PERFECT AND NEGATION:
EVIDENCE FROM LITHUANIAN AND SUNDRY LANGUAGES

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Theoretically, two mutual scope relations between the perfect and negation are possible (McCawley 1999, de Swart & Molendijk 1999):

NEG > PERF: ‘a past situation V is not currently relevant’ (“upper” negation)
PERF > NEG: ‘a past situation not-V is currently relevant’ (“lower” negation)

In most European languages which have perfect as a separate grammatical category distinct from (perfective) past, e.g. in English, Bulgarian and Italian, there is only one morphosyntactic position of negation in the verbal domain, covering both the upper and the lower interpretations, cf. ex. (1) and (2). Ex. (2) is roughly paraphrasable as “I am in a state resulting from not sleeping for four days”.

A different situation is observed in Lithuanian (Baltic). In this language the perfect consists of an active past participle of the lexical verb and the ‘be’-auxiliary and expresses resultative and experiential meanings (Geniušienė, Nedjalkov 1988). In contrast to English and Bulgarian, in Lithuanian the negative prefix ne- can attach both to the auxiliary and to the participle, formally distinguishing between the upper and the lower interpretations, cf. (3).

The distinction between the two types of negated perfect in Lithuanian is fairly robust, though the semantic difference between them is sometimes quite subtle, cf. (4). The “lower” negation in (4b) implies that “not reading this book” is a salient property of the subject, e.g. something to be ashamed of, while (4a) is a neutral statement. This is in accord with the general tendency to use the “lower” negation when “not-V” can be construed as a situation with non-trivial consequences (e.g. “not-sleep”, “not-eat” etc., cf. Stockwell, Schachter & Partee 1973: 250–251). Even double negation of the perfect with the interpretation “it is not the case that there has been not-V” is possible, cf. (5).

From an areal perspective, we can observe that the closely related Latvian and Latgalian mostly pattern with the Western European languages, and not with Lithuanian, usually banning the negation on the participle in perfect constructions and allowing the “lower” interpretation when negation attaches to the auxiliary, cf. (6). By contrast, Belorussian and North-West Russian dialects, which have a kind of periphrastic (plu)perfect (Kuz’mina & Nemčenko 1971, Mackevič & Grinaveckienė 1993, Wiemer & Giger 2005), allow the double attachment of negation, like Lithuanian, which might even suggest areal influence, cf. parallel Lithuanian and Belorussian examples in (7). On the other hand, Baltic Finnic languages such as Estonian and Votic express the “lower” negation of the perfect by means of a special abessive infinitive (Tamm 2011: 861–862, 875–876), cf. (8).

Double position of negation in perfect constructions is also attested in various languages of Eurasia, e.g. in Nakh-Dagestanian and in Japanese, as well as on the fringes of Standard Average European (e.g. in Irish English or in Spanish, and, marginally, in Standard English as well, cf. (9) from Zanuttini 1996: 189).

This study shows that while from a purely logical stand the “lower” scope of negation with respect to the perfect can well be universal, languages differ in whether they have morphosyntactic means to overtly distinguish between these two semantic construals, as well
as in the extent to which they employ such means. Lithuanian, in contrast to most European languages, presents a clear example of a language where this difference in semantic scope is reflected in the morphosyntax in the most iconic way.

Examples:

(1) a. English: *I have not worked for the State Security.*  
   b. Bulgarian: *Ne sâm rabotil za Dâržavna Sigurnost.* ‘id.’

(2) a. English: *I have not slept for four days.*  
   b. Bulgarian: *Ne sâm spal ot četiri dni.* ‘id.’

Lithuanian

(3) a. *Niekada ne miegoj lauke.* ‘I have never slept outdoors.’  
   b. *Jau dvi dienas esu nemiegoję.* ‘I have not slept for two days already.’

(4) a. *Ne su skaitę šios knygos.* ‘I have not read this book.’  
   b. *Esu ne skaitę šios knygos.* ‘id.’

(5) *Niekada nesu nepadėję zmogui vien dėl to, kad jis yra vienos ar kitos partijos narys.*  
   ‘It has never been the case that I didn’t help a person just because he was a member of a particular party.’

(6) Latvian:  
   *Visu nakti ne esmu gulējis.* ‘I have not slept whole night.’

(7) Lithuanian:  
   *Jis buvo tris dienas nevalgę.* ‘He has not eaten for three days’

   dialectal Belorussian: *Jon byu try dni n'aješy.* ‘id.’

(Mackevič, Grinaveckienė (1993: 107)

(8) Võru:  
   *Sis arotõldas, ... midä om jo ärq tett ja miä om tegemäldäq.* ‘Then it is discussed, what has been done already and what has not been done.’ (Tamm 2011: 875)

(9) English
   a. *Mary hasn’t always paid taxes.*  
   b. *Mary has always not paid taxes.*

References

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