

# Negative Objects, NEG-shift, and Cross-linguistic Microvariation

## 1 Negation

In all the Scandinavian languages, i.e. Danish (Da), Faroese (Fa), Finland Swedish (FS), Icelandic (Ic), Norwegian (No), and Swedish (Sw), negation of a clause with an indefinite object can be expressed with (some version of) the sentence medial adverb *ikke* ‘not’. The same is the case for English (En):

- (1) a. Da: Hun har ikke læst nogen bøger.  
b. Fa: Hon hevur ikki lisið nakrar bøkur.  
c. FS: Hon har inte læst några böcker.  
d. Ic: Hún hefur ekki lesið neinar bækur.  
e. No: Ho har ikkje lest nokon bøker.  
f. Sw: Hon har inte læst några böcker.  
g. En: She has not read any books.

The same meaning (more or less) can be expressed with a negative object consisting of the negative indefinite quantifier/determiner *ingen* ‘no’ and an NP (cf. Koch Christensen 1986, 1987; Faarlund et al. 1997; Hansen 1977; Holmes & Hinchcliffe 1994; Jónsson 1996; Petersen et al. 1998; Rögnvaldsson 1987, and Svenonius 2002):

- (2) a. Da: Hun læste ingen bøger.  
b. Fa: Hon las ongar bøkur.  
c. FS: Hon läste inga böcker.  
d. Ic: Hún las engar bækur.  
e. No: Ho las ingen bøker.  
f. Sw: Hon läste inga böcker.  
g. En: She read no books.

In all the Scandinavian languages except Finland Swedish, the negative object must be outside VP to license sentential negation (as in (4)). I shall refer to this movement out of VP as *Negative Shift* or *NEG-shift*.

In main clauses with non-compound tense, i.e. with the main verb in V2 position, NEG-shift is string vacuous, as in (3), whereas in clauses with compound tense, NEG-shift moves the object across the main verb, as in (4)<sup>1</sup>:

- (3) Da: Han læste<sub>v</sub> ingen bøger<sub>i</sub> [VP t<sub>v</sub> t<sub>i</sub> ]  
 He read no books
- (4) Da: Han har<sub>v</sub> ingen bøger<sub>i</sub> [VP t<sub>v</sub> [VP læst t<sub>i</sub> ] ]  
 He has no books read
- 

I assume the target of this operation to be spec-NEGP (see (7) below) and that NEG-shift is motivated by (a version of) the *Negative Criterion*, or *NEG-criterion*:

- (5) **The NEG-criterion** (original)  
 Each NEG X° must be in spec-head relation with a NEG operator and vice versa.  
 (Cf. Haegeman & Zanuttini 1991: 244 and Haegeman 1995: 106)

The NEG-criterion is thus satisfied by filling spec-NEGP – either by direct insertion of the sentential negation (e.g. Da *ikke*) or by moving a negative object into it. Both operations will check the [NEG] feature on NEG°.

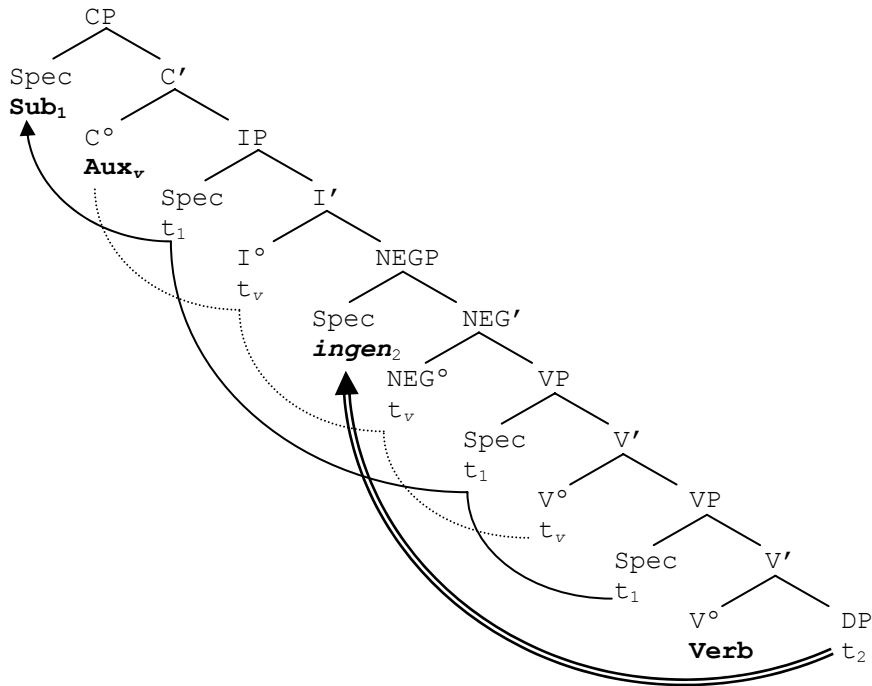
However, feature checking is not crucially dependent on a spec-head relation – it is but one possible checking configuration. Furthermore, in case of pied piping of a preposition (e.g. as in (25)b below: [PP P° [DP *ingen* NP]]), the negative object itself is not in spec-head relation with NEG°. I propose to revise the NEG-criterion to accommodate this:

