Negation in syntactic dialects in Hungarian
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1. Introduction

In this short paper I am concerned with an apparently minor problem of negative concord in Hungarian, which may turn out to have far-reaching consequences. Due to limitations of space I can do justice neither to all the authors who have targeted negation in Hungarian before, nor to all the related problems in this paper that have been written about elsewhere.[1]

The problem I investigate here is a curious cooccurrence of contrastive focus and/or the negative marker and the negative (universal or existential) quantifier, in short the '*n*-word', in one and the same clause, which seems to divide the speech community into at least two, but possibly three, syntactic dialects. Before the constructions in question are introduced let us give an overview of the relevant context of the syntax of negation. To begin with, it is well-known that there may be multiple Neg heads in the clause, but all of them must line up in front of the finite verb, cf. Puskás (2000), É. Kiss (2002), Kenesei (2009), among others.[2]

(1)   **Topics –*Neg*– Quantifiers/wh-XPs – *Neg*– FOCUS (wh-XP) – *Neg* – Verb+T – …**

	Topics	*Neg*	Quantifiers/wh-XPs	*Neg*	FOCUS (wh-XP)	*Neg*	Verb+T
a. …		**nem** *not*	mindenki *everyone*		A LEVEST *the soup-ACC*	**(nem)** *not*	ette meg *ate PV*
b. …			senki *nobody*	**nem** *not*	A LEVEST *the soup-ACC*	**(nem)** *not*	ette meg *ate PV*
c. …			ki *who*	**nem** *not*	A LEVEST *the soup-ACC*	**(nem)** *not*	ette meg *ate PV*
d. …			ki *who*		mikor *when*	**(nem)** *not*	ette meg a levest? *ate PV the soup*

a. 'Not everyone ate/didn't eat THE SOUP.'
b. 'Nobody ate/didn't eat the SOUP.'
c. 'Who is it that it is not the soup that s/he ate/didn't eat?'
d. 'Who ate/didn't eat the soup when?'

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[2] The set of examples in (1) is from Kenesei (2009); SMALL CAPITALS signify contrastive focus. (1a) is more precisely rendered as 'For not every person *x*, it was the soup that *x* ate/didn't eat.', and (1b) as 'For no person *x*, it was the soup that *x* ate/didn't eat.'

Hungarian is a negative concord (NC) language, in which *n*-words must have a clause-mate negative marker.[3] As in other negative concord languages, the presence of multiple *n*-words in a clause amounts to a single negation. In this paper, I will assume that an *n*-word has an uninterpretable [uNeg] feature, which must be checked against the interpretable [iNeg] feature of the negative marker in the head of Neg, whether the *n*-word follows the tensed verb or precedes it. In the former case the operations involved are Merge and Agree, in the latter one, it is Merge plus Move and Agree. (*N*-words are in italics below; the negative marker is in bold type. The clause-final *sem* in (2a) is an optional particle also subject to negative concord and a source of much confusion in the relevant literature. As shown by the idiomatic translations, the two sentences (2a-b) are fully synonymous.

(2) a. [NegP **Nem** [TP mondott erről *senki* *senkinek* *semmit*   (sem)]]
            not   said   of-this nobody nobody-DAT nothing-ACC NEG-PRT
         'Nobody said anything to anyone about this.'

     b. [NegP *Senki*$_i$ [NegP *senkinek*$_j$ [NegP *semmit*$_k$ [Neg **nem**] [TP mondott t_i t_j t_k erről]]]]
            nobody   nobody-DAT   nothing-ACC   not   said   of-this
         'Nobody said anything to anyone about this.'

   If the *n*-word is in a clause different from the one containing the negative marker, the sentence is unacceptable, even though the matrix verb allows long movement, as in (3a-b), or licenses negative polarity items, cf. (3c-d).

(3) a. *Senkit*$_i$ hiszek   [hogy e_i **nem** volt beteg]
         nobody-ACC   I-believe that   not was ill

     b. *Senkit*$_i$ **sem** hiszek   [hogy e_i beteg volt]
         nobody-ACC   not I-believe that   ill   was
         'I believe nobody to have been ill.'

     c. *Anna **nem** hiszi   [hogy *senki*   volt beteg]
         Anna not believes that   nobody was ill

     d. Anna **nem**   hiszi   [hogy valaki   is   beteg volt]
         Anna not   believes that   someone   ever ill   was
         'Anna doesn't believe that anyone was ill.'

