

# The puzzle of Old Italian Negative Concord

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- In this talk I will investigate how negative concord developed in Old Italian.
- Starting from a language with double negation like Latin I will show that the complex pattern of Old Italian negative concord between the negative marker and one or more n-words or PI can be accounted for by the interaction of two sets of factors.

- Syntactic accounts of negative concord can be split into two types
- A) those that attribute NC to the properties of the negative marker
- B) those that attribute NC to the properties of n-words
- I will propose that we actually need both perspectives to account for OI data.

- Syntactic accounts of negative concord based on the operation agree assume that there is a null or phonetically realized negative operator with an interpretable negative feature which licenses n-words.
- The distinction between different types of negative concord (for examples strict/non-strict) is derived by the different status of the negative marker, which can correspond or not to the actual negative operator.

- A language where n-words always co-occur with the negative marker (i.e. strict negative concord) only has a null negative operator that licenses n-words in all positions
- A language where n-words only co-occur with the negative marker when they are in postverbal position (i.e. non strict negative concord) visibly encodes the negative operator through the negative marker.

- Accounts based on the idea that negative concord derives from a property of the n-word model the phenomenon in terms of
- A. different features of the n-word (which can be +negative or not) (Martins (2001), (2011))
- B. different positions of the n-word in its internal structure: the n-word climbs up to the SpecD position. Déprez (2011)

- It has already been noticed that the medieval Romance languages are unstable with respect to the pattern of negative concord. For instance Martins (2001), (2011) shows that negative concord with preverbal n-words starts out being obligatory and then becomes optional at a certain stage of Old Romance.

# Old Spanish

- a. *O. S. que a myo Çid Ruy Diaz, que **nadi nol** diessen  
posada*  
that to my Lord Ruy Diaz, that nobody not-him give  
lodging  
that nobody give lodging to *Mio Cid Rui Diaz*  
(*Cantar de Mio Cid* 25. Menéndez-Pidal, ed. 1946: 910)
- b. *O. S. Fablo Muño Gustioz, **non spero a nadi***  
spoke Muño Gustioz, not waited for nobody  
    *Muño Gustioz spoke, he didn't wait for anybody else*  
*to do it'*  
(*Cantar de Mio Cid* 1481. Menéndez-Pidal, ed. 1946: 953)



# Old French

- a. **Nient ne** nous vaut, vous en venrés  
nothing not us is-worth, you of-it will-see  
= 'Nothing is worth us, you will see' (Cf. Foulet 1930: 245)
- b. *Se g' iere Deus, je feroie / lo siecle tot autrement, / et meillor*  
if I were God, I would-do the century all otherwise, and better  
*gent i metroie, / car cist n' i.valent neient*  
people there would-put, because these not are-worth  
nothing  
= 'If I were God, I would do this century different, and I would  
put a better people in it, because this people aren't worth  
nothing'  
(Cf. Foulet 1930: 280)

- She traces this back to the features of NPIs developing from weak into strong PI on the basis of three features affirmative, negative, modal.
- It is actually problematic to assume that the negative marker is sometimes really negative and sometimes it is not when we see no change in the form of the negative marker, while we see changes in the form of the n-word.

I will provide evidence that:

- A. The mechanism of Agree in OI is subject to restrictions that are not found in modern Italian
- B. The internal structure of n-words is also related to the possibility of negative concord

- The first attestations in OI already display a system where negative concord seems optional, there are no attestations of OI where it is a stable strict negative concord language as Martins assumes for Old Spanish and Old French.
- OI texts are actually later than those of Old French, so, this could be due to the fact that OI is documented too late.

- There is a clear change in the system of negative concord approximately around the turn of the XIV century (from 1297 the system changes in the distribution and form of n-words).
- After 1350 the system is much more similar to the modern one, i.e. the one of a non-strict negative concord language.

