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**Stolac, Diana**

*Source / Izvornik:* **Jezikoslovlje, 2017, 18, 101 - 123**

**Journal article, Published version**

**Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:186:121208>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-09-19**



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UDC 811.163.42'367.333=111

811.111'367.333=111

Original scientific article

Received on 01. 02. 2017

Accepted for publication on 19. 07. 2017

**Diana Stolac**  
University of Rijeka

## Genitive of negation in the Croatian language

A direct object in Croatian is an object in the accusative case or an object in the genitive case which is interchangeable with the accusative. There are two types of direct object in the genitive case – the partitive genitive and the genitive of negation (*Slavic genitive*). The conditions that have to be met for the genitive of negation to be used are that the predicate verb has to be transitive, and that the sentence has to be negative. Therefore, the genitive of negation can only be realized in negative sentences in which it is synonymous with the accusative, while in the positive sentences the direct object is exclusively in the accusative case.

The literature on the genitive of negation primarily deals with its origin and original meanings – partitive, ablative (Meillet, 1897), its position in the Indo-European noun case system (Heinz 1965), and its status in particular Slavic languages (Trávníček 1938; Breznik 1943; Hausenblas 1958; Harrer-Pisarkowa 1959; Gortan-Premk 1962; Heinz 1965; Hlavsa 1975; for Croatian: Feleszko 1970; Menac 1979; Vince-Marinac 1992; Stolac 1993; Stolac – Horvat-Vlastelić 2004; for Croatian-English relations see: Zovko Dinković 2013). This morphosyntactic fact is a feature of Slavic languages (which is why it is also called the Slavic genitive) in which it has different qualitative characteristics (stylistically marked/unmarked, interchangeable with the accusative with/without a difference in meaning, non-interchangeable with the accusative). There are no equivalent syntactic structures outside the Slavic language family.

This paper comments on the differences between the Croatian and English syntax which make direct translation of the genitive of negation impossible and require the translator to employ translation strategies that enable him or her to preserve all of its features (amplified negation, stressed negation, stylistic markedness). Since the genitive of negation is more frequent in older Croatian texts, and especially in the contemporary spoken discourse, it is also nec-



essary to approach it from the diachronic perspective. The corpus for this segment of this study consists of plays by the Kajkavian comedialographer Tituš Brezovački (1757–1805).

Apart from translation, this is also an issue in teaching Croatian as a foreign language, as the change of cases between the positive and negative sentence confuses the users of Croatian as a foreign language. The relationship between the following examples is discussed: *Vidim budućnost./Ne vidim budućnost.* (neutral affect)/*Ne vidim budućnosti.* (marked affect), and their possible translations: *I don't see the future./I see no future.*

**Key words:** genitive of negation; direct object; Croatian syntax; English syntax.

## 1. Introduction

The cause-and-effect relationship between society and language is irrefutable regardless of how we interpret these basic sociolinguistic relations: as language determined by society/reality (that which exists in the real world needs to be named in language), or as language that determines reality (only that which can be expressed in language can exist in reality).

We will not analyse the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or the linguistic relativity hypothesis here; we merely wish to remind the reader about them in order to provide one of the frameworks for the different perceptions of reality in different cultures, and the consequently different realizations in different language communities. This can help in discussion of translation challenges.

Although this is more visible on the lexical-semantic level, grammatical elements also offer such possibilities, and we will focus on the relationship of negation in the Croatian language with that in other languages, e.g. the English language (Zovko Dinković 2013).

Seen through the perspective of transformational grammar, negation is a transformation that encompasses the entire sentence structure. As a result, in some languages it suffices to mark negation on the surface level in one place, with one word or phrase, and it applies to the entire sentence (naturally, this only applies to sentence or clausal negation).



## 2. Negation in the Croatian language

But, in Croatian the negation must, on the surface level, be expressed alongside all, or almost all (i.e. indefinite), the lexical elements that are covered by negation (i.e. elements being negated):

- (1) *Ana nije nikada nikoga uvrijedila.*
- (2) *Nikada nisam nikome ništa ružnoga rekla.*

The English equivalents of these sentences are:

- (3) *Ana has never offended anyone.*
- (4) *I have never said anything bad to anyone.*

We can notice the difference in the number of words that are negated: in English the negation is expressed in only one place, while in Croatian the verb, the adverb and the pronoun are all negated.

Only exceptionally negation does not encompass the adverb of emphasis *i* (in syntax) or the particle *i* (in morphology). This is the case when it is followed by the negative particle *ne*, and, since this is rare and an exception, it usually presents a problem even for the native speakers:

- (5) *On to i ne zna.*  
'He doesn't know it (at all).'

And as a result, mistakes are frequent:

- (6) *\*On to ni ne zna.*  
\*'He doesn't know it (not at all).'

