract negative operator. Her (2016) article, however, only applies such an approach without an abstract negative operator to Haitian Creole. This article will demonstrate that a similar approach will make incorrect predictions about another strict NC language: Russian.

1.2 Research questions

[4] Watanabe (2004) strongly criticizes such an analysis of negative fragment answers. Under this elision analysis, a critical requirement for ellipses is not met: a proper antecedent for the fragment neg-word answers is not provided. With regard to ellipses, affirmative propositions cannot be the antecedent for negative propositions without predicting illicit negative answers.

(i) *Japanese* (strict NC) Q:
Nani-o mita no?
what-ACC saw Q
'What did you see?'

Answer 1: Hebi.
snake-ACC
'I saw a snake.'

Answer 2: Hebi[-o mi- nak- atta].
snake-ACC saw-NEG-PAST
'I didn't see a snake'

— example from Watanabe (2004)

In example (i), only Answer 1 is a licit answer. Answer 2 is not possible, showing that negative markers cannot be elided in this manner.

Russian has typically been considered a strict NC language. However, we found that there may be rare occurrences of DN readings in Russian involving *ni za chto* ("for nothing").[5] A native speaker colleague reported the sentence in (7) to be ambiguous between an SN reading and a DN reading:

(7) *Russian*

a. DN reading
Он **не** отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**.
On **ne** otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto**.
He **NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**
'He did not give his life for nothing.'

b. SN reading
Он **не** отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**.
On **ne** otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto**.
He **NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**
'He did not give his life for anything.'

The DN reading in (7a) would arise in a context such as:

"The soldier's parents were angry that they lost their son during the war. The

[5] DN readings involving "for nothing" exist in other strict NC languages as well. We are aware of the following examples in Mauritian Creole and Czech:

(ii) *Mauritian Creole* **Pa**
pou nanye sa!
NEG for nothing that
'It isn't for nothing!' ('It's not in vain!')

(iii) *Czech*

a. **Ne**zmařil svůj život **pro nic za nic**.
NEG+waste.3SG.PST his life **for nothing**
'He did not die for nothing.' ('He did not die in vain.')
Or: 'He did not die for anything.'

b. **Ne**zaplatil jsem $1000 **pro nic za nic**.
NEG+pay.PST.PTCP be.1SG $1000 **for nothing**
'I did not pay $1000 for nothing.' ('I did not pay $1000 in vain.')
Or: 'I did not pay $1000 for anything.'

Preliminarily, "for nothing" does not seem to function the same way in Czech (where the resulting readings after fronting *pro nic za nic* appear to be different than in Russian). How "for nothing" functions in other strict NC languages is beyond the scope of this squib and is left to further research.

government told them: '**He did not give his life for nothing**. Sacrificing his life ensured the freedom of his country.'"

The SN reading in (7b) would arise in a context such as:

"The soldier wasn't willing to sacrifice his life to keep top-secret information from getting into the enemy's hands. **He did not give his life for anything.** In fact, he's still alive. He'll live to see another day."

Crucially in example (7), the DN reading was available and salient for the native speaker we consulted. DNs in Russian have been briefly noticed in the syntax literature, but have not been thoroughly explained in leading accounts of negative concord. Evreinov (1976a, 1976b) notes that *ni* as a particle in idiomatic expression cancels negative concord, but gives no further explanation of this phenomenon.

Fitzgibbons (2010) observes freestanding neg-words in Russian which are not licensed by the negative marker *ne*—contradicting Giannakidou (2006); she also observes that certain DN readings are available in Russian when the negative marker is combined with some of these freestanding neg-words. To account for these freestanding neg-words, Fitzgibbons (2010) proposes that both sentential negation and a phonologically null negative head are seated in Polarity Phrases (PolPs), and that "freestanding *n*-words" are licensed by the latter. Building on this, she argues that two PolPs can appear—in, for example, a negated sentence with a Prepositional Phrase (PP) that includes a neg-word— and that these two negative heads (seated in the PolPs) may give rise to a DN reading.

However, Fitzgibbons (2010) specifies that the reading for this type of sentence may not be ambiguous, stating that "a PP with an *n*-word in it can induce either a DN reading or an NC reading in Russian, but not both" (Fitzgibbons 2010: 75). She notes that the availability of one reading or the other "appears linked to whether or not the *ni* morpheme is separated by P from the *wh*-stem" (Fitzgibbons 2010: 79). She writes that "if in the presence of [sentential negation] the order is *ni*+P+*wh*-stem, NC readings are preferred" (Fitzgibbons 2010: 79) and that, conversely, NC readings are "not available with the P *n*word order" (Fitzgibbons 2010: 80). This generalization excludes the possibility that the freestanding neg-word *ni za chto* (*ni*-P-*what*) could result in a DN reading in the presence of sentential negation, as our colleague initially reported to be possible. This anomalous, unexplained DN reading, shown in (7a), thus prompted our investigation into the availability of this DN reading in Russian for native speakers more generally.

Since negation is focus-sensitive, it was important for our investigation to distinguish between different types of SN and DN readings, depending on the placement of focus. As Beaver and Clark (2008) show, negation has a quasi-association with focus. They demonstrate how different foci result in different implicatures, and therefore appear in different discourse contexts. In combination with either an SN reading or a DN reading, this focus distinction results in the paradigm in table 1 (provided in English):

Table 1: Reading paradigm based on focus

SN with Narrow Focus	SN with Broad Focus
"John gave his life for [$_{FOC}$ nothing]."	"John did not [$_{FOC}$ give his life for anything]."
⇝ John is dead.	⇝ John is not dead.
⇝ John died for no purpose.	⇝ There was a purpose for which John could have given his life.
DN with Narrow Focus	**DN with Broad Focus**
"John did not give his life for [$_{FOC}$ nothing]."	"John did not [$_{FOC}$ give his life for nothing]."
⇝ John is dead.	⇝ John is not dead.
⇝ John died for a purpose.	⇝ John would have given his life for no purpose.

Using this paradigm, we are able to determine the focus for the readings we have seen in example (7). Which focus reading is available may be tested by considering if the event has or has not happened. If the event has not occurred, a broad focus reading is available. For example, in table 1 under the broad focus readings, John has not died and is still alive. In contrast, when the event has occurred, a narrow focus reading is available. Under the narrow focus readings in table 1, John has died. Applying this to our example sentences in (7) allows us to conclude that (7a) is a narrow focus DN reading, while (7b) is a broad focus SN reading.

Although broad focus DN readings may exist in Russian, we are not currently aware of any examples. This question will therefore be left to further research. The existence of a narrow focus DN reading in Russian, as provided in (7a), is enough to question Russian's status as a strict NC language—following the definition of strict NC provided in Giannakidou (2006). Sections 1.3 and 1.4 compare different approaches, with and without an abstract negative operator, that may account for this narrow focus DN reading in Russian.

