The Problem: morphological negation

- positive adjectives may be prefixed with un-, but negative ones systematically cannot; both positive and negative adjectives can be negated with not (???)

1. unhappy b. unlike c. not said
   unfriendly a. inhospitable b. not hostile
   untrue a. false b. not false

⇒ Zimmer/Hom- generalisation:

2. a. ‘Negative affixes are not used with adjectival stems that have a negative value.’ (???)
   b. ‘The stem to which a relatively nonproductive negative affix can attach tends to be an unmarked, weak positive scalar value.’ (???)

- on closer scrutiny, the pattern turns out to be more general:
  - rules suffixed with -less tend not to negative per se – (???)
  - rules suffixed with -ful allow un-prefixation – (???)
  - stacking multiple negative prefixes (un-un, un-sad, un-un) is ruled out – (???)

- breathless *unbreathless not breathless
  - senseless *un-senseless not senseless
  - lawless *un-lawless not lawless

- *undisloyal not disloyal
  - *undiscourteous not discourteous

- *unlawless not lawless
  - *unsenseless not senseless
  - *un-honest not honest

⇒ Two important questions:

Q1 (empirical): Why is this pattern restricted to affixed negation?
Q2 (theoretical): Is it a coincidence that negative markers are excluded with negative adjectives?

Answers:

A1: The above pattern is not restricted to affixed negation, but can be observed both with morphological and syntactic negation.
A2: This is not a coincidence, but it follows from a general restriction on admissible functional sequences, as claimed in (???)

(???)

The functional sequence must not contain two immediately consecutive identical features.

Additional support

Q1: Syntactic negation

- French and Dutch not only show the pattern in (1), but the same pattern with the syntactic modifiers peu and neyng ‘little’, respectively.

17. peu + actif/passif: aimable/*hostile ‘friendly/hostile’
   d. undismayed

18. weinig + actief/passief: content/*mécontent ‘satisfied/dissatisfied’
   c. undefeated

- these data can be explained by the same account if we assume that peu/neyng ‘little’ are the phrasal spellout of Neg+Q.

19. peu + actif

20. weinig + actief

- these data show that the pattern in (1) is not restricted to morphological negation, but extends to certain cases of syntactic negation.

Q3: Apparent counterexamples

- cases like (22) (???) and (24) (???) appear to contradict the earlier generalisation:

21. a. undiscourteous
   b. undiplomatie
   c. undishencted
   d. undiminished

- these adjectives are all derived from (negative) verbs or nouns.
- if there is a negative head, it attaches to the noun or verb.
- this does not conflict with the higher negative head spelled out by un- on-

24. on- < neg

- the two Neg heads are separated by other heads in the fow 2 the tree does not violate (???)

Conclusion

- empirical evidence suggests that the restriction on the stacking of multiple negative morphemes is not to be formulated in terms of the morphology-syntax divide.
- we account for it in a principled manner in terms of a general constraint on two successive identical features in the fow

References