# FOCUS AND NEGATIVE CONCORD IN HUNGARIAN

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**Abstract**

This paper presents a newly disccovered exception to Negative Concord in Hungarian that does not involve double negation. Rather, it is like English *it*-clefts that contain two negative particles that correspond to two instances of negation, in two independent formulae. The paper extends a DRT-based analysis of Hungarian Focus to the simplest cases, mentions some implications for the division of labour between syntax and semantics and suggests a possible method of presupposition accommodation that is required by the more complex cases..

## 1. Introduction

The aims of this paper are (*i*) to present new Hungarian data that show a new kind of exemption from Negative Concord that is problematic to syntax-based, or syntax-driven, theories of Negative Concord (e.g. Zeijlstra 2004);[1] (*ii*) to show how the core cases follow from a DRT-based analysis of Hungarian Focus and (*iii*) to sketch an analysis of the more involved cases. These latter cases are relevant also for ongoing debates on presupposition accommodation in the theoretical literature.

## 2. Negative Concord in Hungarian; The Exceptions

This section reviews the standard facts about negation and Negative Concord in Hungarian, and introduces the exceptions to Negative Concord.

### 2.1. Negation and Negative Concord

Hungarian is a Negative Concord language, as shown in (1): two so-called *n*-words, *senki, semmi* ('no-one' and 'nothing') and the negative particles *nem* or *sem* contribute to *one* negation in the sentence. According to linguists working on negation and Negative Concord (cf. Giannakidou 2002, Zeijlstra 2004) Hungarian is a so-called strong Negative Concord language.[2] The relevant contrast is between Hungarian (1b) and Italian(2b). In simple descriptive terms, in Hungarian the preverbal

[1] Some of the data can be found in an unpubslihed UCLA ms by Anna Szabolcsi; what is new here is the realisation of their significance for Negative Concord.

[2] But see Surányi 2002 for the claim that Hungarian is in fact a hybrid. This claim is based on data different from the data presented here.

position of the *n*-word *senki* 'no-one' is not sufficient to prohibit the occurrence of the negative particle *nem* or *sem* — unlike the Italian example (2b), where the pre-verbal *n*-word *nessuno* 'no-one' blocks the negative particle *non*.

(1) a. Nem látott senki semmi-t
Not saw no-one nothing-Acc
'No-one saw anything'

b. Senki ∗(nem/sem) látott semmi-t
No-one not/SEM saw nothing-Acc
– same –

(2) a. Gianni ∗(non) ha telefonato a nessuno

b. Nessuno ( ∗non) ha telefonato

### 2.2. Two Positions for *Nem*

The placement of the negative particle *nem* looks standard at first sight: from (1) one could conclude that it is to be immediately preverbal. The problem is that *nem* can surface in not one but two preverbal positions: in an immediately preverbal position, as in (3a), or in a position that immediately precedes Focus, as in (3b).

(3) a. [János]$_F$ nem látta Marit
'It was John who didn't see Mary'

b. Nem [János]$_F$ látta Marit (hanem Péter)
'It was not John who saw Mary (it was Peter)'

There is consensus in the literature that immediately preverbal *nem* projects *NegP*. The status of pre-Focus *nem* is less clear. (See Olsvay 2000 or Surányi 2002 for discussion.[3])

### 2.3. Exemption from Negative Concord

The two positions for *nem* in Hungarian are relevant for the study of Negative Concord, because, as it turns out, a sentence can have **two** occurrences of *nem*.

(4) Nem [János]$_F$ nem látta Marit (hanem Péter/hanem Péter ÉS János)
'It was not John who did not see Mary (it was Peter/it was Peter AND John)'

It is important to note about (4) that an English *it*-cleft is indeed a close paraphrase for it. That is to say, this is not a double negation sentence.[4]

It is as if (4) had a complex underlying structure, and the two negative particles contributed to different 'compartments' of this structure. This may have motivated, I think, Surányi's proposal concerning the metalinguistic status of pre-Focus *nem*. Sentences like (4) will be said to involve iterated negation, or 'independent' negation.

The sentences in (5) show that *n*-words are licensed in such environments, as expected:

[3] According to Surányi, the pre-Focus particle corresponds to meta-linguistic negation; his own examples are attractive, but some examples later in this paper complicate matters considerably.

