

Outliers in variation and change: atypical users of the variants of negation in Old and Middle Hungarian

According to Weinreich et al. (1968: 188)’s classic observation, „Not all variability and heterogeneity in language structure involves change; but all change involves variability and heterogeneity.” The present paper aims to discuss the history of sentence negation in Hungarian, with a focus on variability and heterogeneity that **precede** change. This variation can be investigated in negative sentences that contain Verb Modifiers (VM); the basic features of the variants are summarized in the table below. The coexistence of the variants can be broken down into three periods: a) stable variation with the predominance of the A-variant (from the first written documents until the 19th century); b) the radical frequency growth of the M-variant (during the 19th century); c) stable variation with the predominance of the M-variant (since the 20th century).

word order	VM – NEG – V	NEG – V – VM
example	<i>el nem megyek</i> away _[VM] not go.1sg 'I am not going away'	<i>nem megyek el</i> not go.1sg away _[VM] 'I am not going away'
structure (É. Kiss 2014)	Negative particle: adjoined to the verb in a lower structural position (PredP); verb modifier: precedes the negated verb	Negative particle: merged into a higher structural position (NegP), eliciting verb movement; verb modifier: follows the negated verb
shorthand	A (djunction-based)- variant	M (ovement-based)- variant

The period that precedes change is investigated based on three groups of texts: a) Old Hungarian codices; b) Old and Middle Hungarian informal texts; c) 16th century (=early Middle Hungarian) translations of the New Testament. The overall distribution of the two variants seems to be fairly similar in the three groups, but each group features an outlier (see the table below). The paper addresses the questions 1. whether the outliers differ in the same way from the majority, or they are different from each other as well; 2. whether these can be seen as the forerunners of the 19th-century change.

group	Old Hungarian codices	16 th -century translations of the New Testament	Old and Middle Hungarian informal texts
rate of the M-variant	22.8% (N=3472)	24.3% (N=745)	15.4% (N=3125)
outlier	the Hussite codices (15th century)	Károlyi’s translation (1590)	Kolozsvár witch trials (1572-1592)
M-var. in the outlier	71.7%	43.3%	55.2%
source of data	http://omagyarkorpusz.nytud.hu/en-intro.html		https://tmk.nytud.hu/

The tentative answers to the questions can be summarized as follows:

1. a) The Hussite subgroup may represent an innovative dialect, being on the way to generalizing the use of the M-variant. However, this dialect disappeared. b) The more frequent use of the M-variant in Károlyi’s translation may be Károlyi’s idiolectal trait. Still, it cannot be excluded that as a highly influential text, it had a (long-term, indirect) impact on the choice of patterns. c) Kolozsvár subgroup: although the unmarked word order is VM – V in neutral sentences, this group displays a persistent use of the V – VM pattern in this context. The reasons for this are not fully understood yet, but it might be the case that the choice between the A- and the M-variant is also influenced by a factor that is operative in neutral sentences as well, that is, independent of negation.

2. There is one important feature all these outliers share both with each other and with the rest of the sources: if clause types that are attested frequently enough are ordered on a scale based on the frequency of the M-pattern, these scales are almost the same: reason / main > complement > relative > conditional (> *until*-clauses). This corroborates the suggestion (Author 2017, 2022) that the variants differed in their pragmatic load in the first period of stable variation, the M variant being more emphatic; the outliers in Old and Middle Hungarian were early overusers of the emphatic variant, but this did not lead to a change in the entire population of speakers at that time.

References

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