   The only exception to the clausemateness requirement is infinitival complement clauses, where the following regularity obtains. An *n*-word in the infinitival clause can be checked either by a clausemate negative marker or one in the matrix clause, providing for alternative interpretations as witnessed in the following examples.

(4) a. Anna **nem** képes   elmondani *semmit*
         Anna not   able   to-tell   nothing-ACC
         'Anna is not capable of telling anything.'

     b. Anna képes [**nem** elmondani *semmit*]

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[3] For negative concord in general, cf. Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991), Giannakidou (2000), Brown (2000); for negative concord in Hungarian, cf. Puskás (1996, 2000), Tóth (1999), Surányi (2002, 2006), Olsvay (2006), É. Kiss (2008, to appear).

'Anna is capable of not telling anything.'

The phenomenon illustrated in (4a) is arguably due to some kind of optional clause union or scrambling as has been argued by Koopman & Szabolcsi 2000, Den Dikken 2004, and Szécsényi 2009, 2010.

The interaction of focus and negation, including *n*-words, in Hungarian has also been the subject of discussion, see, among others, Puskás (2000), Surányi (2006), Olsvay (2006), É. Kiss (2008, to appear). In a previous paper (Kenesei 2009) I suggested that contrastive focus, which invariably occupies a preverbal position, constitutes a proposition of its own, or in syntactic terms, it is a distinct phase. This accounts for (proper) double negation, which occurs only if a sentence contains a focused constituent, as in (1b-c), schematically illustrated in (5).

(5)   [CP (Neg) Focus   [CP (Neg) TP]]
             – Phase 1 –   – Phase 2 –

It follows then that one or more *n*-words can be placed in front of a negated focus, i.e., in Phase 1 above, cf. (6), but no *n*-word can follow focus, whether negated or not, unless the negative marker is placed in front of the tensed verb, i.e., in Phase 2, as (7) illustrates.

(6)   a. [NegP Senki$_i$ nem/sem [FP   ANNÁT$_j$ [TP   dicsérte t_i t_j]]]
                nobody not   Anna-ACC   praised
           'Nobody praised ANNA' (= 'For no person *x* is it Anna that *x* praised.')

         b. Soha$_k$ (*sem) senki$_i$ *(nem/sem)   [FP ANNÁT$_j$ [TP dicsérte t_i t_j t_k]]]

(7)   a. *[NegP (Nem) [FP   ANNÁT$_i$ [TP   dicsérte senki t_i]]]]
                 not   Anna-ACC   praised nobody

         b. [NegP (Nem) [FP   ANNÁT$_i$ [NegP nem [TP dicsérte senki t_i]]]]
                 not   Anna-ACC   not   praised nobody
            'It was (not) Anna that nobody praised.'

Example (6b) shows the behavior of the curious particle *sem*, which can occur freely in postverbal positions following practically each *n*-word, provided the preverbal negative particle is in place. However, *sem* is prohibited in preverbal positions except as a variant of the basic negative particle *nem*, if and only if it is preceded by one or more *n*-words.[4] In other words, the particle *sem* is not part of the *n*-word, as is sometimes maintained in the literature, cf. Puskás (2000).

2. The data and the problem

Leaving some of these problems unsolved for the time being, let us turn our attention to the case at hand. There is a recurrent set of examples that has not yet been fully accounted for. Puskás (2000: 344), relying on judgment by Katalin É. Kiss (p.c.), states that the pair in (8) is

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[4] Other functions of the particle *sem*, such as in negative coordinate clauses as in the example below, cannot be discussed here due to lack of space.
(i) *Sem* Anna nem   válaszolt, *sem* Péter   nem   telefonált.
       nor Anna not replied   nor Peter   not   telephoned
       'Neither Anna replied, nor Peter telephoned.'

ambiguous between two readings, depending on whether or not the postverbal *n*-word has main stress (signified by the " mark here).

