

## The syntax of expletive negation in exclamatives: Evidence from Hungarian

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### INTRODUCTION

Expletive negation (broadly speaking, instances where the negator seems not to modify the truth-value of the proposition) has been at the forefront of research interest recently. In her seminal work, Espinal (2000) analyzed expletive negation and negative concord in a uniform feature-checking framework, postulating that in both cases, the negator occupies the same syntactic position (Neg<sup>0</sup> of a NegP above TP), with the crucial difference being that in the case of expletive negation, the negator is licensed by a higher non-veridical operator. In his in-depth analysis of Italian, Greco (2018) introduces a finer distinction between strong expletive negation and weak expletive negation (based on licensing facts related to strong NPIs and N-words). Greco (2019) discusses expletive negation in so-called surprise negation sentences (or *snegs*) in Italian in a phase-theoretic framework, proposing that whether the same negative marker receives an expletive interpretation depends on whether it is merged in the v\*P phase or later in the CP phase. Delfitto, Melloni and Vender (2019) argue that expletive negation is a truth-value reversal operation, just like standard negation, however, its domain of operation is different. While standard negation operates on the asserted meaning of the utterance, expletive negation operates on a presupposition or an implicature of the utterance.

While much of the discussion of expletive negation has so far been based on Romance languages (such as Catalan, Spanish, Italian or French), in this paper, we discuss hitherto unexplored data concerning expletive negation in Hungarian exclamatives and show that (i) the expletive negator is in a structurally different position to standard negation and (ii) that the expletive negator itself has different structural positions depending on whether it is in a surprise negation sentence or a *wh*-exclamative. We will claim that these data favour a broadly Greco (2019)-style analysis (where different readings of the negator are associated with different structural positions) as opposed to an Espinal (2000)-style analysis (where standard and expletive negators are in the same position). Also, we will argue that the data from Hungarian provide a nice fit with Delfitto, Melloni and Vender's (2019) semantic-pragmatic proposal, inasmuch as the domain of operation (implication, assertion, presupposition) is clearly mapped to the syntactic position of the negator.

### PREVIOUS LITERATURE

Apart from a brief discussion of certain empirical facts in the descriptive work of Kálmán (2001), we are not aware of any analysis of expletive negation in exclamatives in Hungarian. Ürögdi (2009) discusses putative expletive negation in *amíg* 'until' clauses (claiming that it is, in fact, non-expletive negation), but she does not discuss exclamatives.

### DATA & ANALYSIS

In Hungarian, standard negation involves verb movement and results in so-called verb – verbal particle inversion:

- (1) a. *János el olvasott sok könyvet.*  
John PRT read.PST.3SG many book.ACC  
'John read many books.'  
b. *János nem olvasott el sok könyvet.*  
John not read.PST.3SG PRT many book.ACC  
'John did not read many books.'

Following É. Kiss (2009) and Olsvay (2000), we assume that the negator is merged as the head of NegP, and the verb moves to the head position of the so-called non-neutral phrase:

- (2) [TopP *János* [NegP *nem* [NNP *olvasott* [TP *el olvasott János sok könyvet*]]]]

The function of the non-neutral phrase (proposed by Olsvay (2000)) is to type-shift TP so that it can serve as an input to negation (or focusing): in essence, this change turns TP from a predicate into the argument of a predicate.

In *wh*-exclamatives, the negator is optional but its position is fixed between the verbal particle and the verb:

- (3) *(hogy) János miket el (nem) olvasott!*  
 that John what.PL.ACC PRT not read.PAST.3SG  
 ‘What (surprising, unexpected) things John has read!’

As shown above, the exclamative can optionally be introduced by the complementizer *hogy* ‘that’. Following Espinal (2000), we assume the structure below, where DegP is headed by a silent affective degree head:

- (4) [DegP  $\emptyset$  [CP *hogy* [TopP *János* [QP *miket* [TP *el nem olvasott János miket!*]]]]]

Following Lipták (2006), we assume that in sentences such as (4), the wh-expression is raised to the specifier of a projection in the quantifier field within the functional left periphery. In terms of the position of the negator, we argue that instead of heading its own projection, as it does in the case of standard negation, it is rather adjoined to the T head: [TP PRT [T’ [Neg V] [VP]]]:

- (5) [DegP  $\emptyset$  [CP *hogy* [TopP *János* [QP *miket* [TP *el T’ [nem olvasott]* [VP ~~*János miket olvasott el*~~]]]]]]]

Note that here, we follow the analysis of É. Kiss (2015), who proposed the same structure to account for the word order properties of standard negation in Old Hungarian, which followed the PRT-NEG-V word order. While this word order is no longer productive in Modern Hungarian as far as standard negation is concerned (bar some fossilized idiomatic uses), it is, we argue, the productive word order for expletive negation in wh-exclamatives.

In surprise negation sentences, the position of the negator is different (and the complementizer *hogy* ‘that’ is not allowed; only the discourse particle *hát*, expressing surprise or uncertainty/hesitation is allowed):

- (6) *(hát) János nem el olvasott egy könyvet!*  
 well John not PRT read.PAST.3SG a book.ACC  
 ‘Didn’t John read a book!?’ (surprisingly, as no one expected him to read a book)’

Since the negator follows the topic *János* and precedes TP, it seems straightforward to assume that it is merged as the head of NegP, just like in standard negation. Crucially, however, verb – verbal particle inversion fails to happen in surprise negation sentences. Such inversion leads to a standard negation reading:

- (7) *(hát) János nem olvasott el egy könyvet!*  
 well John not read.PAST.3SG PRT a book.ACC  
 ‘John did not read a book!’

(7) can only be interpreted as a case of standard negation, asserting that János did not read a (particular) book, rather than asserting that he did read a book (surprisingly to the speaker).

We claim that this is in fact to be expected. If one assumes, following Delfitto, Melloni and Vender (2019) that in surprise negation sentences, the negator operates on an implication of the utterance rather than the asserted meaning, it follows that the projection of NNP would be superfluous: since the asserted meaning is not the input of negation, there is no need to type-shift TP into a predicate argument. In the absence of NNP, the verb fails to move into NN<sup>0</sup>, staying in T<sup>0</sup>, which produces the verb order observed in surprise negation sentences:

- (8) [TopP *János* [NegP *nem* [TP *el olvasott János egy könyvet*]]]

In other words, we assume that in surprise negation sentences and in standard negation, the negator occupies the same structural position (Neg<sup>0</sup> of NegP in the functional left periphery), however, the structural configurations are different in that in the case of surprise negation (i.e., negation affecting an implied meaning component rather than the assertion itself), no non-neutral phrase is projected.

#### REFERENCES

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