1.3 Predictions assuming an abstract NEG operator

Zeijlstra's theory of NC is unable to account for DN readings in Russian. Given the specifications that all neg-words are uNEG and that negation is only introduced by the abstract NEG operator, two semantic negations should never appear within one clause. However, with a slight modification, this same framework may be able to account for DN readings within a presumed strict NC language. As such, we propose a hybrid macro/micro-parametric account of NC: this approach maintains that all negative elements in a strict NC language are [uNEG], but that this default setting can be superseded by overruling specifications for certain lexical items. Under this hybrid macro-/micro-parametric approach, semantic negation will typically be introduced through the use of an abstract negative operator; however, certain lexical items may also bear [iNEG] features—providing two means for the introduction of semantic negation within Russian. In this section, we present the predictions of this new approach to NC.

1.3.1 *Ni za chto* is self-licensing

Zeijlstra's theory of NC may easily be adapted to account for DN readings within Russian. *Ni za chto* could function as a phrase that varies in its ability to introduce semantic negation. While maintaining that Russian has a [+NC] setting, we hypothesize that *ni za chto* may alternately bear an iNEG or a uNEG feature, depending upon the context. In other words, *ni za chto* may be inherently optionally iNEG.

This proposal bears a certain similarity to the analysis of Herburger (2001, 2003), who argues that NC results from "a systematic lexical ambiguity: the items that participate in Negative Concord [...] are ambiguous between negative polarity items and their genuinely negative counterparts" (Herburger 2001). Herburger (2001) argues that this "[a]mbiguity can only arise if NPI n-words and NE [negative element] n-words are not in entirely complementary distribution", and she provides the following evidence from Spanish (a non-strict NC language) that shows that certain NCIs do indeed give rise to two different interpretations in the same syntactic structure. The sentence in (8)

(8) El bebé no está mirando a **nadie**.

the baby not is looking at n-body

may be interpreted as (9a) or (9b):

(9) a. The baby is not looking at anybody.

b. The baby is not looking at nobody.

Herburger justifies this lexical ambiguity by arguing that it "plausibly represents an intermediate stage of the Jespersen Cycle, where n-words can be viewed as shifting from NPIs to the corresponding NEs in the course of history" (Herburger 2003). She bases this argument on historical evidence from Romance languages and argues that languages like Standard English (which lack ambiguity) have progressed further in the Jespersen Cycle than languages like Spanish (Herburger 2001). Herburger thus argues that positing ambiguity in neg-words is theoretically justified; we similarly adopt this stance in our analysis of Russian.

While our hypothesis similarly considers the neg-word *ni za chto* to be ambiguous, it differs from Herburger's analysis in using a Zeijlstra-style featural analysis to explain the distribution of semantic interpretability. We propose that when *ni za chto* is semantically negative, it bears an iNEG feature; when *ni za chto* does not bear semantic negation, it is not an NPI but instead bears a uNEG feature. This hypothesis requires *ni za chto* to function as a phrase which bears a NEG feature.

We see two possible ways for *ni za chto* to be introducing an iNEG feature as a phrase. The first possible analysis to explain *ni za chto*'s anomalous behavior is that it is a lexical item that can bear an iNEG feature. Although we acknowledge that this assumption is not motivated by independent evidence, it might be the best way to account for the data if native speakers accepted an SN reading when *ni za chto* occurs without the negative marker.

The second possible analysis is that the combination of the PP and *ni* could interact to result in an iNEG feature. This builds upon Fitzgibbons (2010), who demonstrates that freestanding neg-words in Russian frequently co-occur with PPs. Two examples of freestanding neg-words that could be accounted for by this analysis are provided in (10a) and (10b).

(10) a. (We planned a story for kids,
but)
Vyšla kniga dlja *nikogo.*
Happened book for *n*-who$_{ACC}$
'...it turned out to be a book for nobody (appeals to no audience).'

b. Oni polčasa progovorili *ni* o *čem*.
they half-hour talked N about what$_{PREP}$
'They spent half an hour talking about nothing.'

—examples from Fitzgibbons (2010)

We propose that the following optional rules may apply when a preposition and a neg-word occur within the same phrase:

(11) a. Optional Rule 1:

$ni_{[uNEG]}$/ __ P → $ni_{[iNEG]}$

b. Optional Rule 2:

$ni_{[uNEG]}$ / P __ → $ni_{[iNEG]}$

When *ni* and a preposition co-occur within the same phrase (such as in *ni za chto*), the NEG feature could raise to the prepositional phrase level and perform feature checking when it has optionally changed to an iNEG feature. If freestanding neg-words with PPs allowed for iNEG features, this would alternatively explain the data presented in Fitzgibbons (2010). The optionality of this rule means that the PP could bear an iNEG or a uNEG feature; this possibility would explain ambiguous readings, if native speakers allowed for them. This second hypothesis has the benefit of accounting for the behavior of a wider range of freestanding neg-words, whereas the first hypothesis only accounts for the behavior of *ni za chto*. This second hypothesis additionally takes into account the fact that Russian neg-words all begin with *ni*. Following this analysis, it is the prefix *ni* which turns the *wh*-stem into a neg-word that bears a uNEG feature. This process is demonstrated in the Russian neg-word examples given in (12):

(12) a.	**ни**кто	a’. кто
	nikto	kto
	⇝ no one	⇝ who
b.	**ни**когда	b’. когда
	nikogda	kogda
	⇝ never	⇝ when
c.	**ни**где	c’. где
	nigde	gde
	⇝ nowhere	⇝ where
d.	**ни**куда	d’. куда
	nikuda	kuda
	⇝ to nowhere	⇝ where to
e.	**ни**откуда	e’. откуда
	niotkuda	otkuda
	⇝ from nowhere	⇝ from where

Regardless of which hypothesis is assumed, *ni za chto* as a phrase must be able to bear an iNEG feature; any analysis that considers that only part of *ni za chto* (i.e., *ni*, *za*, *chto*, or any pairing of these subparts) can bear an iNEG feature would overgenerate available negative readings. For example, *ni* by itself cannot result in an interpretable semantic negation, as this would predict that Russian neg-words should be self-licensing and would allow for DN readings when preceded by the negative marker. Consider the example of *nichego* (“nothing”):

(13) a. *****Я делал **ни**чего плохого. ungrammatical
Ja delal nichego ploxogo
I do.pst.m nothing bad

b. Я не делал **ни**чего плохого**.** SN
Ja ne delal nichego ploxogo
I NEG do.pst.m nothing bad
⇝ I didn’t do anything wrong.

Here, *nichego* cannot self-license, as shown in (13a); additionally, it requires the negative marker and can only be interpreted with an SN reading in (13b). If *ni* were able to introduce semantic negation, (13a) would be predicted to be grammatical and (13b) would be predicted to have a DN reading. Similarly, *za* (“for”) and *chto* (“what”) cannot be semantically negative. Both *za* and *chto* have only positive interpretations when considered by themselves or as a pair, as in (14):

(14) За что?
Za chto?
For what
⇝ What for? (#For nothing?)