(8) a. Senki-vel   nem beszéltem "semmi-ről   = NC reading
         nobody-with   not I-spoke   nothing-about
         'I didn't speak with anyone about anything.'

     b. Senki-vel   nem beszéltem semmi-ről   = DN reading
         'I didn't speak with anyone about nothing.'

Furthermore, Surányi (2006) reports that the sentence in (9), which contains a focused constituent, is also an instance of double negation or DN.[5]

(9) Sehova   sem   MA   jött el   senki   se.
     Nowhere not   today   came along   nobody NEG-PRT
     'Nobody came along nowhere TODAY.' (= 'For no place *x* was it today that nobody came.')

Finally, in a paper published in Hungarian É. Kiss (2008) discusses a similar construction, in which a postverbal *n*-word follows a focused item. The example below is É. Kiss's (5b) but in my notation and translation.[6]

(10) Nem A DÉLI VONATTAL érkezett "senki.
      not   the noon train-with arrived   nobody
      'Nobody arrived by the NOON TRAIN.' (= 'For no *x* is it the noon train that *x* arrived by.')

Note that the data reported here are incompatible between them. In order for (8b) to convey double negation, the second *n*-word (*semmiről*) must be a negated universal quantifier, so it cannot take a 'free ride' on the negative marker, since this configuration is reserved for negative concord (NC), i.e., the 'single negative' interpretation, as in (8a). But it can only serve as an independent negative quantifier if it has a distinct clausemate negative marker, which is nowhere to be found in (8b).

The case is even clearer in (9), where the negative marker preceding the focused item licenses the negative concord required by the initial *n*-word, still it has nothing to do with the postverbal *n*-word, which is construed as a narrow scope negative quantifier, as is illustrated by the sense translation.

In contrast, the *n*-word in É. Kiss's example in (10) is used to illustrate a wide scope negative quantifier as is clear from the schematic diagram in her paper. To sum up, the stress pattern in (8a), i.e., stress on the postverbal *n*-word corresponds to negative concord and narrow scope quantifier, while the same stress pattern in (10) provides for wide scope. Finally, if the postverbal *n*-word is unstressed, it has narrow scope but it is then an instance of independent negation.

3. Syntactic dialects

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[5] The interpretation in parentheses is mine. Due to limitations of space I cannot discuss the regularities pertaining to the occurrence of *se(m)*, glossed as 'negative particle' below, but suffice it to state here that it is fully optional postverbally without any semantic effect whatsoever.
[6] For comparable data and analyses accessible in English, cf. É. Kiss (to appear).

Before I try to accommodate these conflicting data, let me review a limited survey among native speakers of Hungarian of constructions containing a negated focus and postverbal *n*-words as seen in (10). Out of ten subjects, only one accepted (10), another one held it questionable, and the rest refused it. But it is important to note that consent to the acceptability of the sentence was conditional upon the *n*-word having no stress and narrow, rather than wide scope, i.e., the interpretation in (11). For the speakers represented by this minority, (10) is another case of double negation then, on a par with (9).

(11) Nem A DÉLI VONATTAL érkezett senki.
      not   the noon train-with arrived nobody
      'It is not the noon train that nobody arrived by.'

It transpires from the data that there are three syntactic dialects to be distinguished in Hungarian as far as the positions and interpretations of *n*-words are concerned. [7]

Dialect A, or the 'No DN' majority dialect displays the following pattern, in which (8a) and (8b) differ in interpretation only. (In the representations below the examples that prove crucial in distinguishing the dialects between them are in bold.)

(12) a. *Neg– Focus – V – *n*-word   ***(7a); *(9)**
     b. ✓(neg) – Focus – Neg– V – *n*-word   ✓(7b)
     c. ✓*n*-word – Neg– V – *n*-word   ✓(8a) = NC – in either stress pattern
     d. **n*-word – Neg– V – *n*-word   ***(8b) = DN** – in either stress pattern

Dialect B, or the *n*-word raising minority dialect, has the following regularity.

(13) a. ✓Neg– Focus – V – *n*-word   **✓(10) = 'NegQ < Focus < …'; ?(9)**
     b. ✓(Neg) – Focus – Neg– V – *n*-word   ✓(7b)
     c. ✓*n*-word – Neg– V – *n*-word   ✓(8a) = NC
     d. ✓*n*-word – Neg– V – *n*-word   **✓(8b) = DN**

Dialect C, or the *n*-word blocking minority dialect, differs from B in that it does not allow for the postverbal *n*-word to take scope over the focus.

