Transparent scope expression in Udmurt focus negation as a concomitant of the OV-to-VO change

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The paper examines the development of transparent scope constructions in focus negation in Udmurt (Uralic; Russia) as a concomitant phenomenon of the ongoing OV-to-VO change of the language. I suggest that inverse scope constructions of type (1a) stem from the original (S)OV nature of Udmurt, whereas the development of constructions of type (1b) and (2) is related to the ongoing OV-to-VO change of the language.

Udmurt has been classified as an SOV language which is currently undergoing a change towards the SVO type (Asztalos 2021). In contemporary Udmurt, constituents can be negated via two strategies. The native Udmurt way involves the same means as sentential negation, i.e. a negative auxiliary (which is followed immediately by the connegative stem of the lexical verb), cf. (1a–b). The contact-induced strategy, on the other hand, involves the negative particle *ńe* borrowed from Russian, which immediately precedes the negated constituent (2a–b). According to a test carried out with native speakers of Udmurt, the negated constituent is focused in both cases and, in connection with the ongoing OV-to-VO change of the language, it can either precede (1a), (2a) or follow (1b), (2b) the sentence predicate.

From a semantic point of view, focus negation means that negation takes scope over the negated focused constituent. Thus, the relative ordering of the negative marker (auxiliary or particle) and the focused constituent, at least linearly speaking, gives rise to two scope readings in Udmurt: inverse scope in the case of variant (1a), and surface scope in all the remaining cases (1b), (2a–b). Note that the first clause of (1a) is structurally ambiguous as, in an appropriate context, it can also have a surface scope reading (with focus taking wide scope over negation, i.e., 'It is Siberia that I didn't go to.').

The expression of scopal interaction seems to be correlated with the basic word order of a language. Amiraz (2021), in his investigations on the scopal interaction of negation with universal quantifiers, carried out on 110 languages, makes a short observation that verb-final languages tend to use inverse scope constructions, while scope-transparent strategies, with the negative marker preceding the quantifier phrase, are uncommon in these languages (Amiraz 2021: 14). However, in a diachronic dimension, languages show a tendency to develop constructions that express scope relationship transparently, and these scope-transparent constructions gradually replace pre-existing inverse-scope constructions (Amiraz 2021: 5, 13). Thus, arguably, the development of scope-transparent constructions can be related to a change in the basic word order of a language, at least in the case of (originally) verb-final languages. I propose that Amiraz's (2021) generalizations can be extended to focus negation constructions, and argue that the development of transparent scope expression in focus negation is a concomitant of the OV-to-VO change of Udmurt. I propose an analysis in which constructions of type (2) involve a right-branching NegP containing a complement FocP, and draw a parallel with Hungarian, in which the development of a right-branching NegP has also been brought into relation with the OV-to-VO change of the language (É. Kiss 2014: 37, 45).

(1) a. *ŚIBIŔ-E*   *öj*   *myny,*   *(a)*   *Vengri-je.*
          Siberia-ILL   NEG.PST.1SG   go.CNG.SG   but   Hungary-ILL
    b. *Öj*   *myny*   *ŚIBIŔ-E,*   *(a)*   *Vengri-je.*
          NEG.PST.1SG   go.CNG.SG   Siberia-ILL   but   Hungary-ILL
          'It is not Siberia I went to but Hungary.'

(2) a. *Ńe*   *ŚIBIŔ-E*   *myn-i,*   *(a)*   *Vengri-je.*
          NEG   Siberia-ILL   go-PST.1SG   but   Hungary-ILL
    b. *Myn-i*   *ńe*   *ŚIBIŔ-E,*   *(a)*   *Vengri-je.*
          go-PST.1SG   NEG   Siberia-ILL   but   Hungary-ILL
          'id.'

References

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