Making ends meet: the consequences of a shift in sentential negation in Hungarian

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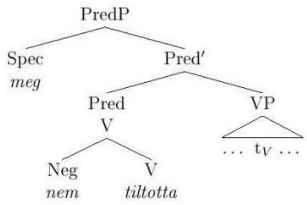
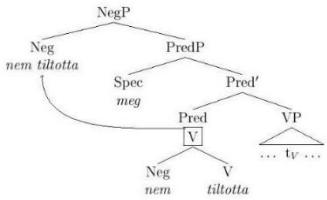
1. The problem. Modern Hungarian displays two word order patterns in negative sentences: the verbal modifier can either precede or follow the negated verb. The distribution of these variants is unequal; as a recent corpus study showed, the NEG – V – VM pattern occurs in 93,78% of negative sentences, whereas the share of the VM – NEG – V pattern is 6,22% (Kalivoda 2020, N=983055). It is a puzzling phenomenon that the rarer variant can occur in two fairly different functions: on the one hand, it encodes that negation is "emphatic, emotionally loaded" (Deme 1962: 478); on the other hand, it occurs mostly in *until*-clauses. The present paper argues that these two divergent functions are the result of a shift in sentential negation that occurred during the 19th century. Prior to that, ordinary sentential negation occurred with the VM – NEG – V pattern, and the NEG – V – VM variant was marginal with a special pragmatic function. During the change, the latter variant gained frequency, lost its special pragmatic function, and became ordinary sentential negation. *Until*-clauses were left out of this change owing to the special nature of negation in them (pleonastic negation), and the VM – NEG – V pattern became coupled with pleonastic negation. The emergence of the emphatic function of the very same pattern can be seen as a result of structural reanalysis that took place probably during the end of the change.

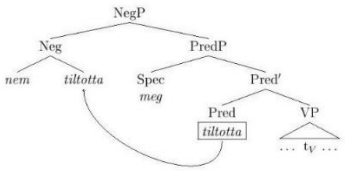
2. The structural background. The VM – NEG – V pattern is the conservative variant that was inherited presumably from the Ugric protolanguage. É. Kiss (2014) derives this order with an adjunction-based analysis, that is, the negative marker is left-adjoined to the verb and they form a complex head (**1a)**. The appearance of the NEG – V – VM pattern is connected to the emergence of a dedicated functional projection (NegP), to which this complex head could get through optional movement, leaving the VM behind in the specifier of PredP (**1b**). According to this analysis, optional movement could have become more frequent in time, and this frequency change could lead to the reanalysis of the structure. As a result of this, the negative particle ended up merged directly into the NegP, from where it elicits verb movement (**2**).



1a: Derivation of VM-NEG-V via adjunction



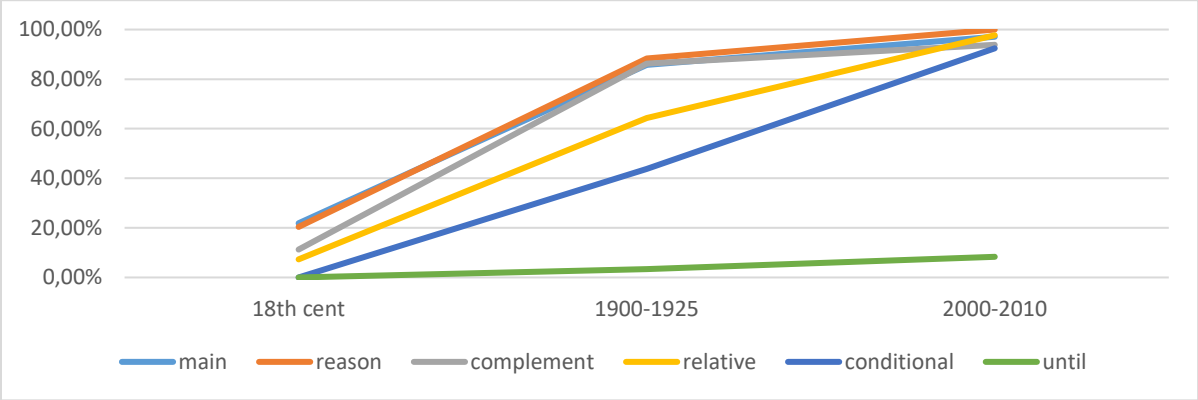
1b: Derivation of NEG-V-VM via adjunction and optional movement