(14) a. ✓Neg– Focus – V – *n*-word   **✓(11) = 'Focus < NegQ < …'; ✓(9)**
     b. ✓(Neg) – Focus – Neg – V – *n*-word   ✓(7b)
     c. ✓*n*-word – Neg– V – *n*-word   ✓(8a) = NC
     d. ✓*n*-word – Neg– V – *n*-word   **✓(8b) = DN**

Before we embark on discussing the differences between the individual dialects, let us first address the problem of the *n*-word having negative interpretation without a licensing negative marker, as in (8b), which is acceptable in both Dialects B and C. There are, in principle, two avenues we can take. The first is to posit two versions of *n*-words in Hungarian: one that has negative force by, say, being assigned an interpretable [iNeg] feature (and is consequently, a 'true' negative quantifier or NQ), and another type of *n*-word that has an uninterpretable [uNeg] feature, as run-of-the-mill *n*-words do, as was outlined in the Introduction. [8] But this

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[7] At a recent talk given at RIL, Budapest, these findings were corroborated by an audience of c. 40 native speakers: Dialects A, B, and C were shown to have decreasing numbers of speakers in this order.

[8] Italian may be said to have a similar scenario, cf.

(i)   Nessuno (*non) ha visto niente.
       nobody   not   has seen   nothing

NQ, unlike its Italian counterpart, cf. fn. 7, can never occur in a clause on its own, so the difficulty of the proposal is obvious: the occurrence of NQ is conditional upon the occurrence of another, c-commanding, *n*-word complete with an overt negative marker.

As we shall see, if we choose the other alternative, we are to run into a comparable problem, but with a slight difference. Let us then try to return to the standard negative concord scenario: the *n*-word has no negative force and is licensed by a clausemate negative marker through either Agree ('in situ') or Move and Agree (when in the left periphery). But then how come the postverbal *n*-word does not show the effect of negative concord in (8b) or (9)?

The only way out of this conundrum appears to be the introduction in dialects B and C of an independent negative marker, which turns the *n*-word, or rather the construction it is a constituent of, into having negative force. Consequently, we have to assume that there is an additional negative marker present as an invisible or empty operator in the constructions in question. Since negative markers are invariably placed preverbally, we are left with no other choice than add an extra NegP to the left periphery of these constructions, which will then account for double negation in line with the general properties of negative concord in this language.

Of course, all three dialects exhibit the familiar properties of NC in the usual examples. Differences start to surface when more complex structures are investigated, containing focus and/or one or more *n*-words. To begin with Dialect C, in order for the postverbal *n*-word to be licensed, the invisible operator *Neg* must be placed between Focus and the inflected verb, i.e., TenseP, as shown in an augmented representation of (11) below.

(15) [$_{NegP}$ Nem [$_{FP}$ A DÉLI VONATTAL [$_{NegP}$ *Neg* [$_{TP}$ érkezett senki]]]]]
      not   the noon train-with   arrived nobody
      'It is not the noon train that nobody arrived by.'

In (15) the first negative marker applies to the focused item and turns its clause into a negated proposition. The second, invisible negative marker then takes care of the obligatory negative concord required by the postverbal *n*-word, which is thereby licensed by Agree. Note that in the majority Dialect A (15), i.e. (11), is rendered as in the pattern of (7b), that is, with an overt negative marker, which is shown as (12b) in our schematic list of structures. (16) will illustrate.

(16) [$_{NegP}$ Nem [$_{F}$ A DÉLI VONATTAL [$_{NegP}$ nem [$_{TP}$ érkezett senki]]]]]
      not   the noon train-with   not   arrived nobody
      'It is not the noon train that nobody arrived by.'

In this same Dialect C, the double negation in (9) must also be licensed by an additional (invisible) negative marker, as fleshed out below.