In order to avoid predicting negative readings that do not exist, it is necessary to adopt an analysis of *ni za chto* as a phrase that can bear an iNEG feature. At this point, we do not have sufficient evidence to determine which of the two hypotheses we have presented more accurately explains how *ni za chto* functions as a phrase. If *ni za chto* is the only neg-word in Russian that can bear an iNEG feature, it is most likely that *ni za chto* has lexicalized. On the other hand, if other

freestanding neg-words in Russian display evidence of having an iNEG feature, the second hypothesis could elegantly account for this. Whichever hypothesis is adopted, we propose that *ni za chto* as a phrase is inherently optionally iNEG. It follows from our proposal that, when *ni za chto* is iNEG, it should bear semantic negation itself; when *ni za chto* bears a uNEG feature, Op:iNEG should be triggered and contribute a single semantic negation. In both cases, *ni za chto* is predicted to result in an SN reading even without the negative marker *ne*. The two structures can be schematized as in (15):

(15) *Ni za chto* alternately iNEG, uNEG

a. Narrow focus SN reading

Он отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**$_{[iNEG]}$**.**

On otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto.**

He give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**

'He died for nothing.'

(Context: His death was unjustified.)

b. Narrow focus SN reading

<Op:iNEG> Он отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**$_{[uNEG]}$**.**

On otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto.**

He give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**

'He died for nothing.'

(Context: His death was unjustified.)

Full embedding contexts for the examples in (15), as well as for the other examples in Sections 1.3 and 1.4, can be found in the Appendix.

1.3.2 Adding the negative marker *ne*

If our hypothesis that *ni za chto* is inherently optionally iNEG is correct, the addition of the negative marker *ne* preceding *ni za chto* should trigger the abstract operator Op:iNEG (following the assumption that *ne* bears a uNEG feature). When *ni za chto* is iNEG, it introduces a semantic negation. Then, when the negative marker *ne* is added higher in the syntactic structure, its uNEG feature cannot be checked by *ni za chto*; thus, Op:iNEG is triggered, contributing a second semantic negation and resulting in a DN reading.

When *ni za chto* is uNEG and *ne* (which also bears a uNEG feature) is added to the syntactic structure, neither negative element contributes semantic negation. Once again, Op:iNEG is necessarily triggered, checking both uNEG features and contributing a single semantic negation. This results in an SN reading.

These two cases can be schematized as in (16):

(16) *Ne + ni za chto*

a. Narrow focus DN reading

<Op:iNEG> Он **не**[uNEG] отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**[iNEG].
On **ne** otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto.**
He **NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**

'He didn't die for nothing.'

(Context: Sacrificing his life served a purpose.)

b. Broad focus SN reading

<Op:iNEG> Он **не**[uNEG] отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**[uNEG].
On **ne** otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto.**
He **NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**

'He didn't die for anything.'

(Context: In fact, he's still alive.)

The examples in (16) show how the same linear word order may have two possible interpretations. By allowing for *ni za chto* to be ambiguous between a uNEG and an iNEG feature, a wider variety of readings within Russian may be explained.

1.3.3 Fronting *ni za chto*

Since Russian is a scrambling language,[4] there are other syntactic structures that remain to be examined under the lens of this hypothesis. If *ni za chto* may optionally bear an iNEG feature, we would expect it to be able to perform feature checking if it is fronted to precede negative elements with uNEG features.

When *ni za chto* is fronted to precede *ne* in example (17), an SN reading is predicted to arise in both cases—whether *ni za chto* is iNEG (17a) or uNEG (17b). In other words, a double negation reading is not predicted to be available for this syntactic structure.

In (17a), since *ni za chto* is now higher in the syntactic structure than *ne*, it should be able to check the uNEG feature present on the negative marker. This would result in a structure where Op:iNEG is not triggered, since it is not grammatically necessary. Only one semantic negation would be introduced in this sentence, by *ni za chto*.

Similarly, in (17b), only one semantic negation would be introduced. However, in this case it would be introduced by Op:iNEG, which would be triggered since both *ne* and *ni za chto* bear uNEG features in this structure.

[4] For more information on scrambling, see: Haider & Rosengren (2003). For more information on scrambling in Slavic languages, see: Zimmerling (2011) and Zimmerling & Kosta (2013).

(17) *Ni za chto* fronted to precede *ne*

a. Broad focus SN reading

Он **ни за что**$_{[iNEG]}$ **не**$_{[uNEG]}$ отдал свою жизнь.
On **ni za chto** **ne** otdal svoju zhizn'.
He **for nothing** **NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life

'He didn't die for anything.'
'He didn't die for nothing.'
(Context: In fact, he's still alive.)

b. Broad focus SN reading

<Op:iNEG> Он **ни за что**$_{[uNEG]}$ **не**$_{[uNEG]}$ отдал свою жизнь.
On **ni za chto** **ne** otdal svoju zhizn'.
He **for nothing** **NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life

'He didn't die for anything.'
'He didn't die for nothing.'
(Context: In fact, he's still alive.)

In this section, we have demonstrated the predictions of a hybrid macro-/microparametric account of strict NC, which assumes an abstract negative operator. With the addition of an inherently optionally iNEG phrase—*ni za chto*—this account predicts both SN and DN readings under certain syntactic constructions. When *ni za chto* appears alone, only SN readings are predicted to be available. When the negative marker *ne* is added to precede *ni za chto*, both SN and DN readings are predicted to be available. Finally, when *ni za chto* is fronted to precede *ne*, only an SN reading is predicted.

1.4 Predictions without an abstract negative operator

The analysis of NC proposed by Déprez (2011, 2016) differs from Zeijlstra (2004, 2007, 2008, 2009) in that it does not assume the presence of an abstract negative operator. In fact, in analyzing Haitian Creole (HC)—a strict NC language—Déprez argues against this abstract operator, writing that it is "hard to see what advantage positing an abstract NEG could have over simply acknowledging [the negative marker] *pa* as the only true semantic negation marker of [Haitian Creole]" (Déprez 2016). Déprez (2016) assumes that the only negative licensor in HC is the negative marker *pa*. The following section presents the predictions that result when a similar approach—where an abstract negative operator is not used and only the negative marker *ne* is a negative operator—is applied to Russian.

1.4.1 *Ni za chto* as a negative operator

Without the presence of an abstract negative operator, when *ni za chto* appears alone it must be able to introduce semantic negation itself. Although such a structure differs from typical Russian negation structures, which require the presence of *ne* in addition to a negword, our native speaker colleague accepted the neg-word *ni za chto* without *ne*—with an SN reading. Further support for this anomalous structure is presented in Fitzgibbons (2010), as discussed in section 1.2. If native speakers accepted this construction with the same SN reading, it would be necessary to conclude

that *ni za chto* alone may introduce semantic negation in Russian. This contradicts Déprez's approach to Haitian Creole, which, when applied to this Russian structure, would require the negative marker *ne* to license *ni za chto*. However, *ne* cannot be licensing *ni za chto* here if *ne* is not even grammatically required. If neither the negative marker *ne* nor an abstract negative operator is licensing *ni za chto*, then under these circumstances, *ni za chto* must be able to license itself (i.e., be interpretably negative), as is shown in (18a).

Even if *ni za chto* is ambiguous between being interpretably and uninterpretably negative, it will always result in an SN reading when it is the only negative item present in the structure. (18b) will be precluded since it is ungrammatical without a licensor; *ni za chto* will therefore always be interpretably negative in this type of structure.