[4] (4) does not entail that John saw Mary: it is compatible with a scenario where Mary was not seen by Peter and John. That is, what (4) negates/denies is that John is the unique (maximal) individual with the property of not having seen Mary.

(5) a. Nem [Marit]$_F$ nem látta senki (hanem Katit)
'It was not Mary who wasn't seen by anyone (but Cathy)'
b. Senki nem [Marit]$_F$ nem látta (hanem Katit)
'No member $x$ from a contextually salient group
is such that it was Mary whom $x$ did not see (it was Cathy)'

## 3. Focus, Presupposition, Negation

This section outlines a DRT-based (Genabith et al. ta) analysis of Hungarian sentences that involve Focus and negation. It takes a proper semantic analysis of negation and Negative Concord for granted, as its main concern is the interaction between the presupposition–assertion structure triggered by Hungarian Focus and negation. The scope interactions between presuppositions and *n*-words will be of particular interest, since the Hungarian data provide interesting evidence on presupposition accommodation and domain restriction.

### 3.1. An Analysis of Hungarian Focus; Simple Cases of Iterated Negation

Hungarian Focus is taken to have the following properties (Bende-Farkas 2005) that are of relevance to this paper: (*i*) It is exhaustive, or maximal (viz the denotation of the focussed constituent is maximal relative to a — possibly complex — predicate constructed from the rest of the sentence). (*ii*) It triggers an existence presupposition.[5] (*iii*) Exhaustivity is also taken to have the status of a presupposition. Exhaustivity, or maximality, is relative to a set of alternatives — that is, one property shared by English and Hungarian Focus is that they invoke a set of contextually salient alternatives.

The simplified analysis adopted here builds on Hans Kamp's DRT-based representation of English Focus (Kamp 2004) and my previous work on Hungarian Focus (Bende-Farkas 2002; Bende-Farkas 2005, also in DRT). The simple sentence (6) would, for instance, be represented as (7) (reverting to a linear, flat format, where $\partial$ marks presuppositions).

(6) János [Marit]$_F$ szereti 'It is Mary whom John loves'

(7) introduces a presupposition about context set $C'$, s.t. the Focus variable $\beta$ and the discourse referent of the focussed constituent both have the property of being in $C'$. There is an existence presupposition (constructed from material to the right of Focus): in this case it involves a state $s$ of John loving some $\beta$. $\beta$ is maximal relative to this property (originally maximality has been encoded with DRT's abstraction operator $\Sigma$, but any suitable maximality operator could be used instead). The assertion part simply identifies $\beta$ with Mary.

[5] Except for $MON \downarrow$ *XP*s that are focussed 'by default'.

(7) $\partial(\exists C', \alpha.[C'(m) \wedge C'(\alpha) \wedge m\#\alpha]) \wedge$
$\partial(\exists \beta, s.[C'(\beta) \wedge n \subseteq s \wedge \textit{love}(s)(j, \beta) \wedge MAX(\beta, \lambda\beta'.[\exists s'[\ldots]])]) \wedge$
$\beta = m$

In what follows an abbreviated notation will be used: in (8), the abbreviated version of (7), $\exists\beta^{C'}_{MAX} \ldots$ says that there is a $\beta$ in context set $C'$, and it is maximal (relative to the property that can be 'constructed' from material in the scope of the existential quantifier).

(8) $\partial(\exists\beta^{C'}_{MAX}.\exists s.[n \subseteq s \wedge \textit{love}(s)(j, \beta)]) \wedge \beta = m$

Given the format exemplified in (7), the simplest cases of exceptions from Negative Concord are easy to represent. The point is, pre-Focus *nem* will contribute to the assertion part, and immediately preverbal *nem* will contribute to the presupposition part (it will have narrow scope relative to the 'main' existential quantifier of the existence presupposition). For reasons of space, an explicit representation of such a case will be left as an (easy) exercise. Indeed, iterated negation sentences (without *n*-words) in Hungarian do not present technical difficulties. The problems they present are theoretical. For reasons of space, I will merely enounce these problems here:

A problem concerning syntax is that the 'domain' of NC in these examples is not a syntactic clause, as in most known cases of NC, but a semantic unit: negation in the presupposition triggered by Focus is independent from negation in the assertion part.

