

## On Development of NegP in Ossetic

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Ossetic (a cover term for two closely related East Iranian languages, Iron and Digor<sup>1</sup>, spoken in the Central Caucasus) has an apparently typologically unique pattern of negative item placement. In my talk, I propose a scenario whereby this system came into existence. 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). Morphologically, NIs are obtained by affixing a negative prefix to wh-stem. They are incompatible with the regular preverbal negation marker, (2).

**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). 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 picture is likely to be true in Old and New Avestan, modulo the scarcity of the surviving data, (4). 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).

**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 took place in Old and Middle Georgian, languages Ossetic was arguably in contact with.)

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<sup>1</sup> In this abstract, all Ossetic examples are from Digor. Iron is substantially similar in what is relevant to us.

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.

#### Examples

- (1) a. *soslan-i*                      ***n*** ~~*ked*~~                      ***ne-ke***                      *warzta*  
 S-ACC                      NEG-when                      NEG-who                      loved  
 ‘Nobody ever loved Soslan.’
- b. **\**n*** ~~*ked*~~                      ***ne-ke***                      *soslan-i*                      *warzta*  
 NEG-when                      NEG-who                      S-ACC                      loved
- (2) a. *soslan-i*                      ***ne-ke***                      **(\* *ne*)**                      *warzuj*  
 S-ACC                      NEG-who                      NEG                      loves  
 ‘Nobody loves Soslan.’
- (3) ***ma***    *ju*                      ***śśa n d o***                      *s k a ā y t e*  
 NEG                      EMPH                      ground.ACC                      touch.SUB.3SG  
 ‘May it not touch the ground.’ Khotanese Saka, (Emmerick 2009: 395)
- (4) ***mā***    ***čiš***                      *a t*                      *vē*                      *d eθē v a t*                      (...)                      *gušta*  
 NEG                      who                      then                      EMPH                      deceitful                      listened  
 ‘No one at all who belongs to the deceitful listened<sup>2</sup>’ Old Avestan (Yasna 31: 18)
- (5) *soslan-i*                      ***ka***                      ***n*** ~~*ked*~~                      *fē i d t a ?*  
 S-ACC                      who                      NEG-when                      saw  
 ‘Who never saw Soslan?’

#### References

Emmerick, R. 2009. Khotanese and Tumshuqese. In Windfuhr, G. (ed.) The Iranian Languages. London: Routledge. Hale, M. 1987. Studies in the comparative syntax of the oldest Indo-Iranian languages. PhD Thesis Harvard University. Insler, S. 1975. The Gathas of Zarathustra. Teheran-Liège: Bibliothèque Pahlavi. Kiparsky, P. 1994. Indo-European Origins of Germanic Syntax. In Ian Roberts and Adrian Battye (eds.), *Clause Structure and Language Change*, p. 140-167. OUP

#### Abbreviations

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

<sup>2</sup> Translation from Insler (1975: 41). Insler suggests that the negative marker *mā* should be replaced here by another negative marker, *naē*, but this is immaterial for our purposes.