- (6) **The NEG-criterion** (revised)  
 The [NEG] feature must be checked on NEG°.  
 (See also Christensen 2003, section 3.2).

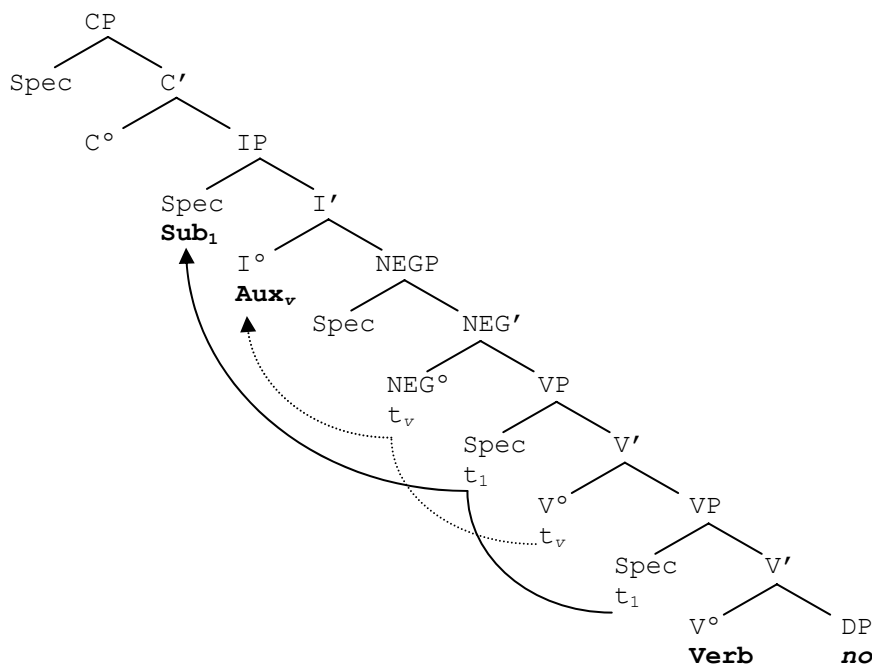
<sup>1</sup> All example clauses are to be interpreted in the sense where they can take a negative tag, such as *and neither did she* or *but she did*. This rules out possible instances of trifling negation, cf. Svenonius (2002: 2).

Danish NEG-shift (e.g. *han har ingen bøger læst* as in (4) above) is illustrated in (7) below. The structure in (8) illustrates the English pattern with the negative object in situ (e.g. *he has read no books*).

(7) Danish:



(8) English:



## 2 The Data

### 2.1 Main Clauses

The languages initially fall into three groups.

#### Group 1

In Danish, Faroese, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish, NEG-shift is obligatory. It takes place across the main verb in situ in sentences with auxiliary verbs, as the following examples show. These languages thus allow structures like both (3) and (4) above (as well as (1)):

- (9) Da: a. \*Vi har da set ingen fugle  
b. Vi har da ingen fugle<sub>1</sub> set t<sub>1</sub>  
*We have though no birds seen* (Hansen 1977: 58)

- (10) Ic: a. \*Jón hefur lesið engar bækur  
b. Jón hefur engar bækur<sub>1</sub> lesið t<sub>1</sub>  
*Jón has no books read* (Rögnvaldsson 1987, (31))

- (11) Fa: a. \*Eg havi sæð ongan  
b. Eg havi ongan<sub>1</sub> sæð t<sub>1</sub>  
*I have nobody seen* (Lockwood 2002: 125)