When it comes to learning Croatian, negation is one of the areas where mistakes are frequently made. Here is an example of a sentence that was originally formed by thinking in English (the speaker is an Australian learning Croatian):

- (7) *You never know.*

The speaker expressed the thought in Croatian in the following way:

- (8) *\*Nikad znaš.*

By following his primary language model while speaking in his second language, the speaker has produced an ungrammatical sentence in Croatian. The correct, grammatically attested, sentence with a negated verb and adverb is:

- (9) *Nikada ne znaš.*



Learning a foreign language is a long process of intertwined cognitive activities, and the level of acquisition of language information depends on a whole range of factors related to all linguistic levels – phonological, morphological, word formation, lexical and syntactic, and inseparably the semantic level, but also to a whole range of interdisciplinary concepts. Among these are definitely the understanding of the particularities of the target language from the point of view of cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and especially, pragmalinguistics. Therefore, proper pronunciation, the knowledge of morphological and syntactic rules and the acquisition of a rich vocabulary are only the first step, the foundation, and not the summit of linguistic knowledge, when it comes to being proficient in a language. A higher level of proficiency in a foreign language becomes manifest precisely through the use of those linguistic features that exhibit differences in the two languages (i.e. the mother tongue and the foreign language) and this becomes particularly evident when structural linguistic elements, such as syntactic elements, are involved.

With respect to the particularities of negation in the Croatian language in relation to the English language, we will focus on the alternatives that exist when it comes to choosing the form of the direct object in a negative sentence in the Croatian language (Morić 2009). According to the theoreticians of the syntax of cases, the accusative is a grammatical and an adverbial case (Heinz 1965: 39–41) the primary syntactic function of which is that of the direct object (Heinz 1965: 102). That is, in Croatian transitive verbs take an object in the accusative case (Katičić 1986: 84).

But, a holistic definition of the direct object states that the direct object in Croatian is an object in the accusative or in the genitive case, the latter being replaceable by the accusative. Therefore, there is a special syntactically and/or semantically stipulated position for the realization of the direct object in the genitive case.

## ***2.1. Two types of direct object in the genitive case***

There are two types of direct object in the genitive case – the partitive genitive and the genitive of negation (*Slavic genitive*).

### ***2.1.1. The partitive genitive***

The object in the accusative case is used to refer to the whole of the entity named as the object, while the partitive genitive is the result of semantics and indicates that we are emphasising partitivity, that is, the quantity.



Instead of the direct object in the accusative case, an object in the genitive case can also be used when the object noun does not refer to an object as a whole, but to substance, or when it is at least conceived as such, and when the speaker's intention is to state that the direct object is just a part of the substance in question, and not the substance as a whole. Such genitive is called partitive genitive. (Katičić 1986: 94)

The relationship established is that of *whole* (accusative) (10) : *part* (genitive) (11):

(10) *Dodaj mi kruh, sir i vino.*

(11) *Dodaj mi kruha, sira i vina.*

The English equivalents also reflect the difference in meaning:

(12) *Pass me the bread, the cheese and the wine.*

(13) *Pass me some bread, some cheese and some wine.*

The opposition *part* : *whole*, that is, *undefined quantity* : *no marker of quantity*, explains well the use of the genitive and the accusative case with transitive verbs. The contrasted examples demonstrate that the genitive indicates the quantity, while the accusative only indicates the type (cf. Hlavsa 1975).

When a difference in meaning is added to the choice between the accusative and the genitive case in such structures, then it is primarily related to the category of definiteness, and sentence such as, for example, *Dodajte mi kruha* may be characterized by indefiniteness, and sentence such as, for example *Dodajte mi kruh* by definiteness. In the first case we are dealing with a certain quantity/part of a substance, and in the second we can assume that what is being talked about is a specific piece of bread found on the table in front of the participants of the speech act. (Silić and Pranjković 2005: 300-301)

The genitive only signals the quantity and it is therefore possible to use the partitive genitive to express extreme quantitative meanings – both small and large quantities:

(14) *On ima novca.*<sup>1</sup>  
                   money-GEN  
                   ‘He has a lot of money.’

<sup>1</sup> For translators it is important to note that, in conversation, the plural of genitive is more frequent: *On ima novaca*, but the noun ‘money’ in plural belongs to colloquial Croatian.



Partitive constructions are not used just as adverbs (they are not only objects), but also as adnominals, and can be realized as attributive phrases that signify quantity:

- (15) *tanjur juhe, čaša vode*  
bowl-NOM soup-GEN, glass-NOM water-GEN  
'a bowl of soup, a glass of water.'

### 2.1.2. Genitive of negation

The second type of direct object in the genitive case is the genitive of negation, and the rest of this paper will focus on this type.

