

Karen De Clercq & Guido Vanden Wyngaerd

Ghent University/FWO & KU Leuven

The Word and the Morpheme, HU Berlin, 22-24 September 2016

① 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) a. unhappy b. \*unsad c. not sad  
 unfriendly \*unhostile not hostile  
 untrue \*unfalse not false

⇒ Zimmer/Horn-generalisation:

- (2) a. 'Negative affixes are not used with adjectival stems that have a negative value.' (? :15)  
 b. 'The stem to which a relatively nonproductive negative affix can attach tends to be an unmarked, weak positive scalar value.' (? :286)

- on closer scrutiny, the pattern turns out to be more general:
- nouns suffixed with *-less* resist *un-*prefixation (though again not negation per se) → (3).
- nouns suffixed with *-ful* allow *un-*prefixation → (4).
- stacking multiple negative prefixes (*un+dis*, *un+iN*, *un+un*, *dis+dis*) is ruled out → (5)-(6).

- (3) breathless \*unbreathless not breathless (4) successful unsuccessful not successful  
 senseless \*unsenseless not senseless eventful uneventful not eventful  
 lawless \*unlawless not lawless lawful unlawful not lawful

- (5) \*undishonest not dishonest (6) \*unimpossible not impossible  
 \*undiscourteous not discourteous \*unillogical not illogical  
 \*undisloyal not disloyal \*disdishonest not dishonest

Generalisation: negative morphemes cannot be stacked.

⇒ Two important questions:

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

⇒ Answers:

- A1: The above pattern is not restricted to affixal 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 (7):

- (7) \*<X, X>  
 The functional sequence must not contain two immediately consecutive identical features.

