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# Particles and Connectives in Baltic

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## Contradiction, contrast, and cause: On the functions of the Latvian particle *neba* in Internet discussions

The Latvian particle *neba* ‘not that’, marked ‘archaic’ in 20th c dictionaries, has recently become popular in discussions carried out on the Internet. This paper investigates in detail what kind of semantic and pragmatic relations are found between a clause containing *neba* and the preceding and/or following clause. It is shown that relations of cause and contrast arise through conversational implicatures, while the only invariant meaning of the particle is emphatic negation. Its formal and functional characteristics make *neba* especially useful in argumentative texts, on the one hand, and in written as against spoken language, where it partly compensates for the lack of prosody.

### 0. Introduction

In the middle of the 19th century August Bielenstein, in the second volume of his Latvian grammar, describes Latvian *neba* enthusiastically as “a particle whose use belongs to the real niceties of the Latvian language” (“eine Partikel, deren Gebrauch zu den rechten Feinheiten der lettischen Sprache gehört”, Bielenstein 1864: 373). He distinguishes two meanings of the word: causal and adversative, which he illustrates with examples from folksongs as the following (the orthography has been adapted to current usage):

- (1) *netur dusmas, bāleliņ’,*      ‘don’t be angry, my dear brother,  
*neb(a) es tautas aicināju*      **it wasn’t** me called for the sui-  
tors’  
‘**for** I didn’t invite the suitors’

- (2) *adu cimδus, adu zeķes,*      ‘I knit mittens, I knit socks,  
*neba došu brālītim;*              **not** to give them to my brother’  
   **‘but** I won’t give them to my  
   brother’

The second translation of the examples contains a connective that spells out the semantic relation Bielenstein had in mind, namely causality in (1) and adversativity in (2).

Endzelin (1922: 816) essentially repeats and affirms Bielenstein’s analysis, and he too cites traditional folksongs (partly the same as Bielenstein). In Mühlenbach and Endzelin’s dictionary (ME) *neba* is listed with two meanings. First as “kausale und adversative Konjunktion”, which corresponds to the description in Bielenstein’s and Endzelin’s grammars<sup>1</sup>. As a second meaning ME mentions that in Ernst Glück’s translation of the Bible (late 17th century) *neba* is used as a strong negation particle, in later editions replaced by *nebūt ne* ‘not at all’. In the 20th century *neba* gets out of use. In LLVV, the most comprehensive dictionary of 20th century Standard Latvian, *neba* is marked as archaic (volume 5 published 1984), while smaller and newer dictionaries such as the one volume LVV (editions of 1989 and 2006) don’t list the word at all. On the other hand, Janīna Kursīte (2007) includes *neba* in her dictionary of marginal and forgotten words (archaisms, regionalisms, occasionalisms). In the first online-corpus of contemporary Latvian, *Miljons*, which contains contemporary texts of different genres, all together one million word-forms, *neba* is found only three times (2 times in fiction of which 1 example is from poetry, and 1 time in press texts). However, *neba* is not just an old-fashioned word on the edge of disappearing from the Latvian language. There is at least one environment where at the beginning of the 21st century *neba* is frequently used by young and middle-aged speakers: discussions carried

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<sup>1</sup> For the history of Latvian grammaticography it may be interesting to note that 2 out of 3 examples given by Endzelin (1922: 816) are also given by Bielenstein 1864, while ME cites 5 different folksongs (plus 1 proverb and 1 example from a fairytale).

out on Internet forums or personal websites. For example, a query searching on the pages of only one forum (SAP, *Sarunas atsaucīgām personām* at [www.sap.lv](http://www.sap.lv)) and restricting the search to the period of one year gave 19 results<sup>2</sup>, which is significantly more than the 3 examples from *Miljons*.

This article investigates the functions of *neba* in this new environment, in order to analyze how different meanings arise and how they are related, and to suggest reasons for the new popularity of this word. In addition, some formal properties of *neba* will be discussed that reflect its two basic components — negation and focus. I will show that the use of *neba* is motivated by the characteristics of the genre where it is used most often, namely written, public, conversational, argumentative texts.

To collect data, I started with a query using the search engine provided by *Letonika* (at [www.letonika.lv](http://www.letonika.lv)) on 29/07/2008. The results were saved and later filtered manually — first to eliminate doublets of the same utterance, homonyms (Russian *neba* ‘sky’), and citations of folksongs. It is worth noting that the great majority of what was left came indeed from forums, discussion groups and blogs; only a few examples were found in newspaper articles, very few in poetry, but other genres (for example, narrative fiction, manuals, technical reports, academic texts, news, laws) are not represented at all. In the next step I sorted the examples along formal criteria into the following four groups:

1. <i>neba</i> with scope over a clause	<b>198</b>
- without a connective (129)	
- following a connective ( <i>un neba, bet neba, jo neba, taču neba</i> ) (67)	
- followed by a connective ( <i>neba ka</i> ) (2)	

<sup>2</sup>Query with GOOGLE carried out 03.06.2009. Without time restriction, GOOGLE found 241 examples of *neba* on the pages of SAP, but I did not check these for doublets etc.

2. correlative <i>neba</i> s – <i>neba</i> s ‘neither s – nor s’ (or <i>neba</i> VP – <i>neba</i> VP)	5
3. <i>neba</i> with scope over constructions smaller than a clause	44
- <i>neba</i> NP (27)	
- <i>neba</i> PP (11)	
- <i>neba</i> VP (3)	
- <i>neba</i> Adv. (3)	
4. idiomatic constructions	29
- <i>neba velti</i> ‘not for nothing, not without reason’ (15)	
- <i>neba tāpēc</i> ( <i>ka</i> ), <i>neba tādēļ</i> etc. ‘not for this reason’ (14)	
total	<b>276</b>

The material base for this investigation are the 198 instances belonging to the first group, where *neba* precedes a clause. Quite often *neba* is accompanied by one or two particles, namely *jau* and/or *nu*. The function of these particles is very difficult to describe, and the difference between *neba jau* / *neba nu* / *neba jau nu* is less than straightforward. In some cases the particles seem to be added mainly for reasons of rhythm. In this paper I will not investigate the subtle differences of meaning provoked by the presence or absence of these particles, but treat single *neba* and *neba + jau/nu* alike.