The main prerequisite for the use of the genitive of negation is that the predicate verb is transitive and that the sentence is transformed through negation. The genitive of negation is therefore only possible in negative sentences and is synonymous with the accusative case in such sentences, while in the positive sentences the direct object can only be in the accusative case:

- (16) *Oni imaju i kuću i stan.*  
they have and house-ACC and flat-ACC  
'They have both a house and a flat.'
- (17) *Oni nemaju ni kuću ni stan.*  
they not.have neither house-ACC nor flat-ACC  
'They have neither a house nor a flat.'
- (18) *Oni nemaju ni kuće ni stana.*  
They not.have neither house-GEN nor flat-GEN  
'They have neither a house nor a flat.'

Sentence (16) cannot have an object in the genitive case:

- (19) \**Oni imaju i kuće i stana.*  
they have and house-GEN and flat-GEN  
'They have both a house and a flat.'

The negative sentences (17) and (18) have an object in the accusative and in the genitive respectively, and there is no difference in meaning, according to some authors:

The genitive of negation with negated transitive verbs can always be replaced by the accusative without a change in meaning. (Barić 1995: 446)



However, due to language economy, a language would never have two constructions that mean exactly the same thing, and therefore we can determine certain nuances in the meanings of these two structures. Thus, sentence (17) expresses possession of a house or a flat, whereas sentence (18) implies primarily that they do not have a place to live.

If this nuance is overlooked, it is likely that both sentences would be translated into English in the same way:

(20) *They don't have a house or a flat.*

(Other translation options will be discussed at a later point.)

This syntactic feature of the Croatian language has direct equivalents in the syntax of other Slavic languages, but there are no equivalent syntactic structures outside the Slavic language family. The nonexistence of equivalent structures is both a translational and a methodological problem for the users and/or teachers of Croatian as a foreign language. In this paper we focus on the genitive of negation as a special type of object, on its syntactic and semantic characteristics, on its syntactic equivalence with the direct object in the accusative case, but also on the different syntactic and stylistic evaluation of these two types of direct object.

### 3. Literature on the genitive of negation

Compared to other morphosyntactic topics in Slavic studies, it can be said that the literature on the genitive of negation is rich. It is possible to track the development of research from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the present day.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Antoine Meillet published one of the more important analyses in the domain of the syntax of cases, the topic of which was precisely the relationship between the genitive and the accusative in Slavic languages (Meillet 1897). The goal of his analysis was to determine the origin of this syntactic structure and to analyze its original meanings by starting from the Old Church Slavonic syntax. In accordance with his original assumptions and methodology, the author determined that, from the diachronic perspective, ablativity forms the basis of the genitive of negation, and that as a result, partitivity forms its basis from the synchronic perspective. The contemporary genitive in Slavic languages has unified the Indo-European meanings of the genitive and the ablative, and it is precisely the feature of partitivity that has been preserved in the contemporary genitive.

In the same vein, but with the application of contemporary principles of research, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the Polish linguist Adam Heinz placed the genitive





case within the Indo-European case system (Heinz 1955). To this we can also add comparative grammar books of Slavic languages in which the diachronic analyses were geared towards determining the continuity of the adverbial genitive and the adverbial ablative in the form of contemporary genitive.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the results of a whole series of important studies that revealed the state of affairs in individual Slavic languages were published. Here we will single out only a few analyses of several Slavic languages.

With respect to Czech, František Trávníček wrote a short, but important study on the genitive in negative sentences (Trávníček 1938), while Karel Hausenblas wrote a comprehensive study on the development of the Czech genitive in which the genitive of negation is presented through examples from texts dating from several centuries of Czech literacy, texts that belong to different styles (Hausenblas 1958). Hausenblas' methodological starting points included the syntacto-stylistic approach, which would later prove to be very important for determining the relation of the genitive of negation towards the accusative, and as such will also be employed in this paper. Zdeněk Hlavsa attempted to determine the possibility of the denotation of the object by employing the structuralist approach and he used contemporary language materials to confirm the use of the genitive of negation in the Czech language (Hlavsa 1975). Anton Breznik analyzed negation on the sentence level and in this context he commented on the position of the genitive of negation as an increasingly rarer alternative to the accusative in the Slovenian language (Breznik 1943).

Unlike the aforementioned analyses, research on the Polish language, especially that by Krystyna Harrer-Pisarkowa on the object in a negated sentence and by Adam Heinz on the genitive in the Polish case system, gives information on a Slavic language in which genitive is the primary realization of the object in sentences transformed by negation (Harrer-Pisarkowa 1959; Heinz 1965).

