

Title: A Visit to the Old Curiosity Shop: Bare *ni* in the Russian Universal Concessive Conditional

Author: Steven Franks, Indiana University

Len Babby has made a career of studying linguistic curiosities. This paper examines one he left for the rest of us, namely the bare *ni* which obligatorily appears in universal concessive clauses (UCCs). Consider (1), from Haspelmath and König (1998: 616):

- (1) Gde by ja ni byla, vezde menja vstrečali druželjubno.
'Wherever I was, everywhere I was met in a friendly way.'

The UCC *gde by ja ni byla* is an adjunct which asserts that the proposition in the main clause (*vezde menja vstrečali druželjubno*) holds in any possible world where the UCC condition is met, i.e., "for all X, X a place that I was in". Such UCCs involve free-choice quantification (e.g., English *-ever*), hypothetical modality (e.g., Russian *by*), and a *wh*-word (e.g., *gde*). This latter is parasitic on the free relative (FR) construction, which supplies the free-choice meaning:

- (2) On vseгда žil, gde ja žila.
'He always lived where I lived'

Note that the FR *gde ja žila* lacks negation. One therefore wonders why the Russian UCC requires *ni*. And, if *ni* is truly negation, why does it occur in the absence of *ne*? Van de Cruys (2012) thus claims that the UCC *ni* "is not a negative or emphatic particle, but a free choice item." While Haspelmath and König (1998: 616) find negation in UCCs semantically "rather puzzling," alongside Russian they cite Polish, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Yiddish, Latvian, Udmurt, and Georgian as exploiting a negation strategy. Also, many languages, including English, Romani, Irish, and Finnish, can express universal concession by embedding the *wh*-clause inside "(it does) no(t) matter/(it is) all the same".

In this paper I argue that *ni* consists of *ne* + focus particle *i*. The UCC bare *ni* is not an NPI, but an instance of pleonastic negation; hence the following judgments:

- (3) Čto/Čego by ja (*nikogda) ni s"ela, mne ploxo. 'Whatever I (ever/*never) eat, I feel sick.'
[cf. Polish: Czego bym nie zjadła, to robi mi się niedobrze.]

Ni renders hypothetical modality and occurs with obligatory focus (*i*) of an adjunct FR (*wh*) clause. Finally, this account of Russian UCCs is supported through comparison with its Bulgarian counterpart (cf. Franks and Rudin 2012).

Franks, S. and C. Rudin. 2012. "Syntactic and Typological Aspects of Universal Concessive Conditionals in Bulgarian." Paper at the Ninth Joint Meeting of North American and Bulgarian Scholars (Bulgarian Studies Association and Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), Eugene, OR.

Haspelmath, M. and E. König. 1998. "Concessive Conditionals in the Languages of Europe." In J. van der Auwera, *Adverbial Constructions in the Languages of Europe*, 563–640.

Van de Cruys, K. 2012. On the Use of the Russian Universal Concessive Conditional with Particle *ni*. Ms., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.