Though languages widely using prototypical converbs have been studied in Europe for several centuries, this category and the corresponding term have only recently been established in European linguistics [1, p.2]. It is therefore not surprising that some of the syntactic (and semantic) properties of converbs are still far from being properly explained or even described.

One of these properties is the way converb clauses are negated. On the one hand, languages otherwise having completely regular and overt verbal negation often show suppletivism (i.e. etymologically not related negative counterparts) in their converb morphology. In Chuvash, a Turkic language spoken in the Middle Volga Region, e.g., the (contextual) converb in -A as well as the (contextual/narrative) converb in -sA are both said to be negated by -mAsÁr, clearly stemming from the masdar -mA plus the privative suffix -sÁr. Such problems may be nightmares for etymologists, but they have no bearing on the semantic interpretation of complex sentences based on converbs.

More intriguing is the question of the negational force of the (finite) main verb in sentences with a negated main verb and a positive converb. In Old Eastern Turkic, e.g., positive contextual converbs are not negated by negative main verbs [2, p.128f.] [3, p.463], whereas in Turkish they generally are [4, p.510f.]. The exact conditions of such matters are still unknown: This question has often simply been omitted in monographical treatments of converb syntax and even oftener in comprehensive grammars of those languages. In Chuvash, for which no full-scale description exists in the first place, the situation is even trickier. The examples discussed in the present paper have therefore been taken from modern literature and periodical publications and were discussed with native speakers. They show that specialised converbs like -sAn expressing a temporal or (more often) a conditional relationship and -sAssÁn, both temporal converbs, are not affected in their propositional value by main verb negation; the contextual/narrative converb -sA seems to be unaffected when it functions as an independent predicate. It is, however, clearly covered by main verb negation when it functions as the basis of a verbal complex, a construction in common use in Chuvash (as in other members of the Turkic family) and – presumably through Turkic influence – in Mari [5] and Southern Udmurt (which are both Finno-Ugric). Since no straightforward criteria for the delimitation of the different uses of converbs have hitherto been found, we will try to use the scope of negation as an indicator in this matter. Tatar and Russian, the other languages of the region, will also be taken into account.

REFERENCES