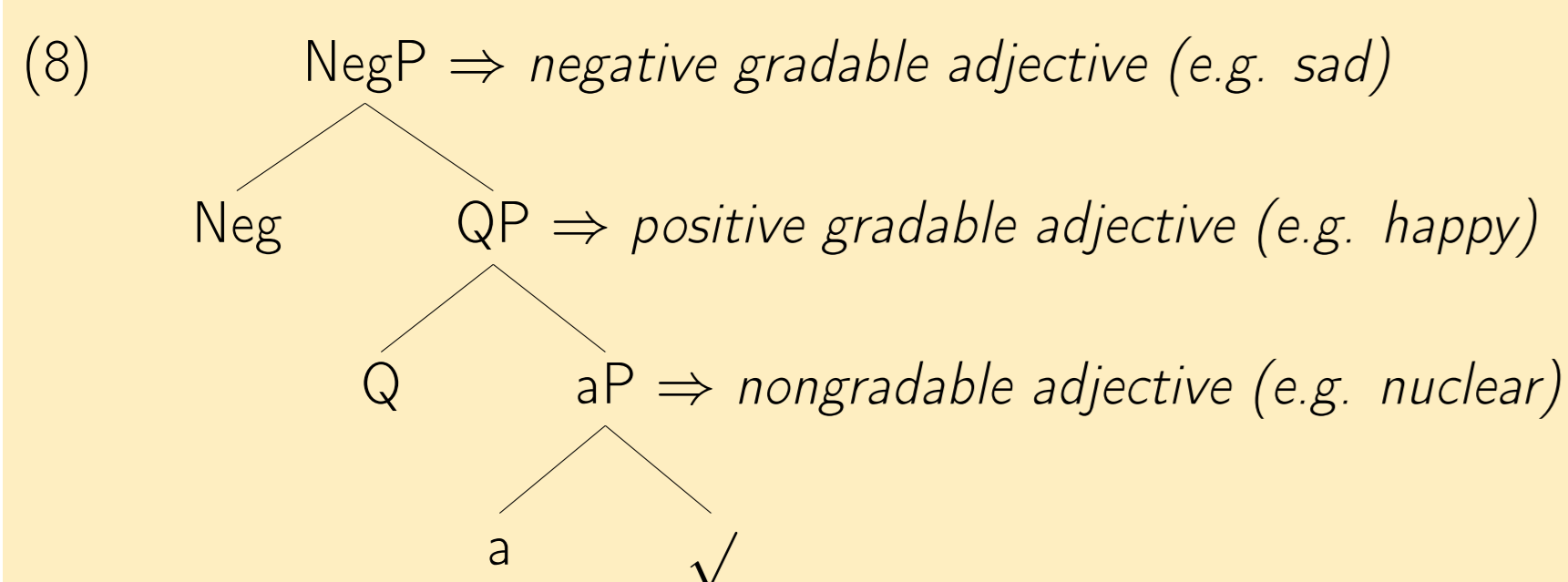
② Prerequisites

1 General background assumptions

- the lexicon is postsyntactic, the syntax works with features.
- phrasal spellout: words spell out syntactic phrases (i.e. collections of features).
- lexical insertion is subject to the *Superset Principle* (?) and the *Elsewhere Principle* (?)

2 The feature structure of adjectives

- there is a (partial)  $f_{seq}$  of features: <Neg, Q, a,  $\checkmark$ >
- $\checkmark$ : a root feature (a dimension)
- a: a categorial head feature
- Q: contributes gradability (an ordering < on a scale)
- Neg: a negation feature (scale reverser: reverses the ordering of the scale of the adjective)



3 Un-prefixed positive adjectives

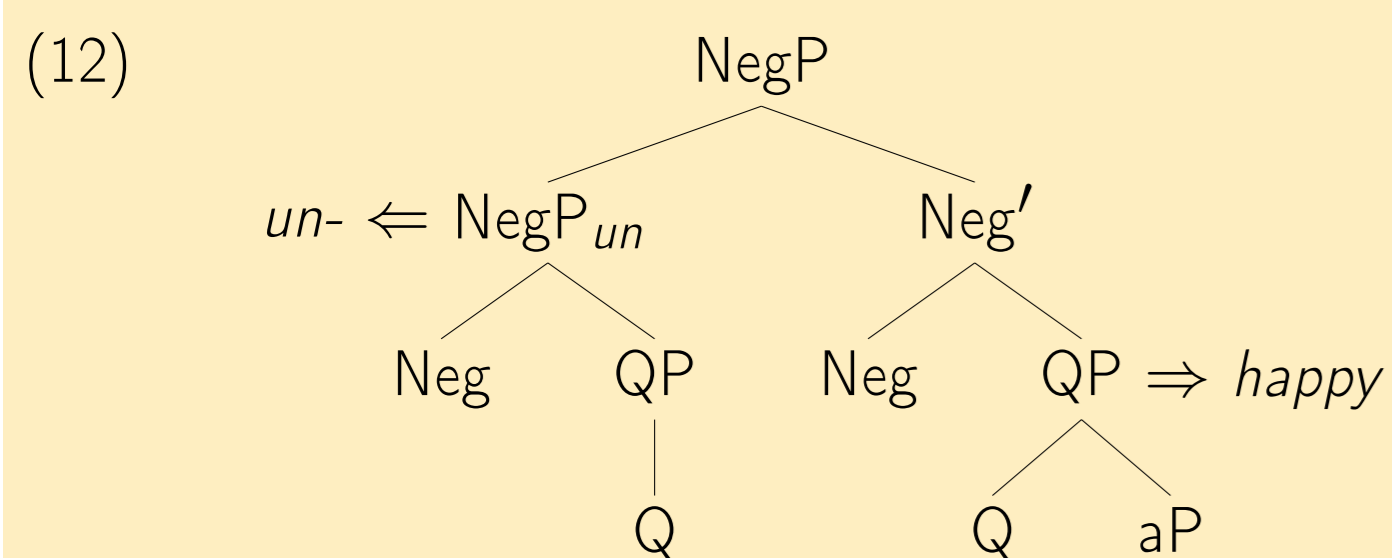
- the *un-*prefix spells out a Neg-feature and a Q-feature (?):

- (9) < /ʌn/, [NegP Neg [QP Q]] >

- evidence that *un-* makes gradable adjectives:

- (10) a. The blood found in in the closet was nonhuman/\*inhuman. (classifies sth as human vs nonhuman)  
 b. Their behaviour was inhuman/\*nonhuman to the extreme. (puts sth on a scale of humanity)

- (11) a. \*This sentence is more nongrammatical than that one.  
 b. This sentence is more ungrammatical than that one.