2: Derivation with merge and movement of the verb

3. Analysis: change and outliers. The change in the distribution of the two variants occurred during the 19th century. Prior to that, the rate of the innovative variant was 13,2% in the negative sentences occurring in the 18th-century data of *Old and Middle Hungarian Corpus of Informal Language Use* (N=2379; the category of verbal modifier was represented with preverbal particles in this query). It can be assumed that the rarer variant had a specific pragmatic function, as it seems to have occurred mostly in contexts in which it was emphatically contrasted with an explicit or implicit context proposition, and carried the meaning that the

negated proposition is true indeed (this notion of emphasis is based on Piñón 1991). The distribution of the innovative variant is higher in those sentence types which are more likely to give space for this emphatic function. These 18th century data are contrasted with two periods following the change (2: 1900–1925, 3: 2000–2010; data were collected from the *Hungarian Historical Text Corpus,* and the class of preverbal particles is represented with the most frequent item *meg).*



As the diagram shows, *until*-clauses were left out of the 19th century change. The paper argues that the reason for this is that this change could be similar to the Jespersen-cycle in that it was a pragmatically marked variant that gained frequency and, consequently, lost its pragmatic function (yet it differs from the Jespersen-cycle in that there is no grammaticalizing negative element involved). However, negation occurring in *until*-clauses is special in that it is not ordinary negation, but pleonastic negation (it is optional, it does not change the polarity of the proposition, it does not license negative pronouns). Therefore, it was incompatible with the pragmatic function carried originally by the innovative variant, and was left out from the change from its beginning. As a result of this, in time the speakers associated the conservative variant (that was originally a general negative pattern) with pleonastic negation.

As for the emergence of the empathic function of the conservative variant, the reanalysis probably took place during the final period of the shift, when the innovative variant was already the standard negative pattern for the majority of speakers. The negative particle in [Spec, NegP] carries stress, and the verb that follows it is not stressed (’NEG – V – ’VM), as opposed to the modern, emphatically interpreted VM – NEG – V pattern, in which it is the negative particle that is unstressed (’VM – NEG – ’V). This structure is assumed to involve the focusing of the VM (Piñón 1991). Prior to the change, the latter pattern was general and involved no focus (see Figure **1a**), but it can be assumed that its stress pattern was similar, i.e. the VM bore stress, and the NEG did not (these two elements could be even written as one word in older sources, which reflects the enclitical nature of the negative particle). When innovative speakers (for whom the negative particle was merged in Spec, NegP and carried stress) encountered the already sporadic ’VM – NEG – V pattern in a context where it could not be associated with pleonastic negation, they reanalysed it by assuming that the VM precedes the negative element and carries stress because it is in focus (expessing verum focus). Therefore, the old pattern acquired a new function, and still occurs, albeit infrequently, in standard negation as well.

References. Deme László 1962. Hangsúly, szórend, hanglejtés, szünet. In: Tompa József szerk., A mai magyar nyelv rendszere II. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest. 457–552. ● É. Kiss Katalin 2014b. The evolution of functional left peripheries in the Hungarian sentence. In: É. Kiss, Katalin ed., The evolution of functional left peripheries in Hungarian syntax. OUP, Oxford. 9–55. ● Kalivoda Ágnes 2020. *Igekötős szerkezetek a magyarban*. Doktori (PhD) értekezés, kézirat. https://github.com/kagnes/phd_thesis ●Piñón, Christopher 1991. Presupposition and the syntax of negation in Hungarian. In: Dobrin, Lise M. – Nichols, Lynn. – Rodriguez, Rosa M. ed., Papers from the 27th Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society 1991. Chicago Linguistic Society. 246–262.