

## On Development of NegP in Ossetic

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In this talk, I demonstrate how the unique syntax of negative items in Ossetic arose via a split of preverbal FocP, followed by analogically driven spell-out of the [uNeg] feature in the focus projection. Ossetic texts are only attested fairly late, but a careful comparison of Ossetic to attested Old and Middle Iranian languages, as well as to typologically similar (and geographically close) Georgian, allows to form a sufficiently plausible conjecture about its development.

Ossetic requires all negative indefinites (NI) and the sentential negation markers to be placed in the immediately preverbal position, (1).

- (1) a.    soslan-i       ne-kəḁ       ne-ke       warzta  
          S-ACC       NEG-when    NEG-who     loved  
          ‘Nobody ever loved Soslan.’  
      b.    \*ne-kəḁ       ne-ke       soslan-i     warzta  
          NEG-when   NEG-who     S-ACC       loved

Morphologically, NIs are obtained by affixing a negative prefix to wh-stem. They are incompatible with the regular preverbal negation marker, (2).

- (2)       soslan-i       ne-ke       (\*nə) warzuj  
          S-ACC       NEG-who     NEG loves  
          ‘Nobody loves Soslan.’

I analyze this variety of negative concord as a kind of syntactic agreement (in the spirit of Zeijlstra 2004, 2008).

**Proposal. I. Initial stage fronting, adjunction to FocP:** In early Indo-Iranian languages NegP did not exist, and negation markers were sentence level adverbials, for instance, they could be fronted, (3).

- (3)       ma    ju       śśando       skauyāte  
          NEG   EMPH ground.ACC   touch.SUB.3SG  
          ‘May it not touch the ground.’ Khotanese Saka, (Emmerick 2009: 395)

In such a system, it is natural to assume that the negative adverbial carries an interpretable feature [iNeg]. The proto-Ossetic system was probably similar, as evidenced by certain idiosyncrasies in the behavior of clitics. I assume that, in sentences like (3), the negative marker was adjoined to FocP (adopting the proposals of Hale (1987) and Kiparsky (1994) for the clause structure in early Indo-European languages).

NIs as such were absent, and wh-words (in the capacity of an indefinite) were used as NPIs. Such a picture is likely to be true in Old and New Avestan, modulo the scarcity of the surviving data, (4).

- (4)       mā    čiš    aṭ    vā    drəgvatō    (...)   gušta  
          NEG   who   then   EMPH deceitful                    listened  
          ‘No one at all who belongs to the deceitful listened’ Old Avestan (Yasna 31: 18)

Thus, at this stage there is no need to posit any special features on NPIs that should be checked by moving close to the negation, their movement was just an instance of focalization.

**II Stage: Loss of fronting, adjunction to preverbal FocP.** The clause initial (or, high in terms of the clause architecture) focus position was lost, and the preverbal focus emerged instead. Postulating this loss across Iranian languages makes sense, because sentence-initial placement of wh-phrases, typical for Old Iranian (Hale 1987), gets gradually replaced by the preverbal one in attested Middle Iranian languages (in Sogdian, Middle Persian, and, to a lesser extent, in Khotanese). The negation got adjoined to the now preverbal FocP. The movement of negative indefinites was still driven by a focus feature. That the loss of clause-initial FocP occurred in Ossetic as well is corroborated by the fact that, in modern Ossetic, wh-phrases are also immediately adjacent to the verb, with only n-words intervening between them, (5).

- (5)            soslan-i        ka    ne-kəd        fejidta?  
                  s-ACC            who   NEG-when    saw  
                  ‘Who never saw Soslan?’

**III Stage: Split of preverbal FocP, emergence of NegP.** At this stage, the focusing of negation and negative items was re-analyzed into movement into a separate syntactic position, with a phonologically null head carrying [iNeg] feature. (Similarly to the emergence of wh-fronting from focalization of wh-phrases in early IE languages, Kiparsky (1994)). Negative items got endowed with a [Neg] feature responsible for their movement. The negative marker, from a [iNeg]-adverb got re-analyzed into [uNeg] affix realized on the first of NIs in the chain.

**IV Stage: Neg-feature receives a spell-out.** As all NIs carried [uNeg]-feature, an analogy-driven development occurred: the negative feature on negative indefinites received a spellout, which resulted in the negative prefix being copied to all negative indefinites present in the clause. (A similar morphological development, (6), took place in Georgian, language Ossetic was arguably in contact with.)

- (6)    Old Georgian: the negative prefix optionally copied on all NIs
- a.        da        ara-raj        vis                sutxres  
           and    NEG-what    who.DAT        they.said  
           ‘And they said nothing to anyone.’ (Mk 16:8)
- b.        nu-sada        nu-ra-s                borot’-sa        ikm-t  
           N.IMP-where N.IMP-what-DAT    wicked-DAT    do.IMP-2PL  
           ‘Never do anything (lit. nothing) (so) wicked.’ (Judges 19:23)
- Modern Georgian: negative prefix obligatorily copied on all NIs
- c.        dyes    ara-vis                                \*(ara)-peri    c’auk’itxavs  
           today NEG-who.DAT        NEG-color    (s)she.read  
           ‘Today nobody read anything (lit. nothing).’

To recapitulate, the loss of the sentence initial focus position and the emergence of the preverbal focus have led to the creation of the negative phrase in Ossetic. If my proposal is on the right track, it shows the “grammaticalization potential” of the focus projection.

## References

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## Abbreviations

ACC accusative; DAT dative; EMPH emphatic; NEG negative; NI negative indefinite; SUB subjunctive