Another problem concerns precisely the relationship between presupposition and assertion: in these core cases negation does not have the 'crossing' dependency property that for instance existential quantifiers have (meaning that an existential quantifier in one slot can bind a variable in the other slot).

### 3.2. The Complex Cases: Focus and *N*-words

In general, the scope of the presuppositions triggered by Hungarian Focus conforms to the so-called Scope-Principle (cf. the work of É.Kiss or Szabolcsi), in that linear order corresponds to scope order. (9)–(10) are a minimal scopal pair, for instance: (9) presupposes that there is a unique individual loved by every student, whereas in (10) the presupposition is outscoped by the universal quantifier *minden diák* 'every student'.

(9) [Marit]$_F$ szereti minden diák 'It is Mary whom every student loves'

(10) Minden diák [Marit]$_F$ szereti 'For every student $x$, it is Mary whom $x$ loves

*N*-words also participate in such scope interactions (irrespective of whether the sentence has one or two negative particles). In fact, *n*-words and more standard quantifiers in Hungarian have a uniform behaviour not only as regards the scope of

the presuppositions of Focus, but regarding accommodation problems as well. That is to say, the remarks on accommodation in this subsection will hold not only for Focus and *n*-words but for Focus and other quantifiers as well.

(11) (Nem) $[\text{Marit}]_F$ nem látta senki 'It is (not) Mary who was seen by no-one'

(12) Senki nem $[\text{Marit}]_F$ látta
'For no $x$ (from a given group): it is not Mary whom $x$ saw'

In (11) the presupposition of Focus has wide scope: it is presupposed that there is a unique individual that no-one saw; it is then asserted that this individual is (or is not) Mary. In (12) the presupposition has narrow scope. Assuming that the *n-word* +negation complex translates as *all...not*,[6] the sentence says that for all members $x$ of some group $X$ it is presupposed that there is a unique person that $x$ saw; the assertion is that that person is not Mary.

(13) $\forall x.[\textit{person}(x) \wedge C(x) \rightarrow \partial(\exists\beta^{C'}_{x,MAX}, e, t.[e \subseteq t \prec n$
$\wedge\ \textit{see}(e)(x, \beta_x)]) \wedge \beta_x \neq m]$

Note that the preverbal *n*-word in (12) (and to some extent the post-verbal *n*-word in (11) as well) corresponds to a quantifier with a non-empty domain. In fact, it corresponds to a quantifier with a domain salient in, or familiar from, previous discourse.[7] In my opinion, the relevant factor in this group-specific reading has to do first of all with Focus and the presupposition it triggers. The point is that 'officially' in (12) the presupposition is 'located' in the nuclear scope, but the over-all native speaker impression is that more is presupposed, viz that the presupposition outscopes the quantifer ('for all $x \in X$: there is a $\beta_x$ that $x$ saw'). This is clearest when the sentence has a denial reading, because then there is an obvious antecedent for it. But a sentence like (12) can be uttered without any prior context and a co-operative listener can accommodate it. The question is what gets accommodated, and how.

Simply exporting the presupposition outside the scope of the *n*-word and its associated universal quantifier is not an option, since the presupposition contains a variable bound by that quantifier. Simple intermediate accommodation is not an option, either; it is rejected on the basis of native speaker judgements (that could be further tested).

What does get accommodated, I think, is the proposition that for every member $x$ of some group $X$ there is a $\beta_x$ that $x$ saw. (14) shows the 'antecedent' for the narrow scope presupposition in (13). Taking (13) and (14) as premises, a sequence of

[6] Cf. Giannakidou 2002; Puskás 2000; Surányi 2002

[7] This is indicated by the marked oddness of continuations that state that in fact there was no-one in the intended group. A better example in this respect is the Hungarian counterpart of the following: *Nothing was bought by [Mary]$_F$, because there WAS nothing to buy.* The Hungarian version of this sentence is definitely odd; precisely, I think, because it presupposes a collection of things, and that each of these was bought by someone.

standard inference steps (universal instantiation and inference rules involving conditionals) yield a conclusion that (for all practical purposes) amounts to intermediate accommodation.

(14) $\exists X'.\forall x'.[x' \in X' \rightarrow \exists \beta'_{x'}, e', t'.[e' \subseteq t' \prec n \wedge \textit{see}(e')(x', \beta'_{x'})]]$

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