All examples are cited in the form they appear on the Internet, which quite often deviates from standard orthography.

## 1. The meaning of *neba*

It is interesting to note that LLVV differs from the older sources with respect to the meaning ascribed to *neba*. As mentioned above, Bielenstein (1864), Endzelin (1922) and ME state that *neba* may have a causal or an adversative interpretation. LLVV has two entries: *neba*<sup>1</sup>, a “contrasting conjunction”, and *neba*<sup>2</sup>, a “particle” with two meanings: 1. *ne* ‘no, not’, 2. *vai tad* (marking a rhetorical question to which the implied answer is negative).

The difference between *neba*<sup>1</sup> and *neba*<sup>2</sup> is syntactic, not semantic, and both groups contain examples which in my eyes correspond to Bielenstein's, Endzelin's or Mühlenbach's understanding of causal or adversative relations<sup>3</sup>. I think the main reason for this diversity in describing the content of *neba* is the fact that while all the above mentioned meanings can be found in sentences containing the word, it is often not clear how they arise: are they part of the lexical meaning of the word, or are they the result of pragmatic inference?

In this chapter I will present in detail the four semantic groups I distinguish as a result of my empirical investigation of the 198 constructions collected: CONTRADICTION ('not at all'), CAUSE ('because not'), CONTRAST ('not that ... but instead') and COMBINATIONS OF CAUSE AND CONTRAST ('because not ... but instead' or 'not because... but instead'). These four groups differ not only semantically, but also with respect to formal and discourse properties. The latter are important for the interpretation of a construction containing *neba*, which is one of the arguments for attributing the different "meanings" of *neba* to pragmatic inferences and not to lexical semantics. In other words, *neba* is vague rather than polysemous.

### 1.1 Contradiction

Negation is the only invariant component of the meaning of *neba*. Where there is no ground for interpreting other meanings (cause or contrast), *neba* signals strong negation, a categorical rejection of the truth of the proposition contained in the clause:

*neba* p = not (at all) p or: "it is not the case that p"

This meaning of *neba* is attested from the 17th century on. For

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<sup>3</sup> The question "conjunction or particle" is not important for these older sources; Bielenstein and Endzelin did not see conjunction and particle as mutually exclusive classes of lexical items (cf. Nau & Ostrowski, introductory paper to this volume).

example, Adolf (1685: 352) lists *neba* with the meaning ‘mit nichten’ (Modern German *mitnichten* ‘not at all’). In earlier times *neba* apparently was also used without a clause, as a particle giving a negative answer. Examples for this use can be found in Glück’s translation of the bible from the late 17th c. Compare the example cited in ME (orthography modernized): *Irag netaisniba pie Dieva? neba* ‘Is there injustice with God? **No, there isn’t**’ (Rom. 9, 14.). While I have not come across such a use in our times, contradictory *neba* is still used in replies — only these are not replies to questions, but to statements. It is thus always DIALOGICAL (in the sense used by Schwenter 2000, based on work by Oswald Ducrot): it opposes the speaker’s viewpoint to another viewpoint. This dialogical nature is seen straightforwardly in utterances which are direct replies to a previous turn, thus part of a dialogue in the strict sense. The following example comes from a discussion initiated by “Neziņa”, who, as she tells the community, although happily married for the second time, is still in love with her first husband. In the course of the discussion she makes the claim in (3), which is categorically rejected by “Ekalo” in (4):

Neziņa, 28-05-08 10:49

- (3) *Bet es mīlu savu vīru. Bijušais ir kā apsēstība, kas negrib mani pamest.* ‘But I love my [current] husband. My former [husband] is like an obsession which doesn’t leave me.’

Ekalo, 28-05-08 11:00

- (4) ***neba nu tu mīli, nekā...*** ‘**no**, you **don’t** love [him], not at all...  
*ja mīlētu, tad i doma par bijušo prātā neienāktu.* if you did, there wouldn’t be even a thought of the ex in your mind.’

(forums.delfi.lv/read.php?f=117&i=400864&t=400864)

Two points seem to be important for this use of *neba*. First, as a lexical means for expressing strong subjective negation — a decided rejection of a statement made by another person, it partly compensates for the lack of prosody that all written language has to face. Second, as it formally requires a clause and therefore a repetition of the statement that will be rejected, the construction does not have to follow the statement it contradicts immediately — in the above example as well as in the following, there is one sentence between statement and contradiction. Both features make *neba* especially useful for this peculiar genre — written dialogue, where it is not possible to interrupt a speaker or to raise one’s voice.

The next fragment, from a series of comments to a blog entry on the topic “suffering from a broken heart”, contains two instances of *neba*. The second, made by “chik” (ex. 6), is a direct reply to the preceding utterance (made by Martins in (5)), this is thus the same case as the one just discussed. The sentence containing *neba* in Martins’ contribution, on the other hand, does not respond to a previous turn:

Martins18, 2004-10-20 14:03

- (5) *Laiks dziedee visas bruuces.* ‘Time heals all wounds.  
***Neba** tu viens tads shai pasaulee.* You are **not** the only such one  
in the world’

chik, 2004-10-20 14:11

- (6) ***Neba** laiks ir tas kas kaut ko dziedee.* ‘**No, it’s not** time that heals anything.  
*Varbuut bruuces dziedees bet reetas sirdii taapat paliksies un [...]* Maybe the wounds will heal, but scars will remain in the heart anyway and [...]