The [uNEG] and [iNEG] notations in the examples that follow in section 1.4 represent uninterpretable and interpretable negative items; different theoretical representations of uninterpretable and interpretable negative items may easily be substituted without changing the predictions. For example, Déprez's treatment of negwords in Haitian Creole as Negative Concord Items (NCIs) and *pa* as their semantically negative licensor may be adopted here—with no change in predictions.

(18) *Ni za chto* as a negative operator

a. Narrow focus SN reading

Он отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**[$_{iNEG}$].
On otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto**.
He give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**

'He died for nothing.'
(Context: His death was unjustified.)

b. Ungrammatical

Он отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**[$_{uNEG}$].
On otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto**.
He give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**
(no interpretation)

1.4.2 Adding the negative marker *ne*

Déprez (2016) proposes that in Haitian Creole, another strict negative concord language, positing an abstract negative operator is not necessary and that neg-words are licensed by a negative operator—realized as the negative marker. Applying this approach to Russian would necessitate that the negative marker *ne* is always interpretably negative.

Assuming that *ne* is always interpretably negative and that *ni za chto* may be either interpretably or uninterpretably negative would result in two available readings. When *ni za chto* is interpretably negative, two semantic negations are contributed, resulting in the DN reading exemplified in (19a). When *ni za chto* is not interpretably negative, only the negative marker contributes a semantic negation, resulting in the SN reading exemplified in (19b).

(19) *Ne + ni za chto*

a. Narrow focus DN reading

Он **не**$_{[iNEG]}$ отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**$_{[iNEG]}$.
On **ne** otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto**.
He **NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**
'He didn't die for nothing.'
(Context: Sacrificing his life served a purpose.)

b. Broad focus SN reading

Он **не**$_{[iNEG]}$ отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**$_{[uNEG]}$.
On **ne** otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto**.
He **NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**
'He didn't die for anything.'
(Context: In fact, he's still alive.)

1.4.3 Fronting *ni za chto*

Finally, when *ni za chto* is fronted to precede the negative marker *ne*, the same ambiguity in readings is still predicted. Since *ne* is obligatorily interpretably negative under a Déprezstyle approach, when *ni za chto* is interpretably negative, two semantic negations will be present in this structure and a narrow focus DN reading will be available. This structure is shown in (20a).

Déprez allows uninterpretably negative items to be licensed in their base-generated position if they are c-commanded by an interpretably negative operator in this position; in this manner, she explains neg-word subjects in Haitian Creole—since subjects are generated below NegP, within VP. A similar approach may be applied to Russian when *ni za chto* is uNEG. Since *ni za chto* is generated within the domain of the negative marker *ne*, it may be licensed before movement. This predicts that, even in the case where *ni za chto* is uninterpretably negative, it may be fronted and result in a grammatical structure which results in a broad focus SN reading, as can be seen in (20b).

(20) *Ni za chto* fronted to precede *ne*

a. Narrow focus DN reading

Он **ни за что**$_{[iNEG]}$ **не**$_{[iNEG]}$ отдал свою жизнь.
On **ni za chto ne** otdal svoju zhizn'.
He **for nothing NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life

'He didn't die for nothing.'
(Context: Sacrificing his life served a purpose.)

b. Broad focus SN reading

Он **ни за что**$_{[uNEG]}$ **не**$_{[iNEG]}$ отдал свою жизнь.
On **ni za chto** **ne** otdal svoju zhizn'.

He **for nothing** **NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life

'He didn't die for anything.'
(Context: In fact, he's still alive.)

The predictions for this fronted structure contrast with those of our hybrid macro-/ micro-parametric approach, which predicts only an SN reading to be available here.

1.5 Summary of predictions

The two analyses that we have examined—with and without the abstract negative operator—make the same predictions when *ni za chto* appears alone and when the negative marker *ne* is added to precede it. However, a difference arises when *ni za chto* is fronted. When the abstract operator is assumed, only an SN reading is predicted to occur here; when the abstract operator is not assumed, this construction is predicted to remain ambiguous. Although this difference would not be visible in Haitian Creole, which is not a scrambling language, *ni za chto* may be fronted in Russian—allowing us to compare these two analyses.[5]

Table 2: Available readings predicted

	With abstract operator	Without abstract operator
Ni za chto alone	SN	SN
Ne + ni za chto, not fronted	SN and DN (ambiguous)	SN and DN (ambiguous)
Ne + ni za chto, fronted	SN	SN and DN (ambiguous)

[5] Another approach to negative concord which makes similar predictions to our hybrid macro-/ micro-parametric approach but does not make use of an abstract operator is proposed by Longobardi (2014). Under his analysis, both neg-words and negative markers may bear [+/-NOT] features in strict NC Romance languages. These features seem to function identically to iNEG and uNEG features. When applied to our examples in Russian where *ni za chto* precedes *ne*,
Longobardi's approach yields the same predictions as our approach. Crucially, however, it relies on a restriction claiming that negative markers are necessarily [-NOT] when they are preceded by a neg-word. Due to yet another restriction claiming that a neg-word may not be [+NOT] when it is below IP, Longobardi's approach fails to accurately predict the instances where *ni za chto* appears alone in Russian. Our approach is thus not only more accurate but also simpler, since no unmotivated restrictions on feature valuations are required. For more details, see Longobardi (2014).

2 Methods

By comparing native speaker judgments to the predictions modeled in table 2, we may empirically test which approach best accounts for available readings in Russian. This section will present the survey we conducted to evaluate these hypotheses.

2.1 Participants

Native Russian speakers were recruited to participate in a survey through Prolific. Two survey versions were administered. 24 participants took the first version, and 25 participants took the second version for a total of 49 respondents.

2.2 Design

The survey was provided in Russian and consisted of eight test contexts, into which target sentences containing *ni za chto* were inserted. Target sentences varied along two dimensions: number of negative elements and fronting. Target sentences contained either one negative element (*ni za chto*) or two negative elements (*ne* + *ni za chto*); [one] and [two] were therefore the possible values for the variable "negative elements". Target sentences also considered whether *ni za chto* was [fronted] or [not fronted]; these were the values for the variable "fronting".

Additionally, target sentences varied in their lexicalization. Some target sentences used a first-person singular subject and involved a context concerning spending $1000; others used a third person masculine singular subject and involved a context concerning a soldier going to war. This variation in lexicalization allowed us to reduce minimal pairs present in our survey so as not to unduly influence participants' judgments.

Target sentences were tested in contexts where they were predicted to fit in, as well as in contexts where they were predicted to not fit in. Test contexts were designed to support either a narrow focus SN reading, a broad focus SN reading, or a narrow focus DN reading; these three readings were the three possible values for the variable "context". "Focus" was treated as an independent variable valued as either [narrow] or [broad]; similarly, "available reading" was treated as an independent variable valued as [SN] or [DN]. The contextual felicity (CF) of each target sentence was measured as a dependent variable.

Two survey versions were administered, which differed in the order of presentation of the target sentences and the lexicalization of these target sentences. This allowed us to examine all syntactic constructions with the same lexicalization, while reducing minimal pairs provided to any single participant.