- (12) No: a. \*Studentene har lest ingen romaner  
b. Studentene har ingen romaner<sub>1</sub> lest t<sub>1</sub>  
*The students have no novels read* (Koch Christensen 1986: 1, (1) & (2))

- (13) Sw: a. \*Han hade sett ingenting  
b. Han hade ingenting<sub>1</sub> sett t<sub>1</sub>  
*He had nothing seen* (Platzack 1998: 134, (5:29))

## Group 2

In colloquial Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish, grouped together as Scan2, NEG-shift can only apply in clauses without auxiliary verbs. According to Svenonius (2002: 2), Norwegian NEG-shift in main clauses with compound tense is not possible in colloquial speech but it is found in literary or formal styles; according to Faarlund et al. (1997: 884), NEG-shift in compound tense is stylistically marked, while Koch Christensen (1987) makes no such distinction. Holmes & Hinchcliffe (1994: 524) make the same claim for Swedish, and the same is felt by some Danish speakers. In other words: (3) is grammatical, (4) is not (repeated here as (14)a and (14)c, respectively):

- (14) Scan2: a. Han læste ingen bøger  
He read no books
- b. \*Han har læst ingen bøger
- c. \*Han har ingen bøger<sub>1</sub> læst t<sub>1</sub>  
He has no books read

## Group 3

Finland Swedish, unlike all the other Scandinavian languages, allows the negative object to license sentential negation in situ. NEG-shift never applies:

- (15) FS: a. Jag har haft ingenting att skaffa med den saken.  
\*b. Jag har ingenting<sub>1</sub> haft t<sub>1</sub> att skaffa med den saken.  
I have nothing had to do with that case.the  
(Hulthén 1947: 130)

The same is found in English. While Finland Swedish is a V2 language, in English the main verb never moves out of VP (or at least not high enough to have any empirical reflex relevant for the present matter<sup>2</sup>), regardless of the presence or absence of auxiliaries. Sentential negation is licensed either by *not* (as in (1)g above) or by the object in situ:

- (16) En: a. Jack [VP received no letters]  
b. \*Jack no letters<sub>1</sub> [VP received t<sub>1</sub> ]
- (17) En: a. Jack has [VP received no letters]  
b. \*Jack has no letters<sub>1</sub> [VP received t<sub>1</sub> ]

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<sup>2</sup> Possessive *have* may be an exception. In certain variations of English, it doesn't take *do*-insertion as in Standard English but moves to a position preceding negation: *I haven't any money* vs. *I don't have any money*.

## 2.2 Embedded clauses

In the analysis below, I concentrate on main clauses as examples with embedded clauses would be completely parallel. In Scandinavian (except Icelandic), the finite verb remains in V<sup>o</sup> in embedded clauses. In Scan2, NEG-shift cannot cross the verb, cf. (14) above, and embedded clauses are always constructed with *ikke...nogen* ‘not...any’:

- (18) Scan2: a. \*... at jeg ingen bøger<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> havde læst t<sub>1</sub> ]  
                   that I no books had read
- b. \*... at jeg ingen bøger<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> læste t<sub>1</sub> ]  
                   that I no books read
- c. ... at jeg ikke [<sub>VP</sub> læste nogen bøger]  
                   that I not read any books

In the other Mainland Scandinavian languages and Faroese, NEG-shift applies across the verb:

- (19) Da/Fa/No/Sw: a. ... at jeg ingen bøger<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> havde læst t<sub>1</sub> ]  
                   that I no books had read
- b. ... at jeg ingen bøger<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> læste t<sub>1</sub> ]  
                   that I no books read

In Icelandic, the finite verb always moves to I<sup>o</sup> above NEGP. In compound tense, the pattern is parallel to that in main clauses, as NEG-shift crosses the main verb but not the auxiliary. In non-compound tense, NEG-shift only crosses the trace of the verb as in main clauses:

- (20) Ic: a. ... að ég hef<sub>v</sub> engar bækur<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>v</sub> lesið t<sub>1</sub> ]  
                   that I have no books read
- b. ... að ég las<sub>v</sub> engar bækur<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>v</sub> t<sub>1</sub> ]  
                   that I read no books

In Finland Swedish and English, NEG-shift never applies across the verb:

- (21) FS: Som jag [<sub>VP</sub> hade ingen brådska], stannade jag kvar.  
           As I had no hurry stayed I back  
           (“As I was in no hurry, I stayed where I was”)

(Hulthén 1947: 130)

- (22) En: a. ... that I did not [<sub>VP</sub> read any books]  
           b. ... that I [<sub>VP</sub> read no books ]

## 2.3 Prepositions

When the object is the complement of a preposition, the languages differ a bit further.