(<http://meeting.oho.lv/meeting.php?cmd=redsleja&raxtsid=86>)



As can be seen from example (5), what is contradicted does not have to be spelled out explicitly. The addressee had not said “I’m the only one in the world”, but such a statement may be implied from what she had written in her blog. Thus, *neba* in example (5) may be explicitly translated as “contrary to what you might think, it is not the case that”. Bielenstein’s remark that *neba* negates the tacit expectation or opinion of another person (“verneint [...] die unausgesprochene Erwartung oder Meinung eines anderen”, Bielenstein 1864: 373) fits very well in this case.

While in example (5) the implied contradicted statement is attributed to a specific person, the addressee, such a “tacit expectation or opinion” may also be attributed to an unspecified source, and may relate to a general discourse, to what people are accustomed to say or supposedly think. This is the case in the next fragment, where the author elaborates on the question “does smoking inevitably lead to death”. He draws the following conclusion:

Laacz, 2004-05-31, 12:59

- (7) [...] *Līdz ar ko — neba nu visi, kas ir miruši ar sirds, plaušu un asinsvadu slimībām, tās ir ieguvuši no smēķēšanas.* [...] And what is more – [contrary to the public opinion] not all persons who have died from diseases of the heart, the lungs, or the blood-vessels, had got these from smoking.
- Un neba nu visi smēķētāji ir slimi.* And not all smokers are sick.
- Un neba nu visi saslims.* And not all of them will fall sick.

(laacz.lv/2004/05/31/novelejums/)

Another type of sentence where it is evident that *neba* negates a possible opinion or expectation contains *neba* in a side remark by the speaker, often in brackets. In the following example the

speaker apparently guessed that his ability to give the exact duration of an event might give rise to the implication that he measured the time, an implication he denies in the comment in brackets:

- (8) *Pēc 9 stundu (neba es skaitīju, bet vienkārši gadījās piefiksēt apmēram laikus [...]) ilga perioda [...].* ‘After a period of 9 hours (no, I **didn’t** count, it just happened that I approximately fixed the time [...])’

(<http://sanchozs.kaktuss.lv/?id=44ce876d02120>)

Thus, it may be concluded that even in monologue portions of texts what *neba* negates is statements supposed to be made by others. Therefore, contradictive *neba* is always dialogical. The techniques used in true dialogues, in conversations, for replies to a previous turn can be used in a monologue stretch of discourse, imitating conversation by implying a statement or question made by the listener/reader, which the speaker than refutes. The same is done in many languages by using the particles ‘yes’ and ‘no’ (as in the English translation of ex. (8)). Another way to put it is by saying that the use of *neba* discussed in this section always involves a PERSPECTIVE CHANGE (cf. Pander Maat 1998): from the perspective of another person (either addressee or a third party) to that of the speaker.

## 1.2 Cause

As mentioned in the introduction, the older grammars and dictionaries attest for *neba* a causal meaning: Endzelin (1922: 816) calls *neba* “kausale Partikel” (just like *jo* ‘for’), and Bielenstein (1864: 373) as well as ME cite the marking of a causal relation as the first meaning of the word. In contrast, LLVV makes no reference to causality, although similar examples are cited. This reflects a different interpretation of the same linguistic

facts. There can be no doubt that many clauses containing this particle are regularly interpreted as giving the reason for what is said in (or by) the previous clause and can be translated into other languages using causal connectives such as English *for* or German *denn*. In addition, *neba* always expresses negation. Preliminary this may be represented as follows (the formula will have to be refined later):

$p \text{ neba } q \quad = p \text{ because } [\text{not } q]$

This however does not mean that causality is lexicalized in *neba* the way it is lexicalized in words such as *jo* ‘for’, *tāpēc* ‘therefore’.

Here are some typical examples:

- (9) *Manuprāt, ir bik nevietā šis runāšanas aizliegums, neba ar likumu var izdresēt sabiedrību.* ‘In my eyes, this ban of talking is a bit out of place, (for) you can’t drill society by law.’

(<http://caurums.lv/Ar-trubu-pie-stures/>)

- (10) *programmējamas pogas gan varēja uzlikt tajā vidus konsolē, neba nu cilvēks ikdienā izmanto visas i-drive funkcijas.* ‘but the programming buttons had better been put into this middle console, for one doesn’t use ALL the i-drive functions every day.’

(<http://www.bmwlife.lv/?coll=7&obj=14&id=133>)

- (11) *Nedzeniet puiku kaktā, neba viņš vainīgs ka tik gudrs.* ‘Don’t corner the boy, it’s not his fault that he is so clever.’

(<http://cietnis.laacz.lv/comment.php?id=1498773>)

- (12) [...] *nafig lielo siltumnicu,* 'forget about the big glasshou-  
*uztaisi tadu parnesajamu,* se,  
***neba jau*** *no stikla buvesi.* make such a portable one,  
(<http://www.sap.lv/index.php?t=30930>) you're not going to build it  
from glass, are you.'

In the analysis of semantic relations such as causality, a useful distinction is made between relations concerning the content plane (also called “real-world causality”) and those concerning the text plane, or speech-act domain (see for example Fabricius-Hansen 2000; Pander Maat & Sanders 2006). The difference is also referred to as one between “semantic” and “pragmatic” relations. Sweetser (1991) has argued for a threefold distinction, with the epistemic domain (concerning knowledge) separated from both content and speech-act domain. Of the four examples cited above, the first (ex. 9) may (albeit with some difficulty) be interpreted as concerning real-world causality: the fact that society cannot be educated by law is the reason why this particular law will have no effect. A more plausible interpretation, however, is gained if we attribute the causal relation to the epistemic or the speech-act domain: the fact that you can't train society by law is THE REASON FOR THE SPEAKER TO THINK / TO MAINTAIN that this law is out of place. This interpretation is also supported by the presence of *manuprāt* ‘in my eyes’. Similarly, in example (10) a causal relation is established between the fact expressed in the second clause and the opinion of the speaker, or his speech act of suggesting where to put the buttons (which is marked as a suggestion by the modal verb *varēt* and the particle *gan*). It is not easy to decide in these cases whether the relation concerns the epistemic or the speech-act domain, but it is clear that we are not dealing with real-world causality. For examples (11) and (12) only the speech-act interpretation is possible, because the first clause is a command. Thus, the causal relation in (11) is: THE REASON

FOR MY DEMAND “don’t corner the boy” is that it’s not the boy’s fault that he is clever.