2.3 Materials

As previously described, four types of target sentences were each tested with two different subjects. All eight target sentences are provided in examples (i)–(iv):

(i) *Ni za chto* only (one negative element), not fronted:

a. Он отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**.
On otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto**.
He give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**

b. Я заплатил $1000 **ни за что**.
Ja zaplatil $1000 **ni za chto**.
I pay.1SG.PST.M $1000 **for nothing**

(ii) *Ni za chto* only (one negative element), fronted:

a. Он **ни за что** отдал свою жизнь.
On **ni za chto** otdal svoju zhizn'.
He **for nothing** give.3SG.PST.M his life

b. Я **ни за что** заплатил $1000.
Ja **ni za chto** zaplatil $1000.
I **for nothing** pay.1SG.PST.M $1000

(iii) *Ne + ni za chto* (two negative elements), not fronted:

a. Он **не** отдал свою жизнь **ни за что**.
On **ne** otdal svoju zhizn' **ni za chto**.
He **NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life **for nothing**

b. Я **не** заплатил $1000 **ни за что**.
Ja **ne** zaplatil $1000 **ni za chto**.
I **NEG** pay.1SG.PST.M $1000 **for nothing**

(iv) *Ni za chto + ne* (two negative elements), fronted:

a. Он **ни за что не** отдал свою жизнь.
On **ni za chto ne** otdal svoju zhizn'.
He **for nothing NEG** give.3SG.PST.M his life

b. Я **ни за что не** заплатил $1000.
Ja **ni za chto ne** zaplatil $1000.
I **for nothing NEG** pay.1SG.PST.M $1000

Each survey context was designed to elicit one of three possible readings. The survey contexts were also designed without Negative Verum Focus (see section 1.1). The sample contexts for each of these three readings were:

I. SN reading with narrow focus

The soldier was killed in battle. **[Target sentence here.]** The war was unjustified and only served to terrorize the native people.

Compatible target sentence: “He died for nothing.”

II. SN reading with broad focus

The soldier was ordered to risk his life by sneaking into the enemy camp, securing top-secret information and getting it back to headquarters. But he wasn’t willing to make the sacrifice. **[Target sentence here.]** In fact, he’s still alive. He’ll live to see another day.

Compatible target sentence: “He didn’t die for anything.”

III. DN reading with narrow focus

The soldier’s parents were heartbroken to learn that their son had been killed during the war. The government official who came to tell them the news said: “**[Target sentence here.]** Sacrificing his life ensured the freedom of his country.”

Compatible target sentence: “He didn’t die for nothing.”

The Russian translations of these contexts as well as a full list of the contexts used in our survey can be viewed in the appendix.

2.4 Procedure

The survey began with two attention check items, which were the same for both survey versions. Each was designed with one target sentence that clearly fit into its surrounding context and one that clearly didn’t. Participants were asked to judge (a) the contextual felicity (CF) and (b) the naturalness of target sentences. They were asked to use a scale of 1–6 to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed that (a) the target sentence was felicitous within (or “fit into”) the given context, and that (b) the target sentence sounded natural. A rating of 1 indicated strong disagreement, and a rating of 6 indicated strong agreement. Participants who responded at the wrong ends of the scale for these attention check items would be excluded from data analysis. All respondents performed as expected for the attention check items; therefore no participants were excluded from data analysis.

The attention check items were followed by eight test contexts, into which target sentences containing *ni za chto* were inserted. In contrast to the attention check items, the test contexts were varied for each version, as was the order of the appearance of the target sentences. Participants were asked the same questions about “CF” and “naturalness”, and were provided the same six-point scale as for the attention check items.

3 Results

To address the research questions elaborated in Section 1.2, we analyzed the native speaker judgments provided in response to our survey questions. Using the open source software R, we ran mixed effects models using the package lme4 and used the package multcomp to apply a Bonferroni adjustment. In all of our models, participants were included as a random effect; all other predictors were analyzed as fixed effects. Version was not a significant factor and therefore was not included.

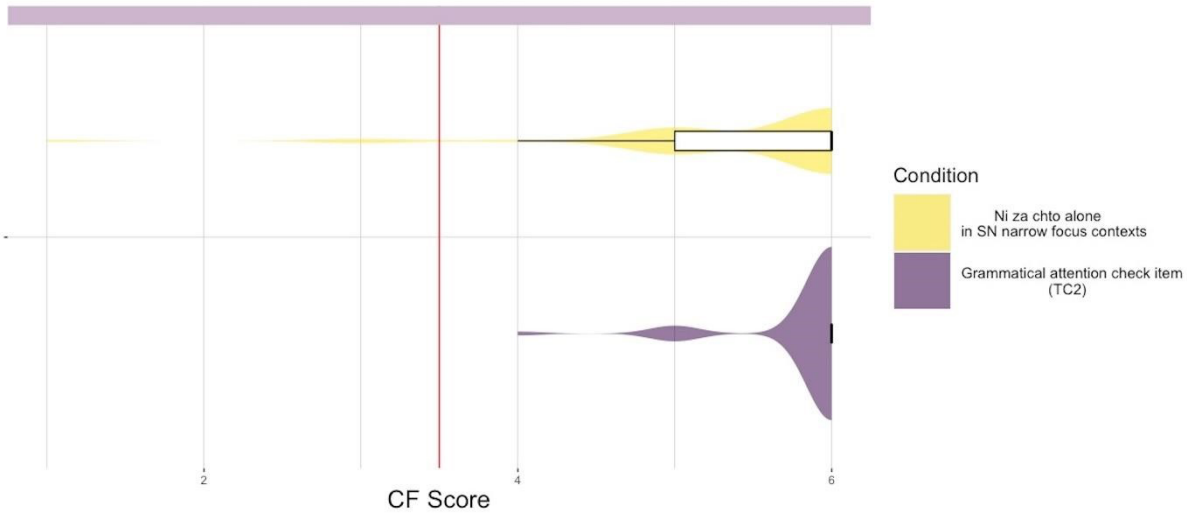
3.1 *Ni za chto* is self-licensing

In contrast with Russian's typical strict NC structure, where *ne* must combine with a negword to produce an SN reading, the results of our survey indicate that native speakers allow *ni za chto* by itself to introduce sentential negation: a majority of participants gave a high CF score to *ni za chto* alone in narrow focus SN contexts.[6] In fact, most participants strongly agreed that *ni za chto* alone fit into these contexts (see Figure 1). A regression comparing the CF scores for one of the attention check items (TC2)—which was an uncontroversially grammatical item where the target sentence was designed to fit in—to the CF scores for *ni za chto* alone in SN narrow focus contexts supports this conclusion statistically. With an estimate of 5.87, TC2 is clearly accepted by native Russian speakers (estimate = 5.87, SE = 0.08, z = 69.72, $p < 0.001$). At 5.6, the estimate for this target sentence with *ni za chto* alone is also very high,[7] showing that speakers accept *ni za chto* alone introducing sentential negation at a similarly favorable rate to the grammatical attention check item (estimate = 5.46, SE = 0.08, z = 64.87, $p < 0.001$). This acceptance supports the idea that *ni za chto* may bear an iNEG feature, as predicted by our hybrid macro-/micro-parametric account.