(17) [$_{NegP}$ Sehova sem [$_{FP}$ MA [$_{NegP}$ *Neg* [$_{TP}$ jött el   senki (sem)]]]]]
      Nowhere not   today   came along nobody NEG-PRT

       'Nobody saw anything.'
(ii)   *(Non)   ho   visto   nessuno.
           not   have-I seen   nobody
       'I saw nobody.'
In (i) *nessuno* acts as an *n*-word having an interpretable [iNeg] feature, but in (ii) it must have an uninterpretable [uNeg] feature.

'Nobody came along nowhere TODAY.' (= For no place *x* it was today that nobody came to *x*.')

And, furthermore, the same covert *Neg* marker is at work in the DN variety of (8b), repeated in its full form below:

(18)   [NegP Senki-vel   nem [NegP *Neg* [TPbeszéltem   semmi-ről]]]
            nobody-with   not   I-spoke   nothing-about
        'I didn't speak with anyone about nothing.'

Note also that in the majority dialect A, (18) is not rendered automatically by changing the covert negative marker into an overt one, because the two negative markers placed side by side might violate some type of low level 'Double Neg' constraint, cf. (19a). Instead, the first negative marker is invariably changed into the alternative form *sem* 'not', as in (19b).

(19)   a. *[NegP Senki-vel   **nem** [NegP nem [TPbeszéltem   semmi-ről]]]
                nobody-with   not   not   I-spoke   nothing-about

       b. [NegP Senki-vel   **sem** [NegP nem [TP beszéltem   semmi-ről]]]
                nobody-with   not   not   I-spoke   nothing-about
            'I didn't speak with anyone about nothing.'

It is well-known that syntactic dialects often differ in whether some or another functional category is overt or covert in them. For instance, as Szabolcsi (1981, 1994) showed in her seminal papers on the Hungarian possessive DP that the Eastern dialect applies the definite article, i.e., the functional category D, in constructions where the majority dialect does not. In the simplified illustrations below, which concentrate on the overt vs. covert representation of the definiteness marker in the unmarked (or 'nominative') possessive DPs (20a-b), as contrasted with its obligatory occurrence in the extended or dative possessive DP in (20c), the DPs are definite in both dialects, but the article is omitted in one of them.

(20)   a. [SpecDP   [D az   [NP [DP   Anna   [NP   almá-ja]]]]]   *Eastern dialect*
                       the   Anna   apple-POSS

       b. [SpecDP   [D *Det* [NP [DP   Anna   [NP   almá-ja]]]]]   *majority dialect*

       c. [SpecDP Anná-nak_i [D *(az) [NP [DP   *e_i* [NP   almá-ja]]]]]   *both dialects*
               Anna-DAT
            'Anna's apple'

My own work on embedding in Hungarian (Kenesei 1994), too, supported a dialect distinction between speakers whose use of the complementizer *hogy* 'that' varied in certain syntactic constructions, such as embedded questions or complement clauses to infinitives. Moreover, the literature abounds in covert functional categories, such as Det, Comp, Tense, Mood, etc., cf., e.g., Han & Siegel (1996), Leiss (2007), including Neg, too, cf. Zeijlstra (2004), whose ubiquitous covert Neg is, however, not followed here.

It is therefore legitimate to suppose that a similar overt/covert distinction obtains with respect to the negative marker along what seems to be similar dialectal lines. Consequently, (17), which has a covert *Neg* in Dialects B and C, is rendered in dialect A by applying an overt negative marker, bolded in (21).

(21) [$_{NegP}$ Sehova sem [$_{FP}$ MA [$_{NegP}$ **nem** [$_{TP}$ jött el   senki   (sem)]]]]
          Nowhere not   today   not   came along   nobody NEG-PRT
      'Nobody came along nowhere TODAY. (= For no place *x* was it today that nobody came.')

Observe, however, that there is an important difference between covert complementizers and covert definiteness or negative markers, since the latter, but not the former, entail semantic consequences. In other words, an 'invisible' negative marker turns an otherwise affirmative clause into a negative one, just as an invisible definiteness marker turns an apparently indefinite NP into a definite one. This difficulty does not arise in the omission of the complementizer (or, in the terminology applied here, in the case of covert Comp), since its occurrence has no semantic consequences. But the case for covert negative and definiteness markers is not completely arbitrary. In the possessive DPs illustrated in (20) the properties of the possessive marker guarantee that the construction is interpreted as definite, while it is the presence of the (postverbal) *n*-word that, in effect, forces the covert negative marker to salvage the contruction.[9] In other words, if the covert negative marker is not selected when there is an *n*-word in, for example, the post-focal section of the clause, cf. (17), then it will not be licensed, and left without an interpretation, so the structure will not converge.