That *neba* operates on the epistemic or speech-act level is characteristic for its “causal meaning”. It is worth noting that also most<sup>4</sup> of the examples from folksongs cited in Bielenstein 1864, Endzelin 1922, and ME to illustrate the causal meaning consist of an imperative clause followed by the clause introduced by *neba* (recall example (1) “don’t be angry...”). The common denominator for constructions where we find a causal relationship is thus that the clause introduced by *neba* expresses a JUSTIFICATION: either of an opinion expressed in the preceding clause, or of a speech-act made by uttering this clause as a statement or command. We may thus refine the formula given above as:

$$p \text{ neba } q \quad = \text{ “p” because [not q] }$$

In the folksongs, following a command seems to be the most typical environment for causal *neba*, while in my collection statements are of equal importance as predecessors. Questions, on the other hand, do not appear to trigger this reading of *neba*. There are 9 instances in my collection where *neba* follows an interrogative clause, but never does the *neba*-clause give a justification for asking the respective question. This is especially interesting if we recall, first, that the classic examples for causal connectives operating in the speech-act domain contain questions, such as Sweetser’s (1991: 77) often quoted example: *What are you doing tonight, because there’s a good movie on* (where *because* = ‘I’m asking this because’). This may be a hint that *neba* is different from typical causal connectives such as English *because* or German *weil*. Second, as pointed out in the previous section, also pure contradictory *neba* is not used in relation to questions, but only to statements.

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<sup>4</sup> Only one example cited by Bielenstein is different.

Coming back to the question of whether causality is part of the lexical meaning of *neba*, as the older grammars and dictionaries suggest, I concluded from my investigation that there is some evidence against this view. In my eyes, if we interpret the second clause as a justification of what has just been said, we are rather making an inference on general pragmatic grounds (ultimately explainable by the Gricean maxim of relevance). Thus, the connexion is *implicite*, not *explicite* (cf. Fabricius-Hansen 2000). There are also examples in the investigated material (19 on the whole) where *neba* is combined with the causal connective *jo* 'for'. If *neba* itself were a causal connective, such a combination would be odd. The addition of *jo* doesn't change the interpretation of the construction or its basic characteristic that causality works in the epistemic or speech-act domain, not the content domain. The omission of *jo* in these instances would not change the interpretation. Here is one example:

- (13) *Taču domāju, ka viņi ir to* 'However, I think that they  
*peļņījuši,* have earned it,  
***jo neba jau vienā dienā*** **for** they didn't gain such a PR  
*uzdzina sev tādu PR, kādu* in just a day, they have gained  
*viņi sasnieguši gadiem strā* it working for years with au-  
*dājot, ar reāliem piemēriem.* thentic examples.'

(<http://arturs.jaffa.lv/2006/05/25/laiks-pirkt-gramatu-getting-real/>)

How can we explain the regular causal reading, if it is not part of the lexical meaning of *neba*? So far research on semantic relations between clauses has concentrated on the analysis of connectives<sup>5</sup>, while research on asyndetic constructions has been scarce (cf. Gohl 2000: 83). Rudolph (1985) puts forward the thesis that causality is the preferred interpretation of the

<sup>5</sup> A purely semantic point of departure is taken in Dixon & Aikhenvald (2008), to which I obtained access only after finishing this paper.

relation between two asyndetically combined clauses wherever possible, while for example an adversative reading requires more (lexical, prosodic) cues. With due caution, I would subscribe to that view. For the data in my collection, the following rule holds:

CAUSALITY AS DEFAULT

If the clause introduced by *neba* can be semantically related to the previous clause, then, if not indicated otherwise by lexical means, the relation is one of causality (acting in the epistemic or speech-act domain).

Approaching the data from another angle, one may explain this rule by properties of argumentative texts: in argumentation, speakers tend to justify statements and commands. Therefore hearers may expect the clause immediately following a statement or command to express a justification.

A consequence of the principle “causality as default” is a tendency to use explicit linguistic means in order to block an otherwise possible causal/justifying reading. Consider the following utterance:

- (14) [...] *vismaz es nebūšu šī* ‘at least I won’t be a fan of this  
*seriāla piekritējs. Bet neba* serial. **But then** I don’t have  
*jau man tā labākā gaume :D.* the best taste :D.’

(<http://ifdb.lv/j104>)

Without the adversative connective *bet* ‘but’, the clause introduced by *neba* might get interpreted as a reason for the first clause (“I won’t be a fan of this serial because I don’t have a good taste”). That means, while the connective *jo* ‘for’ in many cases seems to be superfluous, the adversative connective *bet* ‘but’ put before *neba* has an important function: it blocks the establishment of the default causal relation between the two clauses.

It is worth noting that in all instances where the clause containing *neba* stands in a causal relation to the previous clause, both

clauses have the same perspective, namely that of the speaker, in contrast to the uses discussed in the previous section, which always included a change of perspective.

There is another type of construction where *neba* is associated with causality, but not with a causal relation between clauses or speech acts. It appears when the clause containing *neba* expresses a rhetorical question, an invitation to the addressee to reject a possible explanation (most often for his/her behavior), for example:

- (15) *Kāpēc gāji prom? Neba nu sakautrējies?* ‘Why did you leave? You didn’t become shy, did you?’

(<http://koko.netparks.lv/?s=spams&r=854>)

This type is not frequent: there are only 4 examples in my collection. The syntactic connection between the clauses is weaker in these cases than in examples (9–12), and an idiomatic English translation will not contain a causal connective (I tried to render the effect of *neba* by a tag question). In LLVV this type is singled out as a special submeaning of the particle *neba* (**neba**<sup>2</sup>, 2, equivalent to *vai tad*). In English, the meaning may be formulated as:

*neba p?* = you don’t assert p, do you?

