Negative Fragments and VP Ellipsis

This talk examines the interaction of two types of ellipsis in the bolded construction in (1a-c), where a left-peripheral negative XP co-occurs with VP ellipsis. It is typically (but not always, as shown by (1c)), used as an emphatic answer to a yes/no question.

(1)   a.   Did you speak to Mary?   **Not to Mary, I didn't**.
       b.   Will you finish by Monday?   **Not by Monday, I won't.**
       c.   **Not in my wastebasket, you don't.**   (Hankamer and Sag 1976: 409)

Its properties are interesting for a number of reasons. First, truth conditionally the answers in (1a-b) are equivalent to the ones in (2a-b) below, which raises the question of what the contribution of negation is.

(2)   a.   Did you speak to Mary?   **To Mary**, I didn't.
       d.   Will you finish by Monday?   **By Monday**, I won't.

Second, the ungrammaticality of the non-elliptical responses in (3a-b) suggests that (1a-b) cannot be derived through movement followed by VP ellipsis along the lines schematized in (4a-b). Thus, if the negative element does not move, what *is* the derivation of (1a-b)?

(3)   a.   *I didn't speak **not to Mary**.
       b.   * I won't finish **not by Monday**.
(4)   a.   * [$_{TP}$ [**Not to Mary**]$_i$ [I didn't speak t_i]]
       b.   * [$_{TP}$ [**Not by Monday**]$_i$ [I won't finish it t_i]]

And third, are (1a-b) equivalent to (5a-b)? And relatedly, is *not* in the negative fragments in (1a-b) clausal or constituent negation?

(5)   a.   It spoke **not to Mary.**
       b.   I will finish **not by Monday**.

Merchant (2003, 2004) argues that *not* in the so-called negative stripping (e.g., *Abby speaks passable Dutch but not Ben*) is clausal (rather than constituent) negation. Others treat negation in negative stripping (and in negative fragments by analogy) as constituent negation (McCawley 1991, Depiante 2000, among others). One of the classic diagnostics to distinguish clausal from constituent negation involves tag questions (Klima 1964 and much later work). The fact that negative tags are used in (6a-b) suggests that *not* is constituent negation in the non-reduced counterparts of (7a-b) (as argued by McCawley 1991). Negative fragments, on the other hand, use positive tags, which suggests *not* in (7a-b) is clausal negation. I argue that this is only apparent, and that the positive tags in (7a-b) target an elided negative clause.

(6)   a.   John spoke **not about Mary** (but about Bill)**,** *didn't he*?
       b.   You will finish **not by Monday** (but by Tuesday), *won't you*?
(7)   a.   John spoke about Mary. **Not about Mary**, *did he*?
       b.   You will finish by Monday. **Not by Monday**, *will you*?

Support comes from languages like Polish, where clausal and constituent negation (while homophonous) can be distinguished by whether they license Genitive of Negation; clausal negation requires it (8a), constituent negation disallows it (8b) (Przepiórkowski and Kupść 1999, Błaszczak 2001, among others). By this diagnostic, negation in negative fragments is constituent negation (8c). Furthermore, negative fragments differ in this (and other) respects from so-called polarity ellipsis, illustrated in (8d) (cf. Morris 2008 and Zaleska 2015), where negation is clausal.

(8)   a.   N**ie**   zaprosiłam   **Ewy/*Ewę.**   **clausal negation**
              not   invited   Eve.**GEN/*ACC**
              'I didn't invite Eve.'

       b.   Zaprosiłam   **nie**   **Ewę/*Ewy.**   **constituent negation**
              invited   not   Eve.**ACC/*GEN**
              'I didn't invite Eve.'

c.	Kogo	zobaczyłaś?	**Nie**	**Ewę/*Ewy.**	**negative fragment**
	who	saw	not	Eve.ACC/*GEN	

'Who did you see? Not Eve.'

d.	Zobaczyłam	Marię, a		**Ewy/*Ewę**	**nie.**	**polarity ellipsis**
	saw	Maria. but		Eve.**GEN/*ACC**	not	

Lit. 'I saw Maria but Eve not.'

While the ungrammaticality of (3a-b) above argues against the movement derivations in (4a-b), the following considerations suggest that the negative fragment does undergo movement. First, it cannot move if it is an indirect object; (9a) is just as degraded as (9b).

(9)   a.   *Did you give John a book? **Not John**, I didn't.

        b.   ***Who** did you give *t* a book?

Second, it is subject to island constraints, as shown in (10-11), with the examples modeled on Merchant's (2004: 688) fragment examples, differing in this respect from what Ross (1969) established for sluicing.

(10)   a.   Does Abby speak the same Balkan language that Ben speaks?

        b.   ∗**Not Ben**, she doesn't.   (Complex DP island)

(11)   a.   Did Ben leave the party because Abby wouldn't dance with him?

        b.   ∗**Not Abby**, he didn't.   (Adjunct Island)

(12)   a.   Did Abby vote for a Green Party candidate?

        b.   ∗**Not Green Party**, she didn't.   (Left Branch Condition)

The main puzzle then is how to reconcile the behavior that suggests movement of the negative fragment with the unavailability of the movement derivation in (4a-b). To do so, I argue for a bi-clausal analysis (similar in spirit to the analysis Ott and de Vries (2016) propose for dislocation structures), where the source of (13a) is (13b), in which the negative XP, rather than moving from the VP ellipsis site (as in (4a-b) above), moves inside 'its own' clause, as shown in (13c). Next, the entire TP deletes (13d). The movement + clausal ellipsis in (13b-c) is analogous to the movement + ellipsis Merchant (2004) proposes for fragments more generally. And finally, VP inside the second clause deletes (13e).

(13)   a.   Not by Monday, I won't.

        b. $[_{CP1}$ I will finish **not by Monday**], $[_{CP2}$ I won't finish by Monday]

        c.   Movement of 'not by Monday' inside CP_1

                 $[_{CP1/FP1}$ **not by Monday**]$_i$ $[_{TP}$ I will finish t_i]], $[_{CP2}$ I won't finish by Monday]

        d.   clausal ellipsis in CP_1:

                 $[_{CP1/FP1}$ **not by Monday**]$_i$ $[_{TP}$ ~~I will finish t_i~~]], $[_{CP2}$ I won't finish by Monday]

        e.   VPE ellipsis in CP_2

                 $[_{CP1/FP1}$ **not by Monday**]$_i$ $[_{TP}$ ~~I will finish t_i~~]], $[_{CP2}$ I won't ~~finish by Monday~~]

On such a bi-clausal derivation, the parallelism in meaning between (1a-b) and (2a-b) reduces to the fact that the second clause in (1a-b) is identical to (2a-b) before movement (compare (14a) with (14b).

(14)   a. $[_{CP2}$ I won't finish by Monday]   b. $[$**By Monday**$_i$, I won't finish $t_i$$]$

Lastly, if *not* in (13) is constituent negation, how do we explain the positive tags in (7a-b)? This, I suggest, could also follow from the bi-clausal analysis. The presence of the positive tag is compatible with *not* being constituent negation, with ellipsis in the second clause targeting the *entire* clause (rather than just the VP), as shown in (15). The positive tag then 'targets' the elided negative clause:

(15)   **Not about Mary** ~~he spoke~~, ~~he didn't speak about Mary~~, did he?

Selected References

Depiante, M. 2000. The Syntax of Deep and Surface Anaphora: A Study of Null Complement Anaphora and Stripping/Bare Argument Ellipsis. UConn dissertation.

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