The central explanandum of this paper is the universal, as far as I know, inability of true (not expletive) negation to appear in *Before*-clauses (BC):

(1) * John left the store before Mary did not try the dress

Note, however, that negation in BCs improves in the presence of a modal:

(2) John was happy before I wouldn’t talk to him anymore

This contrast suggests that the cause of the deviant status of (1) is not a violation of a fundamentally syntactic principle. Instead, I will propose that the reason is presupposition failure. Informally, a BC carries a presupposition that there exists a unique, contextually salient and identifiable time $t$ such that the relevant event expressed by the BC took place at $t$. In other words, the presupposition of the BC is identical to that associated with definite descriptions. The natural question that then arises concerns the origin of that presupposition. I will examine two options. First, following the analysis of *before* that Beaver and Condoravdi (2003) have proposed, we can suggest that the presupposition originates in the *Earliest* operator that they propose is the core of the meaning of *before*:

(3) $A$ before $B = T$ iff \[((\exists t \in A) \ t < \text{earliest}(B))\]

As a superlative, *Earliest* carries a definite presupposition. The second option locates the presupposition in a silent, syntactically active, complement of before which, following Kayne (2005, 2010) I will notate as [THAT TIME]. According to this analysis BCs have the structure \[[\text{THAT TIME}][\text{CP} \ldots]\] where the BC is a relative modifying [TIME]. The silent complement [THAT TIME] is, of course, definite and accounts for the presupposition. The second option originates in the work of Katz and Postal (1963) and their analysis of *where* as the *the place at which*... In the case of *Before* a similar line has recently been taken by Gronn and von Stechow (2009, 2011) and has been criticized by Sharvit (2013). In somewhat enriched form (1) will be as follows according to the two approaches:

(4) John left the store Before the *Earliest* time $t$ that is a non-dress-trying-by-Mary $t$

(5) John left the store before [THAT TIME textbft [when Mary did not try the dress/which is non-dress-trying-by-Mary $t$]]

Between those two options, I will show that the first is eventually inadequate as it fails to capture cases where the A event (the event of the matrix clause) is located at the initial boundary of the relevant interval. To be more specific, given common assumptions about contextual restriction of evaluation, I take it that a sentence like (1) is evaluated within a context of, say, a particular visit to a store. Now, in that case, if the visit is an interval $i$ such that $t_1 \ldots t_n \in i$ and assuming that Mary tries the dress at $t_x$ such that $t_1 < t_x < t_n$ then at least $t_1$ is a time that can be picked up by the *Earliest* operator. The objection can be replicated with other situations. The second option does not suffer from such defects and naturally leads to the required presupposition failure as within the relevant interval there
are many moments (or continuous sub-intervals) at which \(-B\) is true at each one of them. Following this I will develop further the analysis of \textit{Before} in the framework of Kayne (2005, 2010). More specifically I will take seriously his conjecture that each lexical item carries a single syntactically interpreted feature. In the case of \textit{Before}, given that the temporal meaning is provided by the empty complement [THAT TIME], which I take to be always there, I will suggest that the meaning of before is simply that of \textit{comparison}. This conclusion is supported from further evidence first from English, where \textit{before} can be modified by the same range of modifiers that apply to comparatives:

(6)  
   a. *More faster  
   b.  Much faster  

(7)  
   b.  Much before . . .

Bare degree phrases:

(8)  
   a. Three days/hours/minutes/seconds/years \textbf{before}  
   b. Three days/hours/minutes/seconds/years \textbf{earlier}

(9)  
   *Three days/hours/minutes/seconds/years \textbf{earliest}

Crosslinguistically, it turns out that we repeatedly find the same pattern in Italian, as Del Prette (2008) shows \textit{Before} also behaves similarly to comparatives, in Ancient Greek \textit{Before} also derives from the comparative. In Slavic, Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian show overt comparative morphology with BCs (10) (Serbo-Croatian):

(10) Prije nego što sam ga video  
   before than what aux him.CL see.PART.SG  
   ‘Before I saw him’

the same is true with Slovenian \textit{preden}

The evidence is, I suggest, convincing. The comparative nature of \textit{Before} will be instrumental in understanding further properties such as the licensing of expletive negation and the original patterns of improved negation with modals. Time permitting, I will then try to address a few higher-level questions of theory most notably the status of Kayne’s notion of \textbf{a single syntactically interpreted feature per lexical item} and its far-reaching consequences for the syntax-semantics interface. In a nutshell, my suggestion will be that for major categories, the feature in question corresponds to the major denotational domain of the category. For nouns, for instance, following Chierchia (2010) I will take it that nouns can denote one of three different things, namely Kinds, Properties, and Number Neutral Properties. This, I will claim will be the unique feature of nouns that the syntax \textit{Interprets}. As a result, the basic conceptual semantics of a lexical item will be largely irrelevant to the syntactic computation. The general approach is strongly decompositional.