In my eyes, the *neba*-clause in these instances shows a double perspective: that of the speaker as well as that of the hearer (or that of the speaker impersonating the hearer). In the terminology used by Traugott (2003), *neba* here is INTERSUBJECTIVE, while in most other cases it is subjective.

### 1.3 Contrast

As I have argued above, the position of the clause containing *neba* is important for its interpretation: The causal reading arises when *neba* follows a clause expressing a statement or command.



We find an analogous rule for cases where the *neba*-clause precedes a clause with which it stands in a semantic relation: this relation then is one of contrast, mostly adversative. The second clause often contains a contrastive connective like *bet* ‘but’ or *tomēr* ‘still, nevertheless’, but asyndetic combinations are also found. Compare the following two examples:

- (16) *Neba būvniekiem interesē to pili būvēt bet gan baņķieriem aizdot naudu tās būvniecībai un 20 gadu laikā nopelnīt 3 reizes lielāku summu nekā aizdeva.*      **It is not** the constructors’ interest to build this castle<sup>6</sup>, **but** the bankers’ to lend the money for the construction and to earn in the course of 20 years 3 times the sum they lent.’

([http://pods.lv/blog/2007/09/gaismas\\_pils\\_un\\_tracis\\_ap\\_to.html](http://pods.lv/blog/2007/09/gaismas_pils_un_tracis_ap_to.html))

- (17) *Nobeigumā vēlētos teikt, ka neba nu kompānijas ir vainīgas, ka tām nākas patentēt šādas lietas. Vainīga ir likumdošana, kas šādus patentus pieļauj.*      ‘At the end I would like to say that **it is not** the companies who are to blame that they have to patent such things. The law is to blame which allows such patents.’

(<http://cietnis.laacz.lv/?cat=7>)

Example (16) contains a correlative marker *bet* ‘but’, enforced by the particle *gan*, while (17) does not. The clauses in (16) are also more tightly connected than in (17) — they are united in one graphic sentence and the shared predicate *interesēt* ‘be of interest’ is omitted in the second clause, while in (17) the two clauses are presented as separate sentences and the common predicate *būt vainīgam* ‘be to blame’ is repeated. Nevertheless, the semantic relation between the clauses is the same in both cases. It may be formalized as follows:

<sup>6</sup>“Castle” refers to the new building of the Latvian National Library, called *gaismas pils* ‘castle of light’.

*neba* p (*bet*) q = not p but instead q

The correlative pair *neba* ... *bet* forms a stable pattern that may appear with at least two different meanings. The first type, illustrated by example (16) above, consists of the confrontation of two propositions with a common denominator of which the first is rejected, in other words, the second clause is the rectification of a negated state of affairs expressed in the first clause. In this case, we may talk of SEMANTIC OPPOSITION (as one type of adversative relations; Rudolph (1996: 131–136) gives a useful overview of the discussion of this concept and its various labels in the linguistic literature).

In the second type there is no semantic contrast between the clauses, instead the pair *neba*...*bet* has a CONVERSATIONAL FUNCTION. This type may be exemplified by the following two utterances:

- (18) *neba jau tas ir galvenais...*      ‘not that this is so important...  
*bet dizains man patiik.*                      **but** I like the design.’

(<http://arturs.jaffa.lv/2007/04/30/digglv-20-no-odienas/>)

- (19) [...] *tikai dažas iebildes:*                      ‘[...] just some objections:  
1) *neba man moralizēt,*                              1) **not that** I want to moralize,  
*bet pie īstas laimes tā netikt.*                      **but** that’s not how to achieve  
real happiness.’

(<http://meeting2.oho.lv/meeting.php?cmd=redsleja&raxtsid=69>)

In this type the conjunction *bet* is probably obligatory. Again, as in cases with a causal relation, we see that *neba* relates to the speech act, not the proposition. More precisely, the *neba*-clause gives a comment on the intention of the following utterance: “what I am going to say may be not important, but I say:...”, “what I am going to say may be wrongly interpreted as moralizing, but I say: ...”.

What the two types (semantic and conversational contrast) have in common is that the clause introduced by *neba* prepares

the hearer for what is said in the following clause. It is in the second clause that the speaker expresses what s/he really wants to say (“the law is to blame” in (17), “I like the design” in (18)), but by first saying something else, suspense is created and expectations are raised. Contrasting is a general way to give a statement more weight and to put emphasis on the second element. Compare:

- (20) (a) *The law is to blame.*  
(b) *The companies are not to blame. The law is to blame.*

The function of structuring the text and preparing the hearer/reader for the fact that the main point is yet to come can also be observed in cases where clauses with *neba* are part of a chain of clauses that make up an ARGUMENTATION, as in the following example:

- |                |   |   |
|----------------|---|---|
| (20) (a) [...] | <i>man bija iespēja noskatīties divas lugas.</i>                              | ‘(a) [...] I had the opportunity to watch two plays.                                      |
| (b)            | <i><b>Ne</b>ba gluži manam vecumam piemērotas [...].</i>                      | (b) <b>True</b> , they weren’t really meant for my age group,                             |
| (c)            | <i><b>Arī</b> pirmizrādes tās jau piedzīvojušas pagājušajā teātra sezonā.</i> | (c) <b>Also</b> they had experienced their opening nights already in the previous season. |
| (d)            | <i><b>Tomēr</b> bija interesanti abus iestudējumus konfrontēt,</i>            | (d) <b>Nevertheless</b> it was interesting to confront the two productions,               |
| (e)            | <i><b>jo</b> [...]</i>  | (e) <b>for</b> [...]  |

(<http://www.karosta.lv/blog/?m=200612>)

Some researchers distinguish a fourth domain in which semantic relations may operate, namely the text domain (see Crevels 2000). With this construct we may explain the difference between examples like (21), which operate in the text

domain, and examples like (18) and (19), where *neba* concerns the speech-act domain.