### Group 1.a

In Faroese and Icelandic, the NEG-criterion is satisfied by preposition stranding. NEG-shift applies across the licensing preposition:

(23) Ic: a. Jón hefur ekki talað **við** neinn  
Jón has not spoken to anyone

b. \*Jón hefur talað **við** engan

c. Jón hefur engan talað **við**  
Jón has no-one spoken to

(Jónsson 1996: 83, (105))

(24) Fa: a. Hon hevur ikki snakkað **við** nakran  
She has not talked to anyone

b. \*Hon hevur snakkað **við** ongan

c. Hon hevur ongan snakkað **við**  
She has no-one talked with

(Zakaris Hansen, p.c.)

### Group 1.b

There seems to be a dialectal difference in the preferred repair strategy in Icelandic. According to Gunnar Hrafn Hrafnbjargarson and Jóhanna Barðdal (p.c.), pied piping is preferred. I refer to this dialect or variant as Icelandic2:

(25) Ice2: a. Jón hefur ekki talað **við** neinn  
Jón has not spoken to anyone

b. \*Jón hefur talað **við** engan

c. Jón hefur **við** engan talað  
Jón has with no-one spoken

### Group 1.c

In Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish, NEG-shift is blocked. In order to satisfy the NEG-criterion, lexical substitution (neutralisation) of *ingen* ‘no’ by *ikke...nogen* ‘not any’ is applied:

(26) Da: a. Jeg har ikke peget **på** nogen  
I have not pointed at anyone

b. \*Jeg har peget **på** ingen

c. \*Jeg har ingen peget **på**  
I have no-one pointed at

(27) No: a. Studentene leser ikke om noen svenske forfattere  
*The students read not about any Swedish writers*

b. \*Studentene leser om ingen sv. forfattere

c. \*Studentene leser ingen sv. forfattere om  
*The students read no Sw. writers about*

(Koch Christensen 1987: 6, (13) & (13)'; 4, (20))

(28) Sw: a. Han har inte pratad **med** någon  
*He has not talked with anyone*

b. \*Han har pratad **med** ingen

c. \*Han har ingen pratad **med**  
*He has no-one talked with*

(cf. Holmes & Hinchliffe 1994: 90)

## Group 2

Recall that, in Scan2, *ingen* is not possible in clauses with auxiliary verbs. In fact, as with Group 1.c, *ingen* is not possible as the complement of a preposition either:

(29) Scan2: a. Han læste ikke i nogen bøger  
*He read not in any books*

b. \*Han læste i ingen bøger  
*He read no books*

c. \*Han har læst **i** ingen bøger

d. \*Han har ingen bøger læst **i**

e. \*Han har **i** ingen bøger læst  
*He has in no books read*

## Group 3

In English and Finland Swedish the negative object stays in-situ.

(30) En: a. John has not talked **to** anyone

b. John has talked **to** no-one

c. \*John has no-one talked **to**

(31) FS: a. Jag hittade inte **på** någonting  
*I found not on anything*

b. Jag hittade **på** ingenting

c. \*Jag hittade ingenting **på**  
*I found nothing on*

(“I didn’t think of anything”)

(Hulthén 1944: 124)

## 2.4 Summary

The table below is a summary of the languages discussed and the various repair strategies applied in these languages to circumvent potential blocking effects on NEG-shift by the licensing verb or preposition.

### (32) NEG-shift:

Group	Language	NEG-shift			Applicability
		Across $t_v$	across Verb	across Preposition	
[1.a]	Fa, Ic	✓	✓	✓ Stranding	Free ↑ ↓ Blocked
[1.b]	Ice2	✓	✓	✗ Pied piping	
[1.c]	Da, No, Sw	✓	✓	✗ Substitution	
[2]	Scan2	✓	✗ Substitution	✗ Substitution	
[3]	FS, En	✗ NEG in situ	✗ NEG in situ	✗ NEG in situ	

This variation in NEG-shift and repair strategies lends itself to an Optimality-theoretic (OT) analysis. Consider next the list of relevant constraints before turning to the analysis itself.