# Preverbal subjects

E **neuno** di voi si spaventi...

and no.one of you refl fears

‘None of you gets scared...’ (*VeV* 69)

**neuno non** andasse poscia in paradiso...

and no.one not went.3sg after in heaven

‘(so that) no one will go to heaven’ (*VeV* 78)

# V2ed constituents

Portava la sua spada a collo e **nulla altra spada non**  
portava

carried.3sg the his sword at neck and no other  
sword not carried.3sg

‘He carried his sword tied at the neck and carried  
no other sword’ (*Tristano* 403)

E questo officio **a neuno** paia lieve

And this deed to noone look easy (B.G. Arte 13)

And noone finds this action easy

- This is the state of affairs on which Martins(2001) bases her analysis of the diachronic change of n-words from weak to strong NPI.
- This observation is correct, but in OI also postverbal negative markers display apparent optionality with respect to negative concord.



- Thus, differently from the observations made by Martins, OI is a language with apparently optional negative concord throughout: it allows for both pre and postverbal n-words with or without the preverbal negative marker *non*, so it is not only the case of preverbal n-words that is puzzling but also the behavior of postverbal n-words.

# Postverbal n-words

Ma **non** valse        **neente**...

but not served.3sg nothing

‘But it did not help...’ (*VeV* 82)

E fede senza opera, overo opera senza fede,

and faith without deed or deed without faith

**è neente** a potere aver paradiso

is nothing to can.inf have.inf heaven

‘Faith without deeds or deeds without faith are worth nothing to reach heaven’ (*VeV* 30)

- This means that OI is not a language which swings between a strict and a non strict negative concord system, but a language that swings between a negative concord and double negation system.
- This is actually expected knowing that Latin was a double negation language.

- One might simply assume that the language is changing and that there are two grammars in competition, or that the lexical entries of n-words are ambiguous between weak and strong NPIs as Martins does.
- However, if one looks more closely at the pattern, robust regularities emerge from the data that point towards a more complex solution.

# Adverbs versus Arguments

- Garzonio (2009) notices that in OI negative adverbs require negative concord obligatorily. Hence, the generalization is:
  - Negative adverbs always require the presence of the negative marker *non* (or of the negative complementizer *né*), i.e. OI is a regular strict negative concord language in the case of adverbs.

# Negative adverbs

- ..elli istava tutto tempo tristo e dolente e **mai non** faceva bella ciera (Anonym., *Reggimento de' Principi Volg.* 3.2.11, 1288)

he stayed.3SG all time sad and grieving and never NEG  
did.3SG nice face

“He was sad all the time, and suffering, and never had a good aspect.”

Ché **non** retorna **mai** la parola ch'è detta...(B. Latini, *Tesoretto*, 1274)

since NEG comes.back never the word COMP is said.F

“Since a spoken word never comes back.”

- In order to better control for internal properties of the n-word, I will now look at the distribution of the element meaning 'nothing' in Old Italian trying to figure out how its distributional pattern works.
- The element ,nothing' can either be translated as *niente/neente/neiente* or as *neuna cosa*.
- *Niente* has an adverbial as well as an argumental usage , *neuna cosa* is only an argument.

# Argumental niente

- Argumental niente can occur with negation:  
ch'io non t'ho tolto niente  
that I not you=have-1SG removed nothing  
'that I have taken nothing from you' (*Nov. LXXII*,  
294)



# Argumental niente

or another negative polarity licenser like a wh-operator

dell'averre d'Atene fu trovato niente?

of.the possessions of Athens was found  
nothing

'...was anything from the goods of Athens  
discovered?' (*Merlino* 48)

- Argumental niente can also occur alone without any visible licensor:

Rispose l'abate e disse:- Voi andate e farete **niente**, però che non è ancora venuto il tempo che stabilito est. (Cronica fiorentina, 106, 33)  
answered the abbot and said you go and will-do nothing because NEG is yet come the time that established is.

# Position of niente

l'altre parti della diceria, delle quali non è **detto**  
**neente...**

the other parts of.the message of.the which not is said  
nothing

'...the other parts of the message, about which nothing is  
said...' (*Rettorica* 142)

Il mercatante non mi insegnò neente: no lli era  
**neente tenuto**

The merchant not=me=taught nothing: not=him was  
nothing obliged

'The merchant taught me nothing, and nothing was due  
to him.' (*Nov. VII, 144*)

# Position of niente

Non avea                    neente                    perduto

not had-3sg            nothing            lost

'He lost nothing' (*Seneca* 17)

→ Argumental *niente* can occur before or after the past participle

# Adverbial niente

Elli non si spezzerebbe niente...

it not REFL=would.break-3SG nothing

‘It would not break at all’ (*Tesoro* 11)

Molte cose dissero di che non mostrano niente la  
veritade...