In her overview of types of adversative relations, Rudolph (1996: 144–150) singles out a class “argumentation” for similar cases. Among others she cites Primatarova-Miltscheva (1986), who described the functions of the German pair *zwar ... aber*, which is very similar to *neba ... bet* or *neba ... tomēr*. German *zwar*, which developed from a phrase meaning ‘it is true’, is very much like Latvian *neba*, only with the opposite sign: it is a strong affirmation, while *neba* is a strong contradiction. By changing the place of the negation, these words become translation equivalents (in this spirit I used English *true* in the translation of (21b)). Contradiction and affirmation at the beginning of an argumentation, where the speaker does not contradict or affirm something previously said or implied, are conversationally odd — we do not normally start by saying that something is not the case or by insisting that it is — and therefore direct the attention of the hearer/reader to what follows. In this way the concessive meaning of Latvian *neba* and German *zwar* arises from conversational implicature.

In contexts of contrast, both the clause introduced by *neba* and the following, contrasting clause represent the speaker’s perspective. The statement negated with *neba* may represent a perspective of someone else, for example, we may imagine that (17) responds to the opinion expressed by another participant that it’s mainly the constructors who want to build the library, or that (21) refers to some explicit notice for which age group the plays were meant, but this is no necessary condition for this type, other than in the examples discussed in section 2.1.

#### 1.4 Cause & contrast

The previous two sections were devoted to cases where a clause with *neba* stands in a semantic relation to either the preceding or the following clause. A further possibility, to be discussed

now, is that the *neba*-clause relates to both its neighbors. Two cases may be distinguished.

First, in cases where the rule “causality as default” applies, the justification may consist of a couple of semantically opposed clauses instead of the single *neba*-clause. Schematically, this can be formulated as:

$p \text{ neba } q \text{ (bet) } r =$  “p” because [[not q] but r]

That is, the *neba*-clause forms a couple with both the preceding and the following clause. Consider the following example:

- (21) (a) *Zatlers par daudz bildēs.* ‘(a) (President) Zatlers is too often in the picture.  
 (b) **Neba nu** viņš baigi galvenais. (b) **It’s not** him the most important.  
 (c) *Šajā dienā svarīgi, ka katrā ģimenē tiek par to stāstīts bērniem...* (c) On this day it is important that in every family people tell their children about it...’
- ([http://filmas.apollo.lv/portal/news/articles/123557/?comm\\_page=1](http://filmas.apollo.lv/portal/news/articles/123557/?comm_page=1)) (comment about a television feature on memorial day for the victims of communist terror)

In the manner described in section 1.2, the *neba*-clause gives a justification for the statement made in the first clause, and this justification contains a negated proposition. On the other hand, the second and the third clause reflect a semantic opposition with the common denominator “what is important (on this day)”, parallel to the first two examples (nr. (16) and (17)) discussed in section 2.3. In the example at hand, the couple “statement : justification” is actually only the beginning of a longer argumentation about officials’ role and the media on such occasions.

The second type is found in cases where the *neba*-clause “negates the tacit expectation or opinion of another person” (see section 2.1), which may arise as an implication of the first clause. The “tacit expectation”, as a rule, is a kind of cause, or

consequence (in the broad sense, including purpose) for the content of the first clause. Here is a typical example:

- (22) ... *veselu nedēļu nebija neviena raksta šai blogā.* '... there hasn't been any entry in this blog for a whole week.  
*Neba nebūtu par ko rakstīt, tieši otrādāk — bija pārāk daudz visa kā cita.* **Not because** [as one might think] there would'nt be anything to write about, **just the contrary** — there were to many other things.'
- (<http://arturs.jaffa.lv/?s=nissan&x=0&y=0>)

The difference between this triplet and the one described before lies in the place of the negation: here we have “not because”, in the previous example it was “because not”. A further difference is that in the first type the causal relation operates in the speech act domain, but in the second type it concerns the content domain. The formula for the second type is thus:

$p$  *neba*  $q$  (*bet*)  $r = p$  not [because  $q$ ] but [because  $r$ ]

This type is also known from the dainas. Example (2) above was given in a shortened version, as cited by Bielenstein (1868), but in fact the next clause belongs to the construction (Endzelin (1922: 816) cites all three lines):

- (23) *adu cimduš, adu zeķes,* 'I knit mittens, I knit socks, ( $p$ )  
*neba došu brālītim;* **not** to give them to my not ( $q$ )  
 brother;  
*došu tautu dēliņam.* I'll give them to the one I'll ( $r$ )  
 marry'

The whole chain of thoughts, which the folksong expresses so elegantly, may be spelled out as follows:

“ $p$  (and you may think that  $q$ , but)  
 $q$  is not the case, (instead,)  
 $r$  is the reason for  $p$ ”

## 1.5 Summary

In this section I have investigated the semantic and pragmatic relations between a clause introduced by *neba* and other clauses. I have shown that causality and adversativity are not part of the lexical meaning of *neba*, but arise through implicatures based on the nature of argumentation. The types discussed in subsection 1.1–1.4 may be summarized as follows:

With a *neba*-clause the speaker

1. contradicts a statement or opinion P where
  - a. P is a statement made by another person (in dialogues) — ex. (4), (6),
  - b. P is a commonly held opinion — ex. (7), or
  - c. P is a possible implication of the speaker's utterance or part of it — ex. (8);
2. justifies his/her speech act S expressed in the previous clause by giving a reason which contains a negation, where
  - a. s is a statement — ex. (9), or
  - b. s is a command — ex. (11);
3. rejects P in order to prepare his/her statement S, where
  - a. P is a statement containing a proposition that stands in semantic opposition to the proposition contained in s — ex. (17),
  - b. P is a possible interpretation of the function or status of S within the discourse — ex. (19),
  - c. P and s are part of an argumentative chain — ex. (21).

