

On some differences between negative connectives and negative conjunctions: The case of Hungarian

1. Aim and facts

The *sem...sem* 'neither...nor' construction in Hungarian appears in two environments: (i) in negative connectives and (ii) in negative conjunctions. In (i), the nominal is **followed by sem** in each conjunct and VP-ellipsis typically applies in the first conjunct, as in (1a). In (ii), the nominal is **preceded by sem** in each conjunct and VP-ellipsis may apply in either conjunct, (3). The paper aims to show that nominals followed vs. preceded by *sem* differ syntactically in two important ways, listed in (a) and (b) below. This makes a uniform, quantificational treatment impossible.

(a) Nominals **followed by sem** in negative connectives, (i), show asymmetric behaviour in Hungarian (for similar facts in Strict NC Balto-Slavic languages see Auwera & Nomachi & Krashnoukova 2021). Preverbally, they do not tolerate the clause negator, (1a). This indicates that they are NQs. Postverbally, by contrast, they always require the clause negator as their licenser, (1b). This is a diagnostic feature of NCIs. In this respect, nominals **followed by sem** in negative connectives pattern with *sem*-phrases, as in (2a,b) (see Surányi 2002, 2006; Szabolcsi 2018a,b).

(i) NEGATIVE CONNECTIVES

PREVERBAL POSITION

(1) a. Kati ~~sem~~ [vett részt a konferencián] és Mari ~~sem~~ [vett részt a konferencián].
Kate neither (took part the conference.on) and Mary neither took part the conference.on
'Neither Kate nor Mary took part in the conference.'

POSTVERBAL POSITION

b. **Nem** vett részt a konferencián Kati sem, és [nem vett részt a konferencián]
NEG took part the conference-on Kati neither and NEG took part the conference-on
Mari sem.
Mary neither
'Neither Kate nor Mary took part in the conference.'

POSTVERBAL SEM-PHRASES

(2) a. Senki sem vett részt a konferencián.
nobody NEG.EMPH took part the conference.on
'Nobody took part in the conference.'

b. **Nem** vett részt a konferencián senki sem.
NEG took part the conference.on nobody NEG.EMPH
'Nobody took part in the conference.'

(b) Nominals **preceded by sem** in negative conjunctions, listed under (ii), always require the clause negator, irrespective of their syntactic position:

(ii) NEGATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

(3) Sem Kati [nem vett részt a konferencián], sem Mari [nem vett részt a konferencián].
neither Kate (NEG took part the conference-on) neither Mary NEG took part the conference-on
'Neither Kate nor Mary took part in the conference.'

The asymmetric behaviour of preverbal vs. postverbal nominals **followed by sem** is derived here from their different licensing conditions, in the sense of Ladusaw (1996).

2. Semantic and syntactic licensing in Strict NC languages

Ladusaw (1996) proposes to divorce NQs from NPIs on the basis of their different licensing conditions in Non-Strict NC languages like Italian. While NQs need only semantic licensing, i.e. being in the scope of OP_{NEG}, NPIs need both semantic and syntactic licensing (the latter taking the form of feature agreement). This division is extended here to NQs vs. NCIs in Strict NC Hungarian. Preverbal nominals **followed by sem** function as NQs, which require only semantic licensing by OP_{NEG} and do not tolerate the clause negator, (5). Postverbal nominals followed by *sem* are NCIs, which need both semantic licensing by OP_{NEG} and syntactic licensing by the clause negator, (6):

(5) [ForceP...OP_{NEG} [TOPP...[SEMP Mari sem...[FinP vett részt]]]].

(6) [ForceP...OP_{NEG} [TOPP...[NEGP **Nem**[FinP vett részt Mari sem]]]].
NEG took part Mary neither

3. Testing the quantificational properties of NQs vs. NCIs in Hungarian

Nominals **preceded by sem** require the clause negator as their licenser, in preverbal and postverbal position alike, (7)-(8). This indicates that they are NCIs:

(7) Sem Kati [nem vett részt a konferencián], sem Mari **nem** vett részt
neither Kate NEG took part the conference-on neither Mary NEG took part
a konferencián-n].
the conference-on
'Neither Kate nor Mary took part in the conference.'

(9) Ha sem Kati [nem vesz részt a konferencián], sem Mari [nem vesz részt
if neither Kate NEG takes part the conference.on neither Mary NEG takes part
a konferencián], akkor elhalasztjuk.
the conference.on then postpone.1PL

(10) 'If neither Kate nor Mary takes part in the conference, we will postpone it.'
 *Ha sem Kati [vesz részt a konferenciá-n], sem Mari [vesz részt
 if neither Kate takes part the conference-on neither Mary takes part
 a konferenciá-n], akkor elhalasztjuk.
 the conference-on then postpone.1PL
 'the same'

Preverbal nominals **followed** by *sem* land in SemP, which is a licenser and blocks the OP_{NEG}....NEG chain:

(11) [ForceP...OP_{NEG}...^{gram.}TOPP...[SEMP Mari **sem** [NEG_P NEG [FinP vett részt]]]]].
 Mary neither took part.ACC

Preverbal nominals **preceded** by *sem*, by contrast, land in NEGfP and [Spec,SemP] is not filled at all. In this case, *sem* does not act as a licenser for the nominal, and therefore no similar freezing effect emerges (see Dalmi 2024).

(12) [ForceP OP_{NEG} [TOPP ... [SEMP Ø sem_[NEGf] Mari_{[NEGp nem} [FinP vett részt]]]]].
neither_{NEGf} Mary_{NEGf} took part.ACC

Divorcing semantic licensing from syntactic licensing offers an explanation for the asymmetric behaviour of preverbal and postverbal nominals followed by *sem* in negative connectives. In particular, they mirror the asymmetric behaviour of *sem*-phrases: preverbally they are NQs, however, postverbally, they need to be licensed by the clause negator, just like other NCIs. This excludes the uniform, quantificational treatment of *sem*-nominals. Nominals preceded by *sem* show NCI properties in preverbal and postverbal positions alike.

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