Many things said-3PL of which not show-3PL nothing  
the truth

‘They said many things about which they did not show  
the truth at all’ (*Tesoro* b53)

→ Adverbial *niente* always requires the negative marker.

Sì no lo potero *niente bene* schifare... (Binduccio,  
*Storia di Troia* 558, 1322)

thus NEG it could.3PL nothing well avoid

“They couldn’t dodge it well at all.”

→ Adverbial *niente* also occurs in front of the  
non-finite verb.

# Empirical generalizations

Adverbial *niente* only displays Negative Concord.

Argumental *niente* triggers negative concord only optionally.

Argumental *niente* can occur before or after the non finite verb

Adverbial *niente* can occur before the non finite verb

- Adverbial *niente* occurs in a position dedicated to quantifiers in the aspectual field.
- This position can also be reached by argumental *niente*, as shown by the fact that it can occur in front of the past participle.

[AspPperfect *mai....* [Asp completive *tutto V p.prt* [XP *niente* [VoiceP *bene*]]]



In order to explain the complex negative concord pattern, I propose that *niente* is morphologically ambiguous between two readings:

[<sub>XP</sub> *ni* [<sub>ClassP</sub> *ente* ]]

[<sub>XP</sub> *niente* ]

The first reading is the one used by the argument, the second by the adverb

This means that the adverb lacks the internal classifier and is monomorphemic.

The reason why *neuna cosa* is never used as an adverb is that it contains the nominal classifier, which is an independent word. This prevents *neuna cosa* from being analyzed as monomorphemic. However, also *neuna cosa si* is ambiguous between a pronominal and a real complex nominal expression:

[<sub>NegP</sub> *neuna* [<sub>ClassP</sub> *cosa* ]]

[<sub>NegP</sub> *ne* [<sub>DP</sub> [<sub>D</sub> *una*] [<sub>N</sub> *cosa* ]...]

Per neuna **altra** cosa veggiamo che...for no  
other thing see-1PL that 'We see  
that (...) by no other thing' (*Vegezio* 6)

è cosa in questo mondo neuna ke tti piaccia?  
is thing in this world not-one that  
you=likes

'Is there nothing else in the world that you like?'  
(*Disciplina clericalis*)

- *Neuna* and *cosa* can in reversed order or be split

- How can we explain that NC is obligatory with the adverb and optional with the argument?
- Is this only due to the fact that *niente* is morphologically, hence also syntactically ambiguous?
- The internal structure only explains why the element *niente* has two possible readings, but not the NC pattern

- Suppose that negative concord is triggered by agree as proposed by Zeijlstra (2007):
- In OI Agree stops at phases: if the n-word is located in the higher phase (where the negative marker is sitting), then concord is possible
- If the n-word is located inside another phase, negative concord is blocked

