Negative modals in Georgian Sign Language: partial suppletion and concord

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In sign languages (SLs), negation can be realized by manual signs and/or a headshake [3]. Interestingly, across SLs, modals commonly involve an irregular negative form [2,4]. We investigate the behavior of modals under negation in Georgian SL (GESL), an understudied language.

We first show that under negation, GESL modals (e.g. CAN, WANT) display a (partially) suppletive form, as they are characterized by a change in movement. We are thus dealing with a morphological ***one-to-many*** relation. Second, when used in a past tense context, the irregular negative forms obligatorily combine with the particle NOT, as is illustrated for WANT-NOT in (1a). That is, we observe Negative Concord (NC), a syntactic ***many-to-one*** relation, Using only the suppletive form leads to ungrammaticality (1b), and so does combing WANT-NOT with NOT in the present/future tense (1c). That is, this type of NC in GESL is tense-specific (tense-specific negation strategies also exist in spoken languages [1], but they usually don't apply to only a subset of verbs).

(1) a. YESTERDAY **WANT-NOT NOT** PAINT
         'Yesterday I didn't want to paint.'
     b. *YESTERDAY **WANT-NOT** PAINT
     c. *TODAY **WANT-NOT NOT** PAINT

We hypothesize that NegP has to be lexicalized. In the present/future tense, this is achieved by moving the modal to Neg, yielding the irregular form. In the past, the modal moves further up to Tns (as evidenced by it preceding NOT), due to [+past] being a strong feature. Thus, merging NOT in SpecNegP is obligatory in [+past] contexts.

References: [1] Miestamo. 2005. *Standard negation*. Mouton. **[2]** Pfau & Quer. 2007. The syntax of negation and modals in Catalan SL and German SL. In *Visible variation*, 129-61. Mouton. **[3]** Quer. 2012. Negation. In *Sign language: International handbook*, 316-39. De Gruyter Mouton. **[4]** Zeshan. 2004. Hand, head, and face: Negative constructions in SLs. *Linguistic Typology* 8. 1-58.