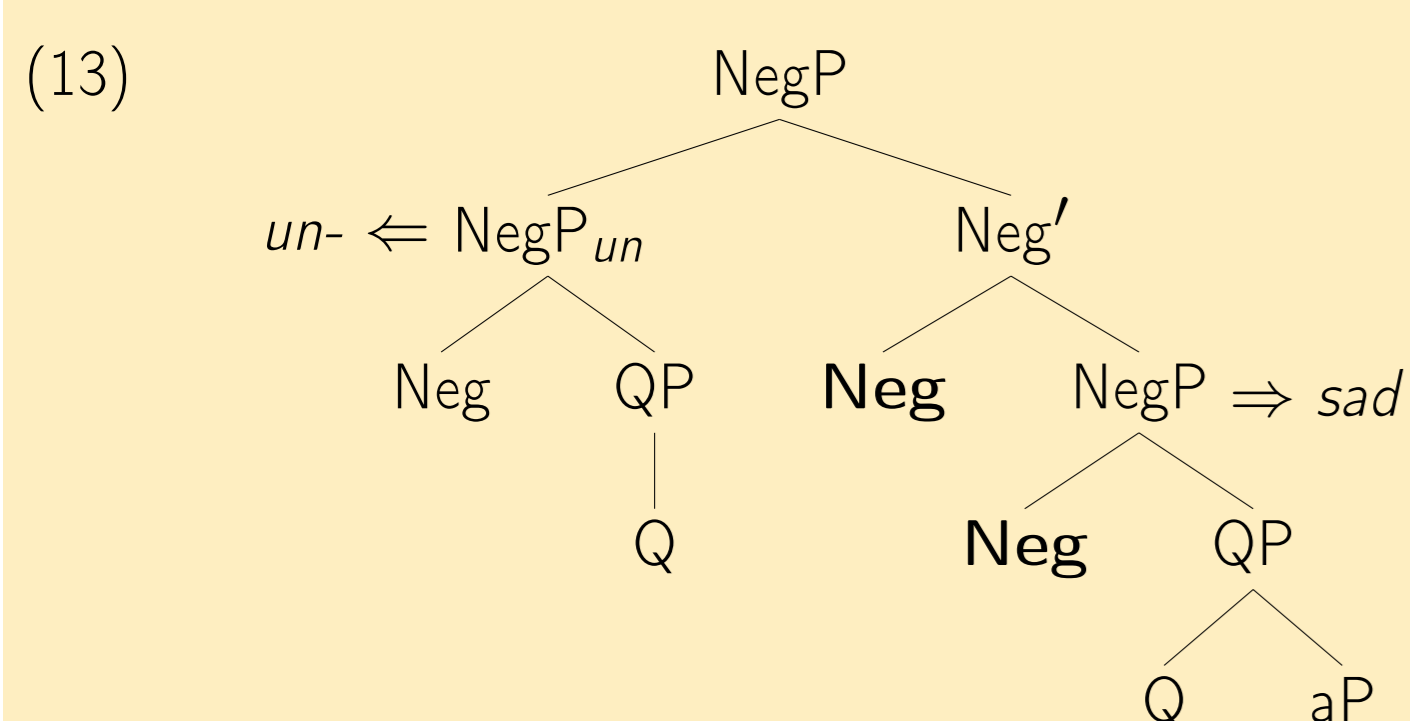


- happy* spells out QP.
- in a parallel derivation, a complex specifier (NegP<sub>un</sub>) is created, which spells out as *un-*.
- this NegP<sub>un</sub> is merged in the Spec of a Neg-head dominating the QP of *happy*.