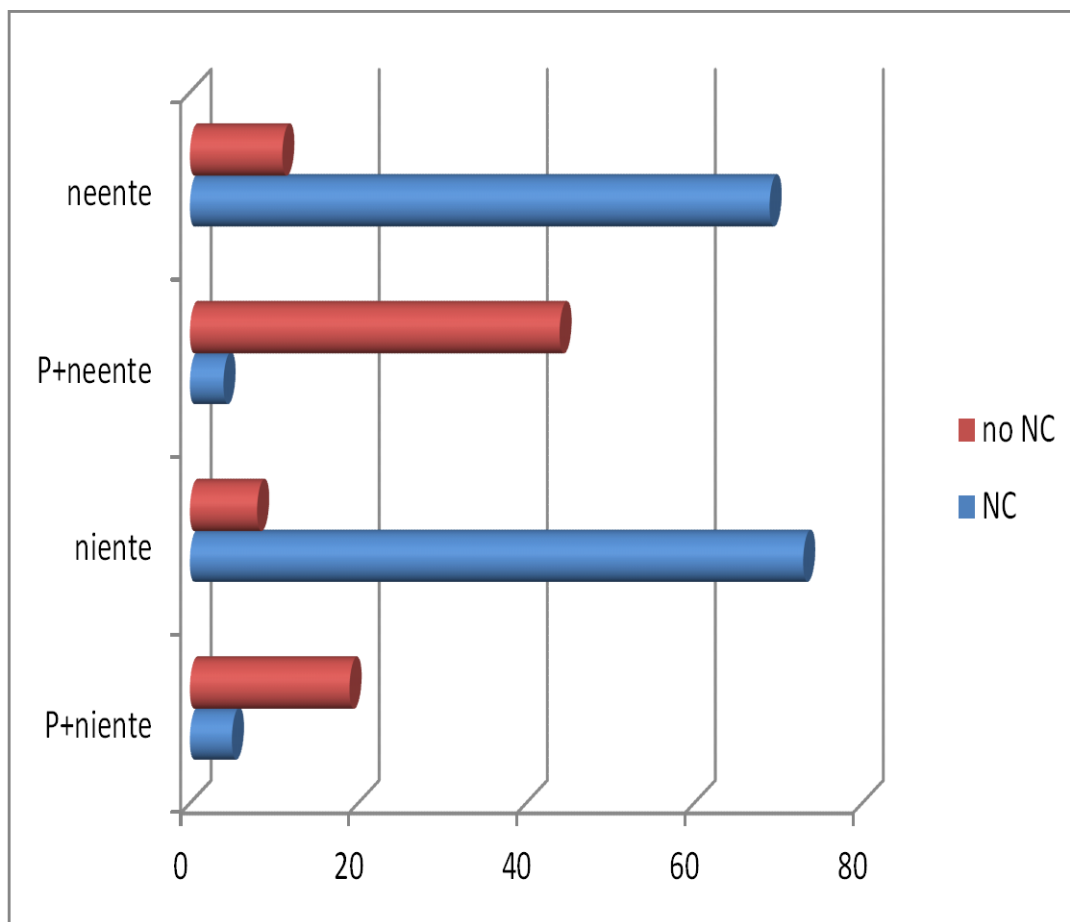
- negative concord is related to the position of the n-word: if *niente* stays in situ in the argumental position within the VP, no negative concord applies;
- when *niente* moves outside the VP (either to the vP left periphery or even higher in the adverbial space), negative concord applies;

- Hence, niente has three possible positions at its disposal
- A. the VP internal argumental one
- B. the vP edge Focus/Topic one
- C. the low IP one in the adverbial space
- [ TP ...[ AspP ...niente.. [ vP [ TopicP [ FocusP *niente*.. [VP ... niente ]...]

- Another problem is due to the fact that comparing the percentages of negative concord of DP and of PP arguments a sharp asymmetry emerges, which points towards a difference in terms of internal structure of the n-word.