Figure 1: Ni za chto alone compared to TC2

[6] Fronted *ni za chto* is not considered in this section, as this section simply aims to establish that *ni za chto* alone is grammatical and results in an SN reading. With this goal in mind, the syntactic position of *ni za chto* within the matrix clause is irrelevant. Native speaker judgments show that *ni za chto* not fronted is considered more natural, so these constructions are analyzed here.

[7] There may be a variety of reasons why *ni za chto* alone is slightly lower rated than TC2 (the grammatical attention check item). For example, each attention check item was written as an entire target sentence-plus-context unit by our native speaker translator. In contrast, for our test items, target sentences were written separately (and verified by native speakers) and then inserted into contexts translated by our native speaker colleague. This difference could potentially explain the slight difference in CF score given to these two items. Also, the attention check items did not include negation, potentially making them easier to process than our test items, and thus perceived as more acceptable. Any of these differences could potentially explain the slight difference in CF score given to these two items. Importantly, native speakers still strongly agree that *ni za chto* alone fits into SN contexts—as 5.5 indicates strong agreement.



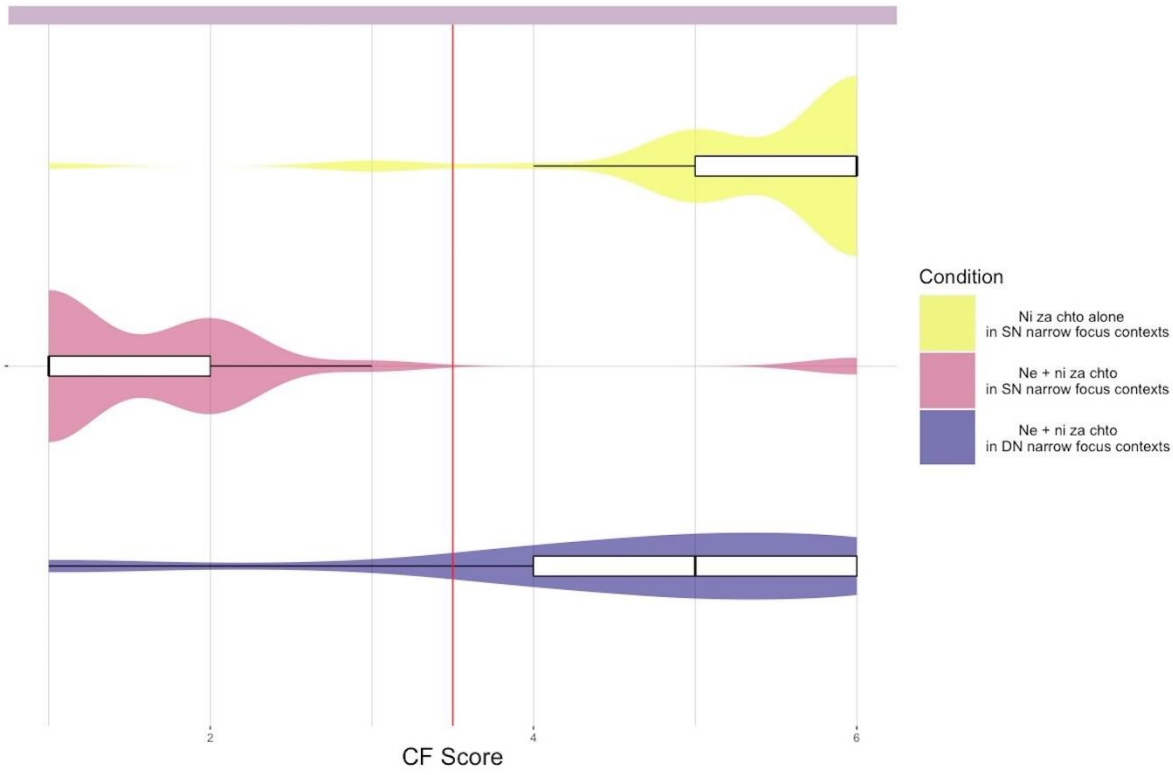
Further evidence that *ni za chto* alone may introduce negation comes from a second regression looking at CF scores (for target sentences in narrow focus contexts only) as a response to the predictor variable "negative elements" (i.e., one or two). Although two negative elements in the same matrix clause (*ne* + *ni za chto*) would be assumed to be required in a strict NC language (Giannakidou 2006), interestingly, this regression reveals that this construction is disfavored in comparison to *ni za chto* alone. The results indicate that an SN reading is actually improved in Russian when *ni za chto* appears alone (estimate = 3.73, SE = 0.22, z = 16.85, $p < 0.001$). Both of these pieces of evidence support the idea that *ni za chto* may bear an iNEG feature, as predicted by our hybrid macro-/microparametric account.

3.2 Adding the negative marker *ne*

Next, we ran a regression to determine whether DN readings were available when *ne* was introduced preceding *ni za chto*. We constructed a mixed effects model with CF scores as the response variable; "available reading" and "participant" were predictor variables in this model. This model returned a negative estimate for the predictor variable "available reading", demonstrating that an SN reading is disfavored in comparison to a DN reading in narrow focus contexts when two negative elements are present (estimate = -2.92, SE = 0.26, z = -11.42, $p < 0.001$). These results provide strong evidence that a DN reading is in fact available when *ne* is added with *ni za chto*.

Figure 2 demonstrates that participants accept a narrow focus SN reading given a syntactic construction with only *ni za chto*; however, when the negative marker *ne* is added to precede *ni za chto*, participants accept a narrow focus DN reading. This finding illustrates that DN readings exist within a strict NC language, challenging Giannakidou (2006)'s rigid definition of strict NC.

Figure 2: Ni za chto alone and ne + ni za chto (not fronted)