These are the basic uses of *neba*. They may be identified quite clearly, although some overlap is possible. In addition, as shown in subsection 1.4, they may be combined, so that

4.a = a combination of 2.a and 3.a — ex. (22),

4.b = a combination of 1.c and 3.a — ex. (23).

There is a further, marginal type that was discussed in 1.2 but does not really fit the scheme presented here: with an interrogative *neba*-clause the speaker invites the hearer to reject a possible explanation or opinion (“you don't assert P, do you?”).

In about half a dozen instances *neba* cannot be motivated in one of these ways and seems to be just a variant of the general negative particle *ne*.

## 2. Some aspects of the syntax of *neba*: focus, scope, connectivity

The answer to the question “is *neba* a conjunction?” necessarily depends on what this notion includes and what the alternatives are. The traditional approach used in Latvian lexicography and grammaticography opposes conjunctions to particles, prepositions, and adverbs (cf. Kalme 2001). In some parts of discourse studies conjunctions are opposed to discourse markers, both being kinds of the broader notion “connective” (cf. Georgakopoulou & Goutsos 1998). Different approaches highlight different properties of the elements in question and of the constructions these elements appear in. They may therefore be used as heuristic tools that complement each other.

Within the traditional approach, *neba* (in the constructions analyzed in this paper) will be classified as a particle rather than a conjunction. A first criterion is its compatibility with other elements. As mentioned above, *neba* can be combined with the conjunctions *un* ‘and’, *bet* ‘but’, and *jo* ‘for, because’, which are not compatible with each other (\**un bet*, \**jo un* etc.). On the other hand it forms particle complexes with the frequent particles *nu* and *jau*. It has further been shown in section 1 that specific semantic relations (cause, contrast) are not part of the lexical meaning of *neba*, but arise through implicature in a given context. This distinguishes *neba* from typical Latvian conjunctions like *ja* ‘if’, *jo* ‘for’, *tāpēc ka* ‘because’, *bet* ‘but’ etc. The only conjunction that is semantically vague like *neba* is the coordinating conjunction *un* ‘and’. Etymologically *neba* consists of two particles: *ne* (negative particle) + *ba* (focus particle, not productive in Latvian). Negation and focusing still determine



the function of *neba* today, and it is worth considering them in some more detail.

The usual way to negate a clause in Latvian is by adding the prefix *ne-* to the finite verb; for the word-form *ir* ‘is’ negation yields the suppletive form *nav* ‘is not’. Using *neba*, it is possible to extract the negation and pose it before the clause, with the finite verb in the affirmative form. Examples are given in the following table:

affirmative	usual negation	negation with <i>neba</i>
<i>Tu viņu mīli.</i> ‘You love him.’	<i>Tu viņu <b>nemīli.</b></i>	<b><i>neba</i></b> [ <i>tu viņu mīli</i> ]
<i>Viņš ir vainīgs.</i> ‘He is guilty.’	<i>Viņš <b>nav</b> vainīgs.</i>	<b><i>neba</i></b> [ <i>viņš ir vainīgs</i> ]

The formal differences between simple negation and *neba*-negation are thus (i) bound form vs. free form, and (ii) position within the clause vs. position in front of the clause<sup>7</sup>. These differences are important for the expression of focus in two ways. With the simple construction, the possibilities to emphasize the negation are limited. In spoken language emphasis is mainly expressed by stress: *tu viņu **NEMĪli*** ‘you DON’T love him’. It may also be expressed by word order, but as the prefix is bound, its position within the clause can only be changed together with the verb: *nemīli tu viņu*. The highlighting effect is much weaker, and spoken language will always use prosody in addition to word order<sup>8</sup>. Using *neba* as a lexical means for highlighting the negation, prosody is not needed — an obvious advantage in writing —, and word order within the clause can be used for other purposes. Second, while the negating part of *neba* has scope over the whole clause (in the instances considered in this

<sup>7</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, cases where *neba* negates only a constituent of a clause (and is thus within the clause) are not considered in this paper.

<sup>8</sup> Miller (2006) found that in European languages focus is rarely marked by word order alone.

investigation), the focusing part may affect only a part of it: the word or constituent immediately following *neba* (thus occupying the first position in the clause) may receive contrastive focus. Recall examples (16) and (17), where the first NPs of the two clauses are contrasted: ‘(not) the constructors / (but) the bankers’, ‘(not) the companies / (but) the law’. To emphasize the contrastive focus of the first element, a cleft construction is sometimes used, as in example (6), repeated here:

- (6) *Neba laiks ir tas kas kaut ko*  
 NEBA time:NOM IS DEM:NOM REL:NOM something  
*dziedee.*  
 heal:PRS:3  
 ‘No, TIME doesn’t heal anything’ (literally: ‘Not time is that which heals something’)

In such cases the scope of *neba* is ambiguous, or rather it has double scope, schematically:

NEG FOC [the companies are not to blame]  
 NEG [[FOC the companies] are not to blame]

As the negation with *neba* stands outside the clause, the clause itself may contain a negation, for example:

- (24) ***neba jau nepietika klubā tās*** ‘not that there wasn’t enough  
*elles dziras* of that hell drink in the club’

(<http://z-koja.blogs.lv/atsaukmes/51644/>)

- (25) *ja jau pie Esteres un Mauriņa* ‘and if there are guests in  
*studijā ir viesi, tad* the studio with Estere and  
***neba nu viņi nav*** *paķēruši* Mauriņš, then  
*līdzī kādu CD [...]* [literally:] **it is not that** they  
 haven’t brought along some  
 CD’

([http://ltv7.lv/lat/zinas\\_sports/283/284/](http://ltv7.lv/lat/zinas_sports/283/284/))

Negation within a *neba*-clause is however rare in my corpus, and there are also 2 examples where the author obviously had some problems with the negation:

- (26) *Baisi, neba internets nav nekas abstrakti autonomi* literally: ‘Baisis, **it is not the case that** the Internet is **not** anything abstractly autonomous’; presumably intended meaning: ‘the Internet is NOT something abstractly autonomous’  
 (<http://www.ebaznica.lv/?p=715>)
- (27) *un neba Amīši nav dumji [...]* ‘and **it’s not the case that** the Americans are **not** stupid [...]’ intended meaning inferred from context: ‘the Americans are NOT stupid’  
 (<http://www.financenet.lv/board/?parentid=45611&id=168845>)

Although presumably erroneous, these examples show that a possible further development of *neba* is that it may lose its negating force and become a pure focusing device (in contexts of negation).