③ The account

1 Un-prefixed negative adjectives

- both *sad* and *un-* spell out a Neg feature:

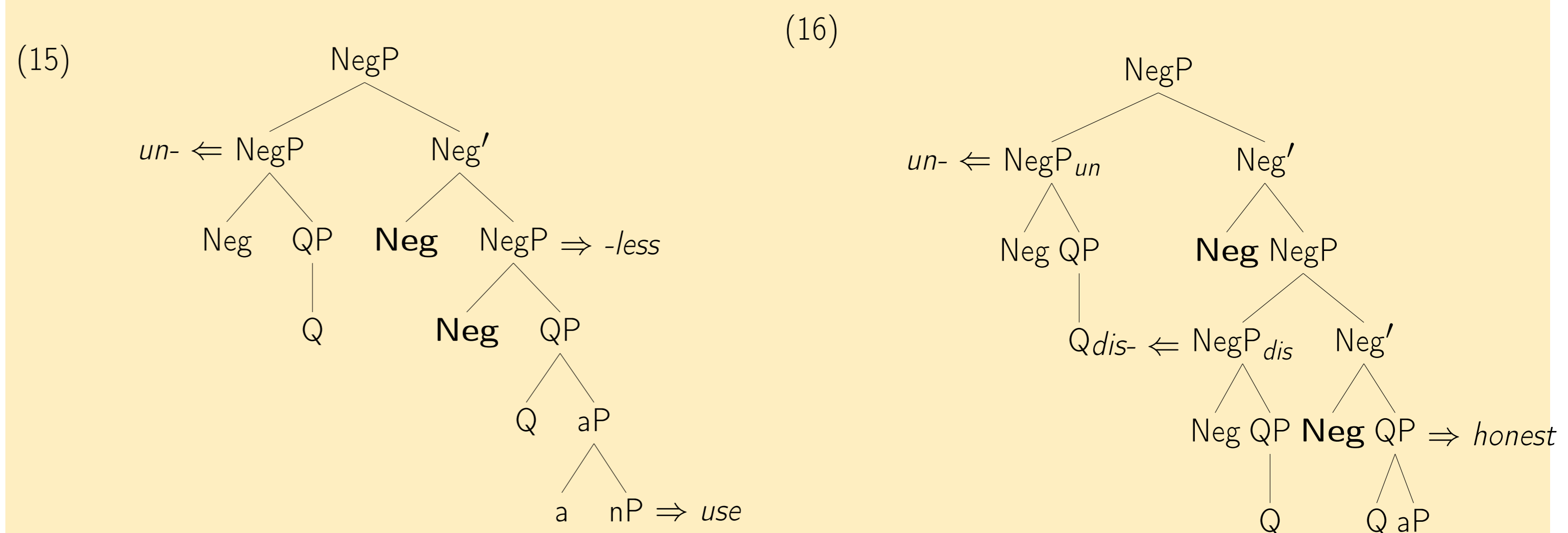


- (13) violates the restriction on the functional sequence in (7), since we now have <Neg, Neg, Q, a>.

2 Un-prefixed derived negative adjectives

- the feature set of *-less* reflects the fact that *-less* derives negative gradable adjectives (i.e. Neg, Q, and a, respectively).
- dis-* spells out the same features as *un-*.

- (14) a. < /ləs/, [NegP Neg [QP Q [aP a]]] >  
 b. < /dis/, [NegP Neg [QP Q]] >



- (15) and (16) have the same violation of (7) as *unsad* in (13): <Neg, Neg, Q, a>
- the restrictions on morphological negation discussed in section 1 are accounted for in a principled manner by the restriction on the  $f_{seq}$  in (7).