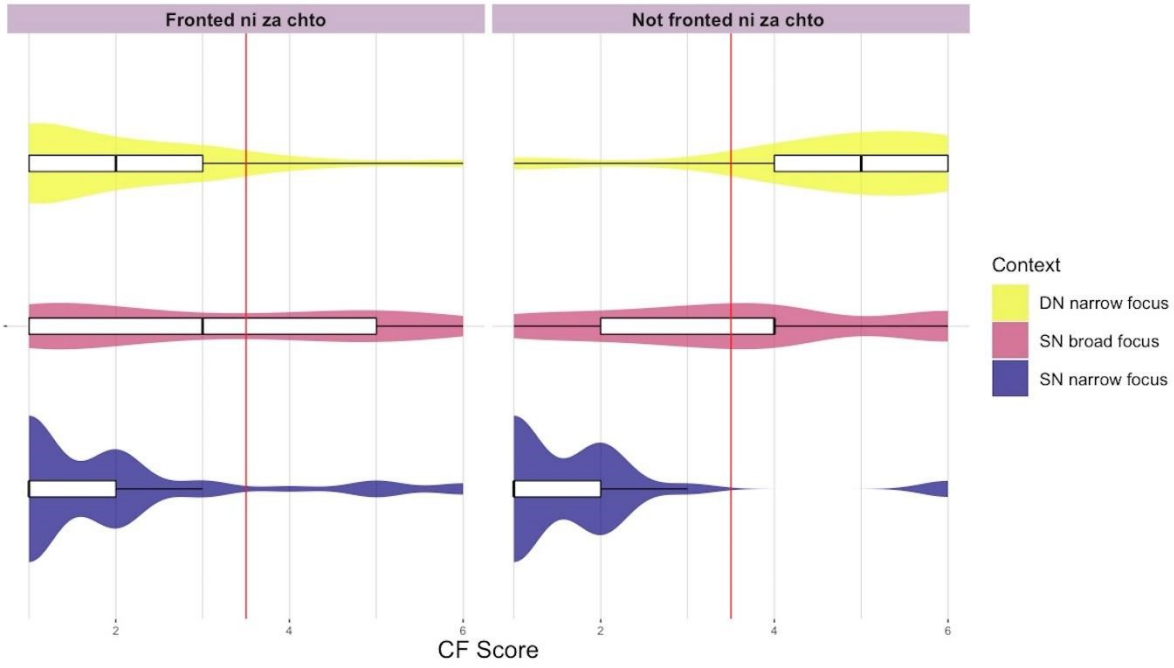


3.3 Fronting *ni za chto*

Finally, we ran a mixed effects model to see if fronting *ni za chto* to precede *ne* had an effect on the previously available narrow focus DN reading (shown in Section 3.2). This model treated CF scores (for target sentences with two negative elements only) as a response variable; "fronting", "context", and their interaction were treated as predictors.

A visualization of participants' responses is provided in Figure 3. A majority of participants gave fronted *ni za chto* + *ne* low CF scores in narrow focus DN contexts (top row, left). This contrasts strikingly with the high CF scores given to *ne* + *ni za chto* (not fronted) in the same contexts (top row, right). This difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), showing that fronting is a significant factor in the availability of narrow focus DN readings. It can be concluded that DN readings are no longer salient once *ni za chto* has been fronted to precede *ne*.

Figure 3: Ne + ni za chto



The results for our third mixed effects model are presented in table 3. Crucially, the effects of broad focus SN contexts, narrow focus SN contexts,[8] as well as the interaction effects between "fronting" and "context" for these two context types are all significant ($p < 0.001$). Although participants did not give fronted *ni za chto + ne* high CF scores in any of the three contexts, it received the highest CF scores in broad focus SN contexts, suggesting that this was the most salient reading for this syntactic construction. Together, these results demonstrate that Russian speakers differentiate between these context types once ni za chto has been fronted; they furthermore support the idea that fronting *ni za chto* blocks the DN reading and instead results in a broad focus SN reading.

[8] The high estimate for the interaction between "fronting" and narrow focus SN context is a result of the very low ratings given to target sentences with two neg-words in these contexts when *ni za chto* was not fronted. When *ni za chto* was fronted, there was a slight improvement in participant ratings for two neg-words in these contexts, resulting in this high positive estimate, even though participant CF scores for these target sentences in narrow focus SN contexts remained extremely low overall.

Table 3: Effect of context and fronting on CF scores among sentences with ne + ni za chto

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(>|z|)
Fronting	-2.59	0.28	-9.43	< 1e-04 ***
Broad focus SN context	-1.10	0.28	-4.01	0.00 ***
Narrow focus SN context	-2.92	0.28	-10.61	< 1e-04 ***
Fronted: broad focus SN context	2.04	0.39	5.25	< 1e-04 ***
Fronted: narrow focus SN context	2.78	0.39	7.14	< 1e-04 ***

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

4 Discussion

Based on the results of our survey, we propose that *ni za chto* is inherently optionally iNEG. We have shown that *ni za chto* alone introduces sentential negation, contrasting with Russian's typical strict NC structure. We have also shown that native Russian speakers find a DN reading to be salient when *ne* precedes *ni za chto* within the same clause, contradicting the prevailing definition of strict NC. Finally, we have shown that when *ni za chto* is fronted, the available DN reading is significantly weakened. We argue that this evidence shows that *ni za chto* may bear an iNEG feature. Furthermore, this collective data aligns with our predictions, as shown in section 1.4, and offers strong support for our hybrid macro-/microparametric analysis.

Although our results clearly demonstrated that native speakers did not allow a narrow focus DN reading once *ni za chto* had been fronted, these same native speakers did not give a high rating to this syntactic construction in SN contexts either. It is possible that fronted *ni za chto* + *ne* was not rated as highly in any of the contexts as the other constructions because it is less grammatically natural;[11] however, the significant differences between

[11] It was suggested to us that a broad focus SN reading is pragmatically odd in Russian in the past tense; this reading is improved in the conditional or future tense, such as in (iv):

(iv) Он **ни за что не** отдал бы свою жизнь.
On **ni za chto ne** otdal by svoju zhizn'.
He **for nothing NEG** give.3SG.PST.M COND his life
'He would never give his life.'

This seems to parallel English. Consider the following examples:

(v) English

a. I didn't pay $1000 for anything.

context types suggest that native speakers do in fact have preferences about the available reading for this fronted syntactic construction. As discussed in Blanchette (2017),[12] as well as Staum Casasanto & Sag (2008) and Staum Casasanto et al. (2010), gradient acceptability allows for insights about the mental grammar to be uncovered even when considering constructions viewed as highly unacceptable if native speaker judgments still significantly differ between these constructions. Even when considering an unnatural syntactic construction, our gradient CF scale reveals differences between the availability of a broad focus SN reading, a narrow focus SN reading, and a narrow focus DN reading once *ni za chto* has been fronted. Since these differences are significant, it may be concluded that when *ni za chto* is fronted, only a broad focus SN reading is available. This aligns with the predictions of our hybrid macro-/micro-parametric account (where only SN readings are available) while contradicting the predictions of an approach following Déprez (2016) (where both SN and DN readings are available). Based on this evidence, we argue that the narrow focus DN reading is blocked as a result of feature checking (once *ni za chto* has been fronted)—providing further support for our hybrid analysis of NC.

The asymmetry in available readings when *ni za chto* is either fronted (SN reading only) or not fronted (SN and DN readings) and *ne* is also in the matrix clause provides support for the existence of an abstract negative operator. Without an abstract operator, this asymmetry is difficult to explain. As we have established, an account similar to Déprez (2016)'s approach to Haitian Creole would require the negative marker to introduce semantic negation; to produce the DN reading that native speakers accept when *ni za chto* is not fronted, such an account would also require *ni za chto* to introduce semantically interpretable negation. Given that these two negative elements would both have the ability to introduce semantic negation under this account, it is unclear why fronting would have an effect on the available readings. Déprez's account therefore seems inadequate to account for our data. Furthermore, our hybrid analysis of NC, which makes use of an abstract negative operator, is more compatible with the evidence shown in Watanabe (2004): a Déprez-style analysis—which makes use of an elided negative marker to license fragment answers—would overgenerate and predict negative answers where they are not available

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a. I wouldn't pay $1000 for anything

b. I won't pay $1000 for anything.

Our own judgments, as well as the judgments of other English speaking colleagues, suggest that (*v.*b) and (*v.*c) are pragmatically better than (*v.*a), where (*v.*a) shows the interaction of a broad focus SN reading with the past tense. It is possible that the past tense is interfering with a broad focus SN reading here; the specifics of this interference are left to further research.