A detailed analysis by Darinka Gortan-Premk encompasses materials collected from texts in Serbian and Croatian, and it must be mentioned as a source of statistical data on the use of the genitive of negation in various syntactic structures with respect to word order and morphosyntactic characteristics of the object (Gortan-Premk 1962). An extensive study on the genitive by Kazimierz Feleszko also includes materials from texts in Serbian and Croatian, with the materials from Croatian being dominant. Therefore his conclusions on the use of the genitive of negation primarily apply to the Croatian language (Feleszko 1970).



Several extensive studies of the genitive of negation in Croatian (Stolac 1988) have been published, and here we will single out those that have focused on determining the distribution of the genitive and the accusative in the function of the direct object in negated sentences. These include studies carried out on materials from Croatian medieval texts (Vince-Marinac 1992), on texts from the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Stolac 1992; Stolac 1993), and on texts from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, accompanied by a contrastive analysis with Russian (Menac 1979).

Even at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the genitive of negation is an intriguing scientific topic. It is no longer analysed only as a concrete syntactic phenomenon, but also placed within the wider context of negation. Here we must mention Zovko Dinković's book on negation in language (Zovko Dinković 2013) which brings a contrastive analysis of negation in Croatian and English. The author (Zovko Dinković 2013) also conducted an analysis of existential verbs as relevant elements for the understanding of negation as a relation within a sentence.

Naturally, research that began during the past two centuries, i.e. through analysing the relations between several closely related Indo-European languages, also continues. Therefore, we would like to remind the reader about some papers (Timberlake 1975; Bailyn 1997) and two extensive books of proceedings: on case in Slavic (Brecht and Levine 1986) and on the history of negation in European and Mediterranean languages (Willis, Lucas and Breitbarth 2014), that is, about the Balto-Slavic context of Slavic languages (Pirnat 2015), where we wish to stress the extensive bibliography. For the semantic approach we refer to Kagan (2013).

In conclusion, the rich literature on the genitive of negation is geared towards identifying the particularities of the genitive of negation in Slavic languages, especially in sentences transformed by negation, with an overview of the Indo-European ablative sources and partitivity as a frequent component of meaning. Each study, with its choice of materials, methodological principles and research goals, contributes to the creation of the picture of the relation between the genitive and the accusative in this syntactic function.

In some of the mentioned studies, the authors warn about the problems involved in translating the genitive of negation into other languages. What is more, Croatian grammar books from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries are of contrastive type and their authors warn that the genitive of negation is a complicated translation task (Stolac and Horvat-Vlastelić 2004).



#### 4. Older Croatian grammar books

In this part of the paper we will present several of the conclusions reached on the basis of the analysis of older Croatian grammar books that relate directly to the use of the genitive of negation or the accusative in negated sentences (for more on this see Stolac and Horvat-Vlastelić 2004).

The first characteristic of older Croatian grammar books is systematic contrasting of Croatian with another language, most frequently Latin, Italian and German, but also French, Russian... These grammar books offer parallel examples in two languages. Thus, on the syntactic level we find a number of examples of objects in negated sentences, and we can therefore trace the process of normativization of the accusative or the genitive of negation.

The second characteristic is clear orientation towards the user, who has to acquire part of the linguistic insights through the process of self-learning. As a result, the contrastive examples listed in them were carefully chosen to convey unambiguous linguistic information. The pragmatic component of these grammar books required great linguistic precision.

We can single out the grammar book of the Croatian language by Ardelio Della Bella as an example of a grammar book published before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This grammar book was written in Italian and it compared the Croatian and Italian grammatical structures. With respect to the governance of transitive verbs in negated sentences, Della Bella noted both examples of the accusative and the genitive of negation, but he also added a stylistic note on the “more elegant” genitive: “Con alcuni Verbi si pone elegantemente il Gen. in luogo dell’ Acc. *Neghledam truda*, non ho riguardo a fatica” (Della Bella 1728: 44). With this he demonstrated that as a foreigner he had noticed a syntactic trait that he did not know in his mother tongue (i.e. Italian). Therefore, it is perfectly logical that he would identify such a grammatical phenomenon – the change in governance between the affirmative and the negative sentence – as a special, stylistically marked, linguistic trait.

Although from the modern point of view it seems that the nonexistence of semantic differences would require description and normative attitude towards the accusative and the genitive of negation in negated sentences, not all grammar books include such observations.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dragutin Parčić wrote several grammar books, and we can track the difference in the normativization of the direct object in a negated sentence: from the genitive as the primary form, with the accusative only being listed in a note and its use being allowed only if certain prerequisites are met



(Parčić 1873), over the parallel use of both cases (Parčić 1878), to identifying the accusative as the neutral form in relation to the marked genitive (Parčić manuscript).

