

Negation-Licensed Commands
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All the expressions in (1) are interpreted as commands:

- 1a. No talking with your mouth full!
- b. No teasing your sister!
- c. No reading the newspaper in class!
- d. No walking on the grass!

Negation is obligatory to convey a command:

- 2a. *Studying hard!
- b. *Reading the newspaper outside of class
- c. *Playing the piano carefully!
- d. *Staying off the grass!

This talk will have a cross-linguistic focus, as the contrast shown in (1,2) appears in a number of languages. Even though the syntactic properties will be somewhat different in different languages, we will see that there is one common characteristic: these commands survive as commands only when they are negated. The absence of negation does not lead to a positive command. It leads either to a completely different (i.e. non-command) meaning, or to ungrammaticality. I will therefore introduce the term “Negation-Licensed Command” or NLC.

I have three goals for this talk: to establish the existence and crosslinguistic stability of the phenomenon of NLCs, to discuss some of its morpho-syntactic properties cross-linguistically, and to show that a number of possible explanations cannot be correct. What, in fact, the correct explanation for NLCs is I do not yet know.

This talk is within syntax and semantics but not technical at all in either.