## 3 Constraints

The variation in NEG-shift can be accounted for by different rankings of the following six universal violable constraints:

### (33) NEGCRIT

The [NEG] feature must be checked on NEG°.

### (34) STAY

Economy of derivation / \*TRACE.

(In the tableaux below, only violations of STAY caused by NEG-shift are indicated.)

### (35) V-LICENSE (V-LIC)

An object must be licensed under c-command by either its selecting V° or the trace of this V°.  
(Vikner's 2001: 328 LICENSING)

### (36) P-LICENSE (P-LIC)

An object must be licensed under c-command by either its selecting P° or the trace of this P°.  
(A subcase of Vikner's 2001: 328 LICENSING)

“No preposition stranding”

### (37) IDENTIO

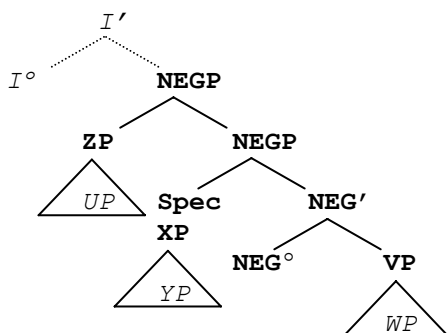
The output elements (lexical material) must be identical to the input elements  
“No substitution”

(38) **MINIMAL**

Checking must take place within the minimal domain / \*PERCOLATION<sup>3</sup>  
“No pied piping”

The minimal domain of X is X<sup>o</sup>, spec-XP, the complement of X<sup>o</sup>, and elements adjoined to X<sup>o</sup> or XP. The minimal domain of NEG<sup>o</sup> is illustrated in (39) below (leaving head adjunction aside). The italicized elements (I', I<sup>o</sup>, UP, YP, and WP) are outside the minimal domain:

(39) The minimal domain of NEG:



Assuming that VP is a phase/barrier, a checking relation cannot be established between NEG<sup>o</sup> and the negative object in situ. Thus, MINIMAL is not violated by VP-internal objects like e.g. *no-one* in (30)b above – NEGCRIT is.

I assume the input to consist of a lexical array (LA) plus a logical form (LF). In all the tableaux below, the input contains a version of *ingen/no*. When the input contains *ikke/not*, the ‘faithful’ candidates, i.e. (a1), (b1), (c1), and (d1), are always optimal as they violate neither IDENTIO nor any of the other constraints.

<sup>3</sup> Heck (2001) has argued for an analysis of pied piping along the same lines and MINIMAL and P-LICENSE are (more or less) equivalent to his LOCALITY CONDITION ON CHECKING and PP-ISLAND, respectively.

## 4 OT Analysis

### 4.1 Faroese and Icelandic [Group 1.a]

(40) NEG-shift from VP

- |   |            |                                      |
|---|------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. Across verb:                           | <i>Yes</i> | (The (a) competition in the tableau) |
| b. Across $t_v$ :                         | <i>Yes</i> | (The (b) competition)                |
| c. {NEGCrit, IDENTIO} » {V-LICENSE, STAY} |            | (a & b → c)                          |

(41) NEG-shift from PP

- |  |            |                                |
|--|------------|--------------------------------|
| a. Across P:                               | <i>Yes</i> | (the (c) and (d) competitions) |
| b. {NEGCrit, IDENTIO, MINIMAL} » P-LICENSE |            | (a → b)                        |