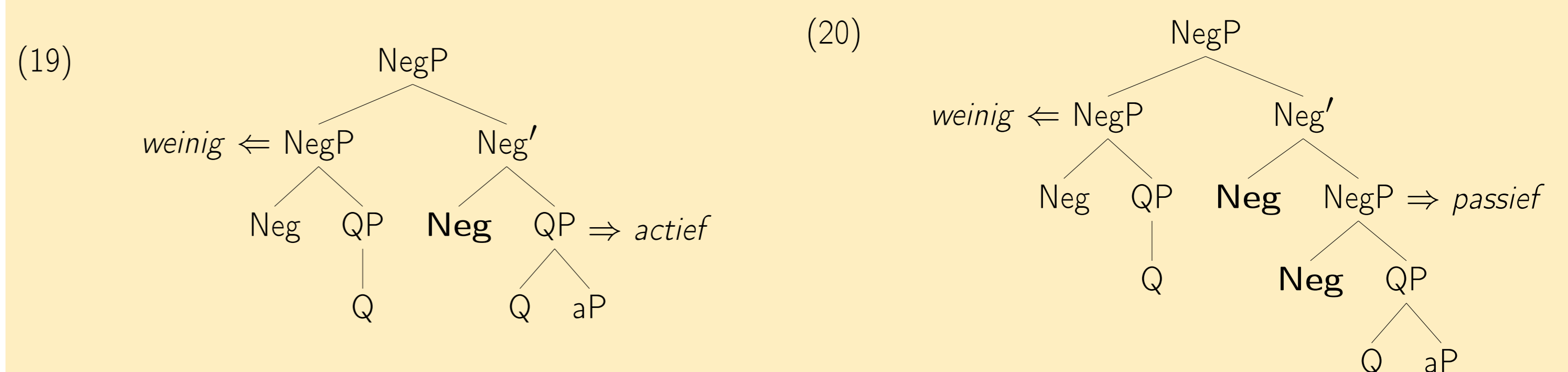
④ Additional support

1 Syntactic negation

- French and Dutch not only show the pattern in (1), but the same pattern with the syntactic modifiers *peu* and *weinig* 'little', respectively:

- (17) **peu** + 'little +'  
 actif/\*passif 'active/passive'  
 aimable/\*hostile 'friendly/hostile'  
 tolérant/\*intolérant 'tolerant/intolerant'  
 content/\*mécontent 'satisfied/dissatisfied'  
 heureux/\*malheureux 'happy/unhappy'
- (18) **weinig** + 'little +'  
 actief/\*passief 'active/passive'  
 correct/\*fout 'correct/wrong'  
 interessant/\*saai 'interesting/boring'  
 duidelijk/\*onduidelijk 'clear/unclear'  
 zinvol/\*zinloos 'useful/useless'

- these data can be explained by the same account if we assume that *peu/weinig* 'little' are the phrasal spellout of Neg+Q:



