Focus Negation is Constituent Negation in Hungarian

Mai Ha Vu (maiha@udel.edu)
University of Delaware

Data

(1) Sentential negation:
Mari nem olvasta el a Hamletest.
Mary NEG read PRT the Hamlet.ACC
'Mary didn’t read Hamlet.'

(2) Focus negation:
Mari nem a ‘HAMLET-ET olvasta el.
Mary NEG the HAMLET-ACC read PRT
'It was not Hamlet that Mary read.'

How should we analyze focus negation in Hungarian?

Hypotheses about focus negation

1. Sentential negation:
   \[ \text{NegP} \[ \text{nem} \[ \text{focus} \ldots \] \]
   - Accepted view (Szabolcsi, 1981; É. Kiss, 2002; Surányi, 2002)
   - NPIs are licensed by focus negation
   - Focus negation coordinates with new predicate

2. Constituent negation:
   \[ \text{focusP} \[ \text{nem} \[ X \] \[ \text{focus} \ldots \] \]
   - Current proposal
   - English constituent negation behaves similarly to Hungarian focus negation (Toosarvandani, 2015)
   - Universal quantifier cannot be focused, negated universal quantifier can be

Semantics of negation

- Negation has flexible type
- Constituent negation has the same logical interpretation as sentential negation:
  \[ \neg X, \quad \text{if X is a truth value} \]
  \[ \neg X \wedge \neg Y(X), \quad \text{if X is a function} \]
  \[ \neg Y(X), \quad \text{if X is an argument} \]
- Semantic differences are due to focus: negated constituent is focused
- Similar to Toosarvandani’s (2013) proposal for the semantics of negation

Focus negation is constituent negation

- \[ \text{Toosarvandani (2013)} \]
  - Conjunctions with sentential negation coordinate with full clauses, conjunctions with constituent negation may coordinate with sub-clausal constituents:
    \[ [p:] \text{Max doesn’t eat chard, but } [p:] \text{spinach, but } \]
  - (4) Max eats [if not chard], but [if spinach].
- Supported from island effects:
  - (6) *Alfonse didn’t break the vase that Sonya bought not in China, but in Japan,
    Alfonse broke the vase that Sonya bought in Japan.
  - (7) Alfonse broke the vase that Sonya bought not in China, but Japan.

1. First conjunct has to be full clause for sentential negation:
   \[ \text{Nem olvastam el a Hamletest, hanem meg néztem.} \]
   NEG read PRT the Hamlet.ACC, but PRT saw 'I didn’t read Hamlet, but I saw it.'

2. Island effects similar to English:
   \[ \text{Nem olvastam el a Hamletest, hanem meg néztem a Hamletest.} \]
   NEG read, but PRT saw the Hamlet.ACC 'I didn’t read Hamlet, but I saw it.'

Focus negation is not sentential negation

1. NPI-licensing
   \[ \text{Senki nem olvasta el a Hamletest.} \]
   nobody NEG read PRT the Hamlet.ACC 'Nobody read Hamlet.'

2. Coordination
   \[ \text{Nem a ‘DOBOT’ veri Péter, hanem az ajtó} \]
   NEG the 'DRUM' beat Peter, but the door csapódott be. PRT
   'Peter doesn’t beat the drum, the door got shut.'

   - Semantic interpretation helps again: negated predicate can be coordinated with a different predicate
   - Here full clauses coordinate in the syntax

Crosslinguistic implications

I have argued that Hungarian focus negation is in fact constituent negation: the negative particle nem adjoins to the focused constituent, instead of occupying NegP that selects for FocusP.

I hypothesize that this is true the other direction: all constituent negation has to be focused. This is true for English:

\[ \text{(18) Laura saw not ‘ROGUE 1, but ‘MOANA.} \]

References