# Distribution of negative concord with argumental niente



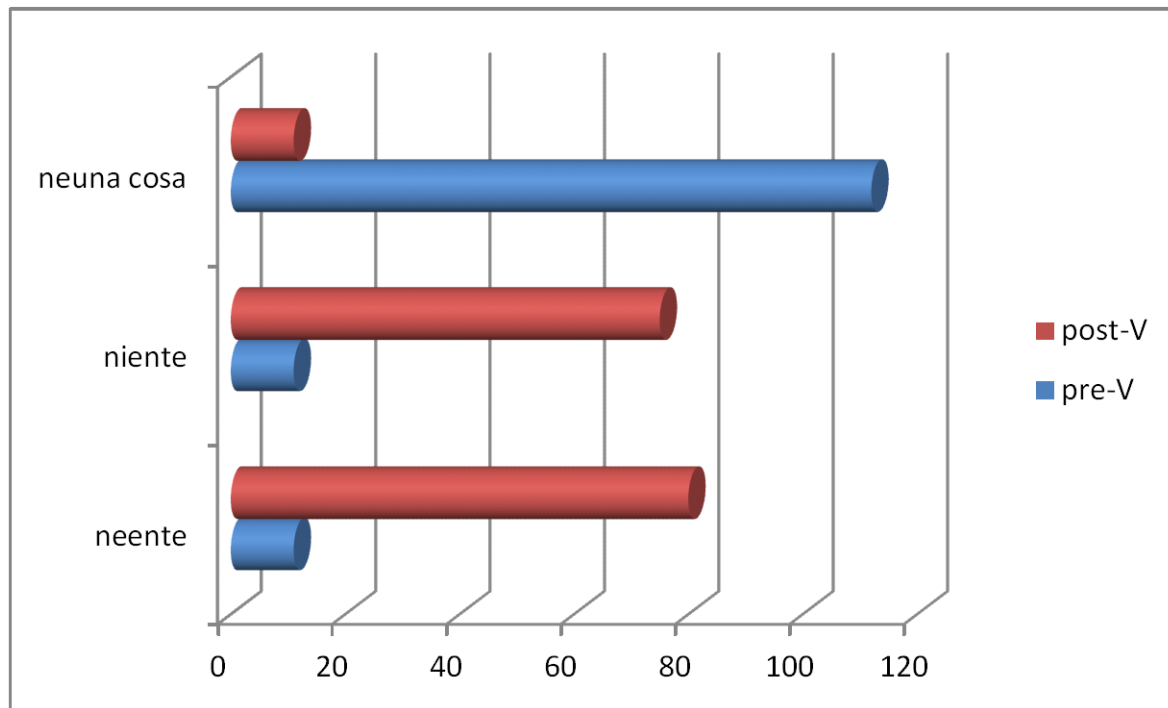
- bare *niente* has two target positions where it can land (and trigger negative concord), namely the scrambling one at the left edge of the *vP* and the one higher than *bene* and located in the adverbial space;
- *P+niente* cannot exploit the position of the bare adverb (precisely because it is not bare) and therefore the percentages of negative concord are much lower, though they still exist, because the other VP-external position, the scrambling one on the left edge of the *vP*, is available also to PPs.

- a) negative concord is related to the position of the n-word: if *niente* stays *in situ* within the VP, no negative concord applies;
- b) when *niente* moves outside the VP (either to the vP left periphery or even higher in the adverbial space), negative concord applies;

- c) bare *niente* has two target positions where it can land (and trigger negative concord), namely the scrambling one at the left edge of the vP and the one higher than *bene* and located in the adverbial space;
- d) P+*niente* cannot exploit the position of the bare adverb (precisely because it is not bare) and therefore the percentages of negative concord are much lower, though they still exist, because the other VP-external position, the scrambling one on the left edge of the vP, is available also to PPs.

- That the internal form of the n-word has to be taken into account is shown by the following distributional pattern between *niente/neente/neiente* and *neuna cosa*.

**Figure 1. The position of negative quantifiers in Old Italian before the XIVc.**



- There is a clear distinction in the distribution of *niente*, which is mainly postverbal and *neuna cosa*, which is mainly in subject position.
- I propose that the few exceptions to this generalizations are due to the presence of Focus positions at the edge of the vP and CP phase.

Non si ricorda che gli facesse recare neuna cosa

Not refl=recalls that to.him=did bring no thing

fa Sant'Omieri se nno dodici vergati di Guanto...

from S. O. if not 12 vergati di Guanto

'He does not remember that he had to bring

anything from S.O. if not 12 vergati di Guanto (a  
type of fabric)' (*C. de Cerchi Inghilterra* 597)

- Postverbal *neuna cosa* is focussed



- [ ForceP [ TopicP [ FocusP *niente* [ FinP [ TP ...[ AspP ... [ vP [ TopicP [ FocusP *neuna cosa* [VP ]...]
- *Niente* is never found in the preverbal subject position
- *Neuna cosa* is never found in the low aspectual field due to its internal composition which includes the existential light noun.

- The first change found in the system is that *niente* starts being found in preverbal position as well as in postverbal position, with about the same rate; after the year 1300, the occurrences of *neente* (until 1350) are 92 for the postverbal position and 80 for the preverbal one, the occurrences of *niente* are 193 for the postverbal position and 127 for the preverbal one.

- There is evidently a rather sharp increase of the cases of preverbal bare *niente/neente*. The same is true for *niente/neente* when it is inserted inside a PP: the preverbal cases become much more frequent. We think that this has to do with a radical change in the whole system of negative concord, and it is not *per se* related to properties of the bare quantifier we have been observing.

- Negative concord is not a unitary phenomenon across n-words
- It depends on two factors:
  - a) the internal composition of the n-word and
  - b) the phase it is in.

Thank you!