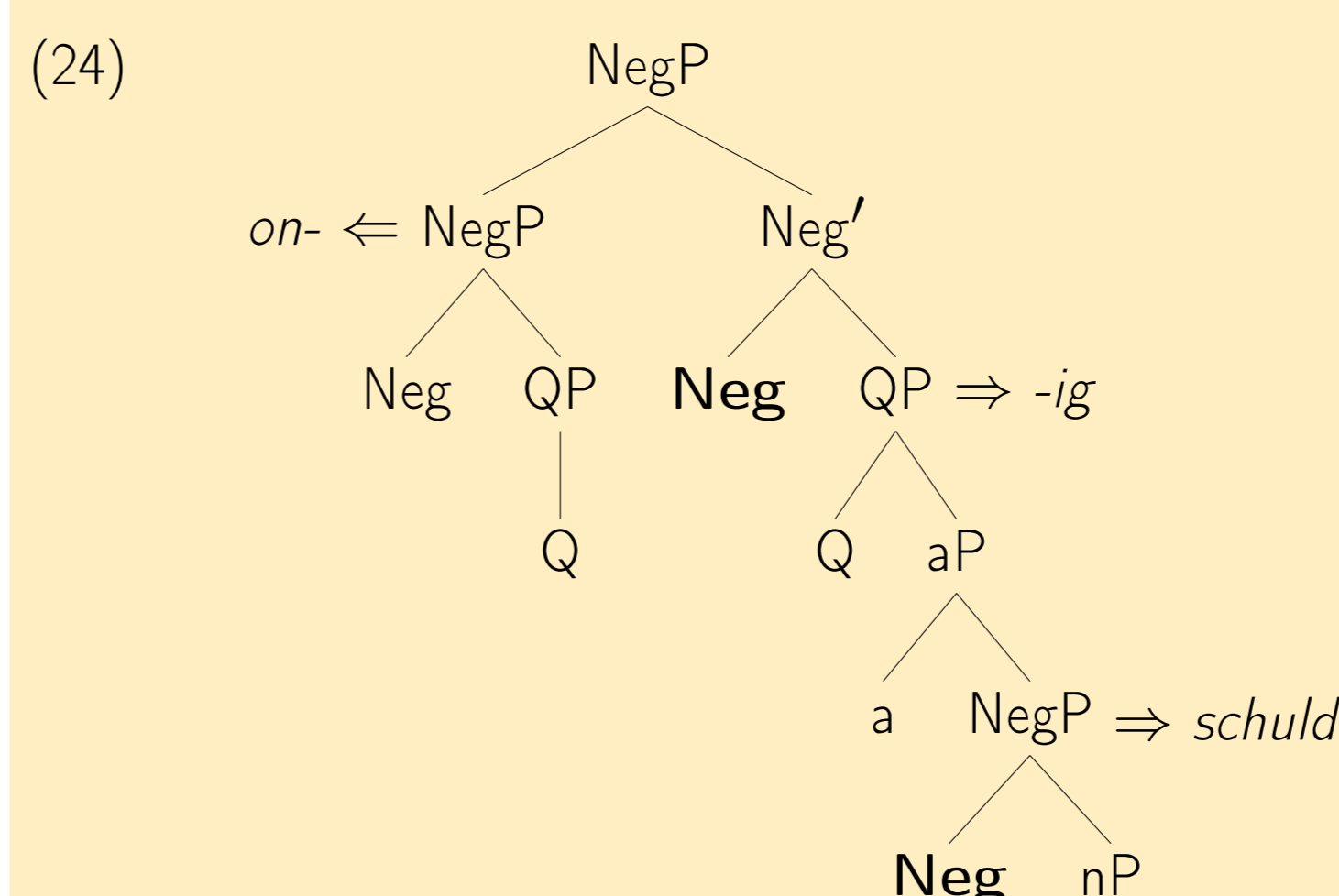
- these data show that the pattern in (1) is not restricted to morphological negation, but extends to certain cases of syntactic negation.

2 Apparent counterexamples

- cases like (21) (? :190-191), (22) (?) and (24) appear to contradict the earlier generalisation:

- (21) a. undiscoverable (22) a. unharmed (23) a. onschadelijk 'harmless'  
 b. undisputed b. unscathed b. onschuldig 'innocent'  
 c. undisheartened c. undefeated c. ondogmatisch 'undogmatic'  
 d. undismayed d. unblamable

- 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-*.



- the two Neg heads are separated by other heads in the  $f_{seq}$ : the tree does not violate (7).

⑤ 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  $f_{seq}$ .

References

De Clercq, Karen. 2013. *A unified syntax of negation*. Ghent: University of Ghent dissertation.  
 Horn, Laurence. 1989. *A natural history of negation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.  
 Horn, Laurence. 2005. An un-paper for the unsyntactician. In Salikoko Mufwene, Elaine Francis & Rebecca Wheeler (eds.), *Polymorphous linguistics: Jim McCawley's legacy*. 329-365. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.  
 Kiparsky, Paul. 1973. "Elsewhere" in phonology. In Stephen Anderson & Paul Kiparsky (eds.), *A festschrift for Morris Halle*. 93-106. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.  
 Siegel, Dorothy. 1977. The adjacency constraint and the theory of morphology. *Proceedings of NELS* 8. 189-197.  
 Starke, Michal. 2009. Nanosyntax: A short primer to a new approach to language. *Nordlyd* 36. 1-6.  
 Zimmer, Karl. 1964. *Affixal negation in English and other languages* Supplement to *Word*, Monograph 5.