We can notice that the analysis keeps leading us to stylistics on the syntactic level. Since we have determined that no semantic difference exists between an object in the accusative and an object in the genitive case in negated sentences, we have opened room for the discussion of syntactic synonymy (Stolac 2007).

## 5. Genitive of negation – qualitative characteristics

The focus of our interest is the genitive of negation, or, the direct object in the genitive case in a negative sentence, which may (but does not have to) replace the accusative from the positive sentence, that is, the noun in the genitive case which appears with negated transitive verbs.

We can notice that the genitive is an alternative to the accusative in this syntactic category, and it is a result of negation. But, negation is not necessarily accompanied by this replacement procedure and the object that accompanies a negated transitive verb can be either in the accusative or in the genitive case. The form of the positive sentence demonstrates that the accusative is the basic form. In positive sentences the direct object is in the accusative case:<sup>2</sup>

(21) *Vidjela sam na zidu sliku.*  
picture-SG.ACC  
'I saw a picture on the wall.'

(22) *Nisam vidjela na zidu sliku.*  
picture-SG.ACC  
'I did not see a picture on the wall.'

(23) *Nisam vidjela na zidu slike.*  
picture-SG.GEN  
'I saw no picture on the wall.'

This demonstrates that the use of the genitive is syntactically conditioned, and that the semantic differences that would result from the lexical meaning of the words used to express the predicate or the object play no role. Thus, the genitive of

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<sup>2</sup> The accusative is the default case in this function, and the genitive of plural nouns is only possible as the partitive genitive, e.g. *Vidjela sam na zidu lijepih slika* ('I saw some nice pictures on the wall').



negation is about emphasizing, amplifying the negation, but it does not bring a clearly visible semantic difference to the sentence.<sup>3</sup> However, the nonexistence of a clear semantic difference between the genitive of negation and the accusative in the same syntactic position does not mean that there are no semantic reasons for the existence and the use of genitive constructions. The link between the partitivity and the genitive of negation is visible, but partitivity is not its sole semantic component, and it would be wrong to reduce the semantics of the genitive of negation to partitivity. We bring one of the relevant conclusions about the character of the use of the genitive of negation reached on the basis of the analysis of negated sentences on the selected corpus (plays by the Croatian comedy writer from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Tituš Brezovački):

The use of the genitive of negation is not a syntactic rule for Tituš Brezovački, that is ... Brezovački uses genitive and accusative (in the function of the objects of the predicates of negated transitive verbs) as optional variants. (Stolac 1993: 426–427)

Now that we have determined that these are optional variants, we need to see if there is any regularity to the parallel use of these forms. From the very definition of the genitive of negation it is obvious that it does not exhibit any semantic differences in comparison with the accusative which performs the same function. Therefore, the reasons have to be sought outside the realms of syntax and semantics in the narrow sense of the word – they can obviously be found on the level of linguistics of text.

Let us start from the beginning. The aforementioned analysis has shown that Brezovački uses both forms in parallel to express the direct object in negated sentences, even when the object precedes the verb, so we can assume that the object is uttered before we know whether the verb that follows it is affirmative or negative:

(24) *ter mi pajdaštva                      ne skrati milošću*  
          friendship-SG.GEN    not deny  
          ‘and do not deny me the grace of friendship’

(25) *onu službu                      vezda od tebe ne potrebuje*  
          service-SG.ACC                      not ask  
          ‘that service does not always ask from you’

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<sup>3</sup> The semantic approach is outside the scope of this paper. For more recent studies on the semantics of the genitive, with an emphasis on the genitive of negation (cf. Kagan 2013).



Not even the presence of an affirmative verb which is located closer to the object than the negative predicate verb (in accordance with the rules on word order in the old Kajkavian Croatian language) is a sufficient reason for Brezovački to employ a complementary distribution of the genitive and the accusative:

(26) *Toga ja od njega misliti ne morem*  
that-GEN  
'That I cannot believe of him.'

(27) *iz njega hasen kakvu imati ne more*  
benefit-ACC  
'from him some benefit he cannot have'

And neither is the insertion of other syntactic categories:

(28) *Toga nikak verovati ne morem*  
that-GEN  
'That I can never believe'

(29) *ne zna drugač cenu, neg od gospode*  
price-ACC  
'knows no other price than that of gentlemen'

The situation is different when the negation in the sentence is expressed with the help of an adverbial of emphasis *ni/niti* 'neither', or some other negated word. Such amplified negation presupposes the use of the genitive of negation, and the accusative is not realized in such constructions:

(30) *Ov mu jošće niti imena ne zna*  
name-GEN  
'This man still doesn't even know his name'

(31) *da je drugač nikak toga včiniti ne morem*  
that-GEN  
'that if it were different I cannot do it any other way'

In this analysis it was found that the genitive of negation can compensate for the negated verb which can be inferred from the context, which yet again indicates the necessity of discourse analysis, as can be seen from this dialogue from one of the plays:

(32) *Koprinovič: Imamo s tobom velikoga računa.*  
big-GEN bone-GEN  
'We have a big bone to pick with you.'