**Tableau 1: Fa, Ic**

	VP Input: <i>enga</i>	NEG CRIT	IDENT IO	MINI MAL	P- LIC	V- LIC	ST AY
a1	S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP <i>ekki</i> [VP V <i>neina</i> NP]]		*!				
a2	*S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP [VP V <i>enga</i> NP]]	*!					
☞ a3	S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP <i>enga</i> NP [VP V t ]]					*	*
b1	S V [NEGP <i>ekki</i> [VP $t_v$ <i>neina</i> NP]]		*!				
b2	*S V [NEGP [VP $t_v$ <i>enga</i> NP]]	*!					
☞ b3	S V [NEGP <i>enga</i> NP [VP $t_v$ t ]]						*
	PP Input: <i>enga</i>	NEG CRIT	IDENT IO	MINI MAL	P- LIC	V- LIC	ST AY
c1	S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP <i>ekki</i> [VP V [PP P <i>neinni</i> NP]]]		*!				
c2	*S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP [VP V [PP P <i>engri</i> NP]]]	*!					
☞ c3	S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP <i>engri</i> NP [VP V [PP P t ]]]				*		*
c4	*S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP P <i>engri</i> NP [VP V t ]]			*!		*	*
d1	S V [NEGP <i>ekki</i> [VP $t_v$ [PP P <i>neinni</i> NP]]]		*!				
d2	*S V [NEGP [VP $t_v$ [PP P <i>engri</i> NP]]]	*!					
☞ d3	S V [NEGP <i>engri</i> NP [VP $t_v$ [PP P t ]]]				*		*
d4	*S V [NEGP P <i>engri</i> NP [VP $t_v$ t ]]			*!			*

In Faroese and Icelandic, NEG-shift applies across both verb and verb trace and no repair strategy is necessary. V-LICENSE and STAY are violated in order to satisfy NEGCrit and IDENTIO, cf. candidates (a3) and (b3), and the relevant constraints are ranked as in (40)c.

No repair strategy is needed for PPs because NEG-shift applies across the licensing preposition. In (c3) and (d3), P-LICENSE (“no stranding”) is violated in order to satisfy NEGCrit, IDENTIO (“no substitution”), and MINIMAL (“no pied piping”).







## 4.5 English and Finland Swedish [Group 3]

(51) NEG-shift from VP

- a. Across verb: *No* → Lexical Substitution: *No*
- b. Across  $t_v$ : *No* → Lexical Substitution: *No*
- c. {IDENTIO, V-LICENSE, STAY} » NEGCRIT

(52) NEG-shift from PP

- a. Across P: *No* → Lexical Substitution: *No* → Pied piping: *No*
- b. {P-LICENSE, IDENTIO, MINIMAL} » NEGCRIT

**Tableau 5: En, FS**

	VP Input: <i>no/ingen</i>	P- LIC	MINI MAL	V- LIC	IDENT IO	ST AY	NEG CRIT
a1	S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP <i>inte</i> [VP V <i>någon</i> NP]]				*!		
☞ a2	S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP [VP V <i>ingen</i> NP]]						*
a3	*S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP <i>ingen</i> NP [VP V t]]			*!		*	
b1	S V [NEGP <i>inte</i> [VP $t_v$ <i>någon</i> NP]]				*!		
☞ b2	S V [NEGP [VP $t_v$ <i>ingen</i> NP]]						*
b3	*S V [NEGP <i>ingen</i> NP [VP $t_v$ t]]					*!	
	PP Input: <i>no/ingen</i>	P- LIC	MINI MAL	V- LIC	IDENT IO	ST AY	NEG CRIT
c1	S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP <i>inte</i> [VP V [PP P <i>någon</i> NP]]]				*!		
☞ c2	S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP [VP V [PP P <i>ingen</i> NP]]]						*
c3	*S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP <i>ingen</i> NP [VP V [PP P t]]]	*!				*	
c4	*S V <sub>aux</sub> [NEGP P <i>ingen</i> NP [VP V t]]		*!	*		*	
d1	S V [NEGP <i>inte</i> [VP $t_v$ [PP P <i>någon</i> NP]]]				*!		
☞ d2	S V [NEGP [VP $t_v$ [PP P <i>ingen</i> NP]]]						*
d3	*S V [NEGP <i>ingen</i> NP [VP $t_v$ [PP P t]]]	*!				*	
d4	*S V [NEGP P <i>ingen</i> NP [VP $t_v$ t]]		*!			*	

NEG-shift is blocked by the verb but lexical substitution is not allowed. Violations of IDENTIO and V-LICENSE are equally worse than violating NEGCRIT and (a2) is optimal. Because STAY outranks NEGCRIT, NEG-shift doesn't take place across the verb trace in (b3).

The same goes for PPs. IDENTIO, P-LICENSE, and MINIMAL all outrank NEGCRIT so both lexical substitution (c1)/(d1), stranding (c3)/(d3), and pied piping (c4)/(d4) are out and the optimal solution is to have *ingen* in situ as in (c2)/(d2).