(see footnote 4). Considering this existing evidence in addition to our results, we argue that an abstract negative operator is necessary to account for negative concord.

[12] Blanchette (2017) uses gradient acceptability to look at NC within English, which is generally not accepted by speakers of Standard English. Using a gradient scale allows hierarchical distinctions to be made between nonstandard constructions, whereas a binary response scale would obscure this information. This methodology may therefore be used to show grammatical knowledge of constructions that may otherwise be rejected.

Alternatively, to account for the effect of fronting *ni za chto* shown in section 3.3, additional restrictions may be placed on feature valuation, as is suggested in Longobardi (2014) (see footnote 7). However, our hybrid macro-/micro-parametric analysis of NC easily accounts for the elimination of the DN reading when *ni za chto* is fronted to precede the negative marker. With the use of the abstract negative operator Op:iNEG, we can maintain that the negative marker *ne* is uninterpretably negative in Russian; its feature valuation does not have to change in order to correctly account for native speaker judgments.

Additionally, the availability of DN readings in Russian has wider implications for current analyses of negative concord. Zeijlstra's macro-parametric theory of NC precludes the existence of DN readings within strict NC languages in nearly all contexts. Alternatively, micro-parametric analyses of NC based on variation at the lexical level have been proposed to better account for language internal variation (Déprez 2011, Longobardi 2014). These accounts reject both an abstract negative operator and the macro-parameter [+/-NC]; however, these rejections do not seem necessary in light of our proposal.

While our proposal borrows from these micro-parametric accounts in assuming phrase-level variation, we argue that the macro-parametric divide between NC and DN language settings can be maintained. However, we challenge the rigid definition of strict NC assumed by Giannakidou (2006); furthermore, we provide evidence that DN readings exist within strict NC languages even outside of Negative Verum Focus contexts. Our data provides support for the idea that negative elements bear uNEG and iNEG features, as evidenced by *ni za chto*'s ability to introduce semantic negation and perform feature checking. Our data also demonstrates that there can be variability in the featural valuation of certain negative elements within strict NC languages, supporting the arguments given in Herburger 2001 and 2003. In contrast to proposals where all negative elements in strict NC languages are analyzed as having uNEG features, this proposal of an inherently optionally iNEG phrase accounts for apparent variation in available readings and allows for both SN and DN readings in a wider range of contexts than previously accounted for. With this proposal, we demonstrate that the foundation of Zeijlstra's macro-parametric proposal can be maintained while accounting for DN readings within a strict NC language.

We leave open the question of how *ni za chto* as a phrase is bearing an iNEG feature. If *ni za chto* is the only negative element that displays feature checking, it is most likely that *ni za chto* has lexicalized. On the other hand, if this behavior was apparent with other freestanding neg-words, as discussed in Fitzgibbons (2010), the second hypothesis could elegantly account for this. More data would be needed with other PP+neg-word combinations to provide support for one or the other of these two analyses; specifically, the effect of fronting should be tested with other freestanding neg-words which allow for DN readings. Additionally, we leave open the question of whether sentences with freestanding neg-words and negative markers are ambiguous between SN and DN readings in Russian. While Fitzgibbons (2010) reports that negative marker + freestanding negword combinations cannot be ambiguous between SN and DN readings, our evidence suggests that *ne* + *ni za chto* is ambiguous for at least some speakers. However, due to the potential negative effect of the past tense on a broad focus SN reading (see footnote 11), this evidence is not conclusive. Determining if these negative marker + freestanding negword combinations are ambiguous is left to future research, along with an exploration of the effect of tense on the availability of different negation readings. A reviewer mentioned that prosody is also crucial to understand ambiguity;

however, we do not currently have the necessary data for a prosodic analysis and leave this to future work.

It also follows from our proposal that more featural variation may exist in other strict NC languages than previously described. Our proposal allows for the possibility of phrases that bear iNEG features in other strict NC languages as well. We have preliminary evidence of similarly behaving neg-words in both Czech and Mauritian Creole, for example (see footnote 5). This consequently predicts more variation in available negation readings within strict NC languages. Describing the cross-linguistic variation of available negation readings in strict NC languages would require more data than we currently have available. As this article has only focused on Russian, we leave this matter to further research.

Abbreviations

1 = first person, 3 = third person, COND = conditional, M = masculine, NEG = negative marker, PST = past, PTCP = participle, SG = singular

Supplementary Files

Supplementary file 1: Appendix. Survey contexts. [Included below for the purposes of this submission.]

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Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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Appendix: Survey contexts

SN narrow focus	
I. The soldier was killed in battle. **[Sentence here.]** The war was unjustified and only served to terrorize the native people. I'. My favorite band's concert was sold out, but I found someone online who was selling two tickets. I was so excited to see the show! But the "concert tickets" I bought were a scam, and I wasn't able to get the money back. **[Sentence here.]**	I. Солдат был убит в бою. **[Sentence here.]** Эта война была бессмысленной и жестокой и не достигла ничего кроме угнетения мирного населения. I'. Билеты на концерт моей любимой группы были распроданы, но я нашёл в интернете человека, который продавал два билета. Я так хотел попасть на этот концерт! Но "билеты", которые я купил, оказались поддельными, и мне не удалось вернуть потерянные деньги. **[Sentence here.]**
SN broad focus	
II. The soldier was ordered to risk his life by sneaking into the enemy camp, securing top-secret information and getting it back to headquarters. But he wasn't willing to make the sacrifice. **[Sentence here.]** In fact, he's still alive. He'll live to see another day. II'. I really wanted to buy this fancy laptop, a nice laptop case, and a new mouse. All together, they cost $1000! **[Sentence here.]** In fact, the money is still in my pocket. I'll spend it more practically.	II. Солдат получил приказ, рискуя жизнью, пробраться во вражеский лагерь, чтобы добыть секретную информацию. Но он не был готов рисковать своей жизнью. **[Sentence here.]** Он и до сих пор жив и здоров. II'. Я очень хотел купить тот новомодный компьютер, а ещё чехол и мышь для него. Но все вместе они стоили тысячу долларов! **[Sentence here.]** А тысяча долларов у меня осталась. Потрачу её на что-нибудь нужное.
DN narrow focus	

III. The soldier's parents were heartbroken to learn that their son had been killed during the war. The government official who came to tell them the news said: "**[Sentence here.]** Sacrificing his life ensured the freedom of his country."	III. Родители солдата были в отчаянии оттого, что потеряли своего сына на войне. Чиновник, который сообщил им о его гибели, сказал: "**[Sentence here.]** Он отдал свою жизнь за свободу нашей страны."
III'. I spent $1000 on tickets to the World Cup. When my favorite team lost, some of my friends told me I had wasted my money. But I disagreed. I told them: "**[Sentence here.]** Going to a World Cup game was an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime experience!"	III'. Я потратил тысячу долларов на билеты на чемпионат мира. Когда моя любимая команда проиграла, мои друзья сказали мне, что я пустил деньги на ветер. Но я не согласился и ответил им на это: "**[Sentence here.]** Я всё равно отлично провёл время! Не каждый день удаётся попасть на чемпионат мира!"