- (33) *Matijaš: Sudim, da čisto nikakvoga.*  
none-GEN

‘I judge it to be none.’

The following construction is similar:

- (34) *Teško je jednomu nesrečnom nikoga svojega imati.*  
nobody-GEN

‘It is difficult for an unfortunate person to have nobody of their own.’

Here, the verb *imati* ‘have’ is in the affirmative form, but the use of the indefinite pronoun with negative meaning – *nikoga* ‘nobody’ – gives the entire verb phrase the meaning of ‘not having’, of complete non-possession. Therefore, the genitive of negation is a justified choice.

The following example is also interesting:

- (35) *Nigde nikoga.*  
nowhere no one-GEN

Here the negated verb form is left out from sentence, and we deal with ellipsis. Here also, the genitive of negation is an expected and justified choice. We can offer the following English equivalent:

- (36) *No one was around.*

The analysed phrases containing the genitive of negation from our corpus have revealed which nominal word most frequently appears in the object position, and which verb most frequently governs the genitive of negation.

The most frequent object is the genitive singular of the demonstrative pronoun *to* ‘that’, that is, *toga*:

- (37) *toga stanovito ne znam*  
that-GEN  
‘I truly do not know that’

- (38) *toga nigdo ne potrebuje*  
that-GEN  
‘no one needs that’

The most frequent predicate verb is *nimati* (‘not have’), which is an expected consequence of the semantics of this verb. The verb *nimati/nemati* negates the possession of even the smallest segment/part of the object, and therefore it is a logical choice for the preservation of the genitive of negation in such sentences:



- (39) *Jošče mira i počinka nimam*  
 peace-GEN rest-GEN  
 ‘I still cannot find any peace or rest’
- (40) *posta nimaju kakti psi; poštene reči ne zrečeju*  
 fast-GEN word-SG.GEN  
 ‘just like dogs they do not fast, they never utter an honest word’

The semantic analysis of these last examples reveals that they express the nonexistence of the object, its lack, or its total negation.

Diachronic analyses reveal that the genitive of negation used to be a lively syntactic category (cf. Stolac 1992: 430). This is no longer the case, because its frequency in the contemporary language has been reduced significantly,<sup>4</sup> and therefore this category is nowadays stylistically marked as belonging to a higher, more formal style.

The analyses of contemporary texts indicate that both the accusative and the genitive of negation are realized in the same types of constructions – those in which an object precedes a predicate and the negation of the syntactic structure is not visible at the time the object is uttered, in constructions containing the negative particles *ni/niti*, and in sentences in which the negated verb is not overtly expressed:

- (41) *On toga ne zna*  
 that-GEN  
 ‘He does not know this/that/it’
- (42) *On joj još ni imena ne zna*  
 name-GEN  
 ‘He still does not even know her name’
- (43) *Njoj o tom ni slova*  
 word-GEN  
 ‘Not a word about it to her’

The difference, therefore, is not observed in the distribution, but only on the syntacto-stylistic level.<sup>5</sup> More will be said about this at a later point.

<sup>4</sup> Research of the spoken language reveals that the genitive of negation has almost completely disappeared from the spoken discourse, especially in conversations on everyday topics and in the speech of the young, and that it is primarily linked to the written discourse which belongs to higher functional styles.

<sup>5</sup> Stylistic analysis reveals that in the texts in the corpus from the 18th century the use of the genitive of negation is an individual choice made by the author, because objects in both the accusative and





To sum up this section: the genitive of negation performs the function of emphasizing,<sup>6</sup> amplifying the negation, but since its use in negated sentences is not the result of semantic differences in relation to the accusative, these are optional variants. The only difference that can be identified on the basis of the conducted analyses is the one on the syntacto-stylistic level.

Based on all of the above we can conclude that the choice of the genitive of negation or the accusative demonstrates that these syntactic synonymy pairs have different stylistic functions. How can translators from Croatian into some non-Slavic language or from some foreign language into Croatian deal with this difference that is immanent to Slavic languages? That is, how can we include this information into the process of learning/teaching Croatian as a foreign language?

## 6. Syntactic synonymy

Syntactic synonymy can be defined as absolute synonymy on the syntactic level, but also as near synonymy. For those who understand syntactic synonymy as absolute synonymy, this principle is extremely important. It requires that all the semantic segments match perfectly and that the same syntactic function is performed, and the differences are allowed only on the level of style.