From another point of view, without doubt *neba* also has some characteristics of conjunctions. Its stable initial position distinguishes it from other particles in Latvian, which typically do not occur at the beginning of a sentence but either as second element within the clause or further towards the end. Interesting in this respect are the Latvian words *jau* and *taču*. The particle *jau*, which in certain examples of this paper was shown in combination with *neba*, very rarely appears in initial position. If we find *jau* at the beginning of a clause, it rather functions as an adverb and has the meaning ‘already’. Similarly, *taču* in initial position functions as a conjunction (as classified by Kalme 2001, other Latvian sources treat this *taču* as an adverb) with the meaning ‘however, nevertheless’, but in second position *taču* is a particle with the meaning ‘after all’.

Within the approach of Georgakopoulou & Goutsos (1998), *taču* ‘nevertheless’ can be classified as a DISCOURSE MARKER — one of “those connectives that operate on both a local and a global level” (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos 1998: 889). It often operates across sentences, connecting units of texts of different length, and its characteristic position, as already pointed out, is at the beginning of a sentence. In contrast, CONJUNCTIONS within this approach are connectives that operate only on a local level, connecting clauses or phrases. How can *neba* be placed in this system? As can be seen in the examples of this paper, *neba* operates most often on a local level, connecting clauses. Although *neba* frequently is the first word of a (graphic) sentence, this is not its only position — in contexts with a causal relationship between clauses, *neba* often introduces the second clause of a sentence. However, there are also cases where *neba* connects clauses on a more than local level: recall the first examples given in section 1.1, where *neba* operates across turns and includes a change of perspective. Also in argumentative chains as exemplified in example (21) the clause with *neba* stands in relation to a clause that is not adjacent. In these examples *neba* resembles a discourse marker. Still, the units that are related when *neba* occurs are clauses, not larger units of texts. Interestingly, there is a word in Latvian that at first glance seems very similar to *neba*, but differs exactly in this respect: *tiesa* ‘true’ (particle < nominative form of a noun meaning ‘truth, right, justice’) is used mainly sentence-initially and relates bits of texts of different length, and thus is a discourse marker and not a conjunction in Georgakopoulou & Goutsos’ system.

### 3. Conclusions: From folksongs to forums

My investigation of the word *neba* as found on the Internet at the beginning of the 21st century has shown that the use of this word is firmly rooted in argumentation. It is used where authors express their viewpoints, confront their opinion to that of others

(of their partners in a discussion, or opposing a general public opinion), justify what they say, or prepare a following statement. It is thus most often found in discussions, to a lesser extent also in argumentative essays. *Neba* is also a marker of subjectivity, or of the speaker's involvement in the argument. This makes it especially suitable for Internet discussions, which are mostly subjective and often emotional, and explains its absence from more formal genres of argumentation, for example newspaper comments, where authors try to be objective and express their opinion without personal involvement.

In addition, *neba* is typical for (a certain kind of) written, not spoken, communication. To my knowledge the word is rarely used in conversations<sup>9</sup>, and its use in the Internet cannot be explained as a feature of spoken language. As I have pointed out in sections 1.1 and 2, spoken language is more likely to use prosodic means to create the effects that *neba* has in written discussions (emphasis, involvement). Thus *neba* is used partly to compensate for the lack of prosody in the written medium, and this use betrays the fact that despite its informality, subjectivity, lack of planning etc. the language of Internet discussions is primarily WRITTEN language<sup>10</sup>. Prosody in a broad sense may also be a reason why outside of the Internet, in texts from previous times, *neba* is most frequent in folksongs and rarely found, for example, in the dialogues of fairy tales etc. The syntax of a song is partly determined by rhythm, so that it is often impossible to mark emphasis by stress or word-order, especially emphasis of a negation. While folksongs might seem very far from Internet

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<sup>9</sup> This claim is difficult to prove, as there are no corpora that would allow empirical investigations of spoken Latvian with statistical significance. I thus mainly rely on my own experience with the language and discussions with native speakers, as well as a cursory examination of radio interviews containing conversations between two speakers in a rather informal style.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. David Crystal's remark: "on the whole, Netspeak is better seen as written language which has been pulled some way in the direction of speech than as spoken language which has been written down" (Crystal 2001: 47-48).

forums, these two genres actually have several points in common: they have characteristics of both written and spoken communication, they show a high degree of involvement, they are forms of public discussions (recall, for example, the traditional Latvian wedding songs, which are “discussions” between the sides of the bride and of the groom).

The stylistic association of *neba* with the traditional folksongs leads to yet another reason why *neba* is so popular on the Internet. The use of archaic words is fashionable among Latvian Internet users, and in the texts that contain *neba* we also often find forms like *irajd* (instead of *ir*) ‘is’, *jebšu* (instead of *jeb*) ‘or, in other words’, and other obsolete or stylistically marked forms. This fashion is “contagious”, and the frequency of forms that only some years ago had been very rare may increase rapidly. Sometimes one gets the impression that fashion is the main reason for using *neba* instead of the usual negation. However, in the overwhelming majority of instances this word has a special function, as shown in this paper.

## Abbreviations

DEM — demonstrative pronoun, FOC — focus, NOM — nominative, NEG — negation, PRS — present tense, REL — relative pronouns

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