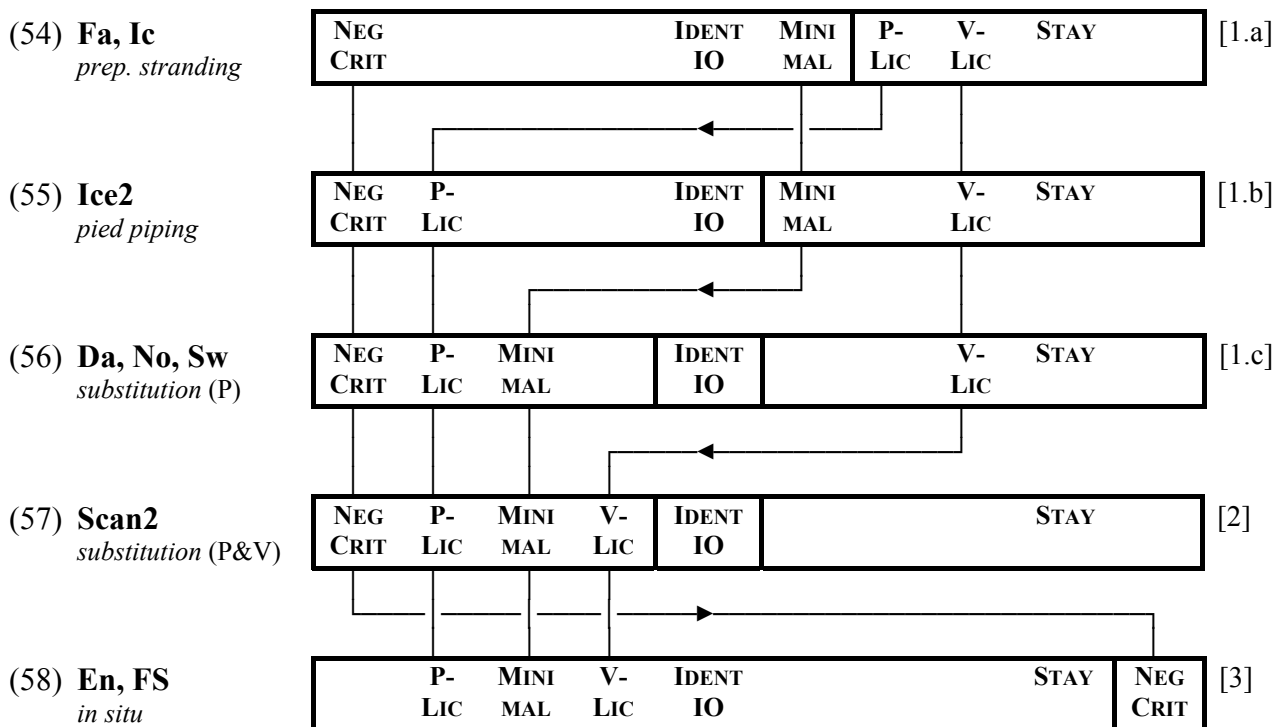
(53) a. Scan2: NEGCRIT, P-LIC, MINIMAL, V-LIC » IDENTIO » STAY

b. En, FS: P-LIC, MINIMAL, V-LIC, IDENTIO, STAY » NEGCRIT

In English, unlike Finland Swedish, the (b) and (d) competitions are actually not available because the main verb never leaves V°. Because English has *do*-insertion, the (a) and (b) competitions are identical and so are (c) and (d).

## 5 Parametric Variation

The parametric variation in terms of constraint reranking can be illustrated in a box diagram, which makes it clear that this variation is rather minimal.



The differences between the languages are accounted for by movement a single constraint (i.e. reranking) plus differences in crucial constraint rankings (adding or removing ‘walls’ in the diagram).

## 6 Conclusion

I have presented data that show an interesting variation in the licensing of sentential negation by NEG-shift across verbs and prepositions in English and the Scandinavian languages. English and Finland Swedish are much more conservative than the other languages, which license NEG-shift to varying degrees.

By treating the NEG-criterion as a violable constraint instead of an absolute principle in the analysis, the variation could be accounted for by minimal variation in the ranking of only six universal violable constraints.

If and only if NEGCRIT outranks STAY, the language has NEG-shift. The different preferences for pied piping, preposition stranding, or lexical substitution (neutralisation) can be derived from different rankings of P-LICENSE, MINIMAL, V-LICENSE, and IDENTIO.

## 7 References

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