On the syntactic level, the requirements of such a definition are met precisely by the genitive of negation in relation to the accusative:

(44) *Nije mu rekla ni riječ.*  
word-ACC  
'She didn't say a word to him.'

(45) *Nije mu rekla ni riječi.*  
word-GEN  
'She said not a word to him.'

Both cases perform the same function – that of the direct object. There is no semantic difference if they appear in the same context. Both are used in the same type of sentence – the negated sentence. The genitive of negation is the result of transforming an affirmative sentence into a negative one, but it is not obligatory.

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the genitive case appear in the same contexts. It is therefore possible to link the conclusions with the literary style. In order to explain other seemingly unsystematic/groundless examples of use of the accusative and the genitive of negation, semantic analysis would have to be included, which is outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> By choosing the genitive of negation, the negation is put in the foreground.



Only a stylistic analysis can reveal whether these are optional variants, as was the case in the earlier periods of the Croatian language, and still is in some Slavic languages, or whether the difference in the use of these two cases is statistically significant, in which case the one that is used less frequently would become stylistically marked.

We must not forget that the genitive of negation appears exclusively in negated sentences and, as a result, it amplifies the negation of the content of the entire sentence. Therefore, on the basis of this, and the statistical data which indicate that the use of accusative is definitely more frequent (79.76%) than the use of the genitive of negation (20.24%) (according to Menac 1979), we can determine that the accusative is stylistically unmarked, unlike the genitive of negation which is stylistically marked. That this is not the case in all Slavic languages is borne out by the information from the same study in which it was found that the situation in Russian is the reverse of that in Croatian: the genitive of negation (78.73%) is more frequently used than the accusative (21.27%). (Menac 1979).

Let us go back to Croatian. Although these two constructions are interchangeable because they do not bring any differences in meaning to the sentence, their interchangeability is complete only on the grammatical level, but not on the stylistic. The genitive of negation is clearly marked and it is always used in marked discourse. Therefore, the English equivalents of sentences (44) and (45), repeated here as (46) and (47), can and should demonstrate this difference:

(46) *She didn't say a word to him.*

(47) *She said not a word to him.*

Let us now turn our attention to the following sentences:

(48) *Vidim budućnost.*  
see-1SG.PRES future-SG.ACC  
'I see the future.'

(49) *Ne vidim budućnost.*  
not see-1SG.PRES future-SG.ACC  
'I don't see the future.'

(50) *Ne vidim budućnosti.*  
not see-1SG.PRES future-SG.GEN  
'I see no future.'

Sentence (49) is affectively neutral and therefore the accusative is used. Sentence (50) is affectively marked and was uttered in a psychiatrist's office during a



conversation about a patient's depression. With his linguistic choice, that of the genitive of negation which negates the existence of the object, the patient clearly indicated that he had no faith in his future. This difference is quite evident in their English translations as well.

Naturally, language is a complex structure, and there is a certain number of phrases, albeit a small number, in which the accusative cannot be replaced by the genitive, because these only seem to involve the genitive of negation at first glance:

(51) *Daj mu mira.*  
          peace-GEN  
      'Give him (some) peace.'

(52) *Ne daj mu mira.*  
          peace-GEN  
      'Don't give him (any) peace.'

Parallel phrases with the accusative are not possible:

(53) \**Daj mu mir.*  
          peace-ACC  
      'Give him peace.'

(54) \**Ne daj mu mir.*  
          peace-ACC  
      'Don't give him peace.'

It is important to stress two things here: first, in this example the verb is in the imperative mood, its use in the indicative mood is exceptional (*Dam mu mira*, 'I give him peace'); and second, the accusative can be found in the Roman Catholic liturgy – *Dajte/Pružite mir jedni drugima* ('Let us offer each other (a sign of His) peace').

We can see that the direct object is in the genitive case in both the affirmative and the negative sentence. This means that the genitive that is used in the negative sentence is not the result of transformation by negation, but of the partitive meaning of the phrase, that is, there is no change of governance (accusative into genitive) because of negation. Instead, this is a subtype of partitive genitive that indicates an incomplete encompassing of the object of the verbal action (we cannot give complete peace to anyone, we can only give them some peace). Due to its resemblance to the genitive of negation, in Slavic literature, it is called *pseudo genitive of negation* (cf. Menac 1979: 72).



Therefore, a genitive that cannot be replaced by the accusative in a negated sentence does exist, but here we were talking only about an illusion of a possible replacement because the genitive that is involved is partitive genitive, a construction of the direct object which carries with it a semantic distinction based on the *whole : part* relationship.