The approach we adopt here is based on the properties of NC, as reviewed in the Introduction. An *n*-word is licensed if and only if its uninterpretable [uNeg] feature is checked against the interpretable [iNeg] feature in the (overt or covert) head of the functional category Neg either by Agree or Move and Agree. In a similar manner, the uninterpretable [uDet] feature of the head of the Possessive Phrase, represented by the possessive affix, at least on one analysis, is checked against the interpretable [iDet] feature of the (overt or covert) head of the functional category Det (exclusively) by Agree in this case. The selection of the covert Neg head is not as optional as that of the overt negative marker, since it must be licensed by a c-commanding overt Neg head. This requirement is again not without analogy. If, for example, the covert complementizer is chosen in the Hungarian equivalent of a *that*-clause, it must be licensed by a governing (i.e., c-commanding) verb of a particular class. It is this licensing condition on covert Neg heads that blocks spurious negative concord of *n*-words solely by a covert Neg head, as in (22), which is unacceptable in all dialects:

(22) *[$_{NegP}$ *Neg* [$_{TP}$ jött el   senki   (sem)]]
                        came along   nobody NEG-PRT

Finally, the updated version of Full Interpretation will block the merging of covert Neg or Det if no *n*-word or possessive marker is present.

Then the dividing line between the two classes of dialects is drawn according to whether the dialect has the covert negative marker Neg, as in Dialects B and C, or not, as in Dialect A. The case of Dialect B is particularly interesting. Whereas in (10) or (13a) the postverbal *n*-word escapes the strictures of NC by in effect covertly moving to c-command the FocusP and thus acquiring wide scope,[10] that is not the case in (8b) or (13d), where the postverbal *n*-word

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[9] For various analyses of possessive DPs, in addition to Szabolcsi's, see Den Dikken (1999) and É. Kiss (2002).
[10] Although the issue of how to account for the phenomenon of *n*-word raising would lead us far afield, it should be mentioned for the record that É. Kiss (2008) relies on a curious type of rightward movement, which she classifies under adjunction, so that the raised quantifier would c-command its domain from right to left, as it were. However, she does not address various concomitant problems, such as possible non-quantifiers following the righ-adjoined *n*-word, as in (i).
(i) Nem   A DÉLI VONATTAL érkezett   "senki (se)   tegnap
    not   the noon train-with arrived   nobody PRT   yesterday

remains in situ and is interpreted for independent negation, that is, it will have to be licensed by an invisible negative operator just like its counterpart in dialect C. Consequently, dialect B, which was shown to have more speakers than Dialect C, seems to be transitional between A and C, and here focus can in effect trigger covert movement of the *n*-word, while for the rest of NC-constructions the occurrence of the invisible negative operator is optional, as in dialect C. Incidentally, it remains to be seen that speakers of Dialect B, i.e., those who allow covert movement of the negative quantifier, overlap with speakers of an independently identified dialect, i.e., one in which a post-focal universal quantifer can take scope over the focus, cf., e.g., É. Kiss (2002).

(23) Tegnap [$_{FP}$ A DÉLI VONATTAL [$_{TP}$ érkezett mindenki]]
       yesterday   the noon train-with   arrived everyone
       'Everyone arrived by THE NOON TRAIN yesterday (= For every *x*, it is the noon train that everyone arrived by)'

4. Summary

In this paper I have attributed the difference in the occurrences and interpretations of *n*-words between syntactic dialects in Hungarian to the overt vs. covert nature of the negative marker. This would account for the lack of negative concord effects and the possibility of double negation in case of a postverbal *n*-word, as well as the phenomenon of pre-focal negation followed by a postverbal *n*-word, which are all missing in the majority dialect. The assumption of a covert negative marker would then be analogous with the overt/covert distinction applying to other functional categories, such as Det and Comp, along similar lines between dialects.

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