## 7. Conclusion

In the conclusive part of this study we can say that the genitive of negation, as a type of direct object that can only be realized in negated sentences and that can be replaced by the accusative without any difference in meaning, is truly a relevant syntactic problem both for the teachers of Croatian and of foreign languages, and for the translators. On the one hand, there are no problems inside the family of Slavic languages where this syntactic category exists (as a result we have direct equivalents: accusative – accusative; genitive – genitive). The problem will be felt by those who compare Croatian to a non-Slavic language because such languages do not have equivalent syntactic structures. Because of this we have presented the genitive of negation as a special type of direct object which is linked exclusively to the transformation of the syntactic structure by negation. We have presented its syntactic and semantic traits, the syntactic equivalence with the direct object in the accusative, the amplification of negation that its use brings to the sentence, but also the different syntacto-stylistic value of these two types of direct objects.

The less frequent use of the genitive of negation makes it marked, even archaic, and it is therefore not appropriate in some contexts, primarily in conversational discourse (except in existential sentences, where the use of genitive is quite common and frequent [cf. Partee and Borschev 2002]).

A high linguistic, and especially syntacto-stylistic, competence is the primary requirement for a translator, who needs to be able to choose the appropriate co-existing form in concrete discourse. In addition to this, a translator must be able to differentiate between the individual constructions that are stylistically marked by the author, with which he or she can get more creative within the broader framework of the free translation of a literary text, and the general neutral constructions that cannot be translated without being acquainted with translation strategies. As of yet no unambiguous solutions to this challenge have been offered in literature, and we have only touched upon some questions.

In order to respond to this translational and methodological challenge, at least two tasks are set before the linguists who study various foreign languages in rela-



tion to Croatian: to propose concrete individual translation equivalents and to determine a scale for their stylistic evaluation.

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## The address of the author:

University of Rijeka,  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,  
Sveučilišna avenija 4,  
51000 Rijeka, Croatia  
diana.stolac@ri.t-com.hr

### SLAVENSKI GENITIV U HRVATSKOME JEZIKU

Bliži je objekt u hrvatskome jeziku objekt u akuzativu ili genitivu koji je akuzativom zamjenjiv. Dva su bliža objekta u genitivu: partitivni i slavenski genitiv. Uvjet za slavenski genitiv je da je predikatni glagol prelazan, a rečenica preoblikovana nijekanjem. Slavenski je genitiv, dakle, ostvariv samo u zanijekanim rečenicama i u njima je sinoniman s akuzativom, dok je u jesnoj rečenici u bliži objekt isključivo u akuzativu.

Literatura o slavenskom genitivu bavi se prvenstveno postankom i prvobitnim značenjem – partitivnost, ablativnost (Meillet 1897) i smještanjem u indoeuropski padežni sustav (Heinz 1965) te stanjem u pojedinim slavenskim jezicima (Trávníček 1938; Breznik 1943; Hausenblas 1958; Harrer-Pisarkowa 1959; Gortan-Premk 1962; Heinz 1965; Hlavsa 1975; za hrvatski jezik: Feleszko 1970; Menac 1979; Vince-Marinac 1992; Stolac 1993; Stolac i Horvat-Vlastelić 2004).

Ova morfosintaktička činjenica obilježje je slavenskih jezika (stoga se naziva slavenski genitiv), u kojima ima različita kvalitativna obilježja (stilski obilježen/stilski neobilježen; zamjenjiv s akuzativom bez razlike u značenju/zamjenjiv s akuzativom uz značenjsku razliku/nezamjenjiv akuzativom). Izvan slavenske jezične porodice nema jednakovrijednih sintaktičkih struktura.

U radu se komentiraju razlike između hrvatske i engleske sintakse koje ne omogućavaju izravan prijevod slavenskoga genitiva te traže prijevodne strategije koje bi zadržale sva obilježja slavenskoga genitiva (pojačano nijekanje, naglašavanje nijekanja, stilski obilježenost). Kako je slavenski genitiv češći u tekstovima starije hrvatske pismenosti nego u suvremenim tekstovima, a posebno u suvremenom razgovornom diskursu, nužan je i dijakronijski pogled. Korpus za taj segment istraživanja dramski su tekstovi kajkavskoga komediografa Tituša Brezovačkoga (1757–1805).

Osim prevoditeljima ovo je problem i u poučavanju hrvatskoga jezika kao stranog jezika jer promjena rekacije između jesne i niječne rečenice zbunjuje stranoga korisnika hrvatskoga jezika.

Na razini primjera diskutira se odnos: *Vidim budućnost./Ne vidim budućnost* (afektivno neutralno)/*Ne vidim budućnosti* (afektivno obilježeno) te moguće prijevodne likove: *I don't see the future./I see no future.*



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**Ključne riječi:** slavenski genitiv; bliži objekt; hrvatska sintaksa; engleska sintaksa.