The Italian negative system: expletiveness as a consequence of a diachronic change in the syntactic status of negation

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Abstract

In this poster I will focus on the Modern Italian negative system showing that it depends on a crucial change occurred in Archaic Latin: Latin negative morpheme *nē* (*n*-), which initially displayed a maximal projection status (Gianollo, 2016), became a syntactic (negative) head (*Spec-to-head principle / Head Preference Principle*, cf. van Gelderen, 2004).

This change, which has been identified in Italian and many other Romance languages, also determines the availability of the expletive reading of negation. More specifically, I will support the generalization that only languages in which the expletive interpretation of negation (some issues with languages with Latin origin)

**Crucial Data**

(2) a. ne nungius mederi queat. (3rd century BC - Aes Rapanum) not nobody to.heal can.substr.3rd.sg 'S/he does cannot heal anybody'

b. Neque ego homines magis asinos numquam vidi (Plautus, Pseud. 136) not-and I hub not more like donkeys.Acc.plu never saw 'I’ve never seen any men who were more like donkeys’

c. ne legat id nemo. (Tibullus 3, 13) neg read.Subj.Pres.3rd.sg it nobody ‘to avoid the risk that anyone read it…'

Latin shows several cases of NC constructions, particularly in the language of uses and in the colloquial style since the Archaic period

**An emerging phenomenon: the Expletive Negative (EN)**

(3) a. Timeo ne aborem augeam (Cic, Leg. 1, 4) Fear.Pres.1sg neg work.Acc increase.Subj.1sg.5sg 'I’m afraid that I shall increase my work.

b. et non è da fidare in loro infin the non and men i trust in theirs in until that EN son connosciuti (Old Italian) are known

c. Rimarrò alla festa finché non arriva Gianni (Modern Italian) stay.1sgsg.FUT to-the party until neg arrives John

I will stay at the party until John arrives’

d. Je ne nie pas [que je n’ aie été bien reçu] (Franch, in Muller 1978) I NEG deny NEG that I neg have been receive

I do not deny that I was received well,

e. Duro ne pas [ne pe curs of the God […] owde (van der Wurff 1999) I doubt not that EN the curse of God […] would brynge me into a full ytel ene if I contynueepes bring me into a very evil end if I continued thus

'I do not doubt that God’s curse would bring me to a very evil end if I continued like this.

f. I will stay at the party until John (*not*) arrives

According to Zacutini and Portner (2003), exclamatives are factive and, therefore, can only be embedded under factive predicates (5a). However, focusing on a specific sub-class of factive predicates, i.e., to-know-verbs (4b), only the NE interpretation is possible, and the ENES one is ruled out:

(4) a. Che cosa non ha mangiato Gianni? what neg /EN has eaten John

b. ‘What has John eaten!’ (Expletive Negation Exclamative, thus NE)

c. ‘What has not John eaten!’ (Negative Exclamative, thus NE)

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(5) a. È incredibile [che cosa non abbia mangiato Gianni!] is incredible what neg /EN had.Subj.3rd.sg eaten John

b. ‘It is incredible what John did not eat!’ (NE)

c. ‘It is incredible what John ate!’ (ENES)

d. Luca sa [che cosa non ha mangiato Gianni!] Luke knows what neg /EN has eaten John

‘Luke knows what John did not eat!’ (NE)

e. ‘Luke knows what John ate!’ (ENES)

**Introduction**

Negation characterizes all and only human languages (Horn 1989) and it represents a one-place operator reversing the truth-value conditions of the sentence in which it occurs. Crucially, the Latin and Italian instantiate two very different negative systems — although Italian comes from Latin: respectively, a double negation (DN) system (1a) — where the co-occurrence of two negative elements generates an affirmative meaning — and a negative concord (NC) one (1b) — where the co-occurrence of two, or more, negative elements constitue a single instance of negation:

1a. Nemo nān videt (Cic. Leal. 99.6)

1b. ‘Everybody sees’

b. Non vede nessuno

b. ‘Nobody sees’

(i) simplifying the discussion in Zeijlstra (2004), I assume that if there is a syntactic negative head—which projects the structure of the negative phrase NegP—then NC construction occurs, otherwise DN construction occurs;

(ii) in the Latin system nēn should be, at the same time, a negative head instantiating a case of negative concord construction, and a maximum pronoun, realizing a case of double negation construction since negative morpheme has only acquired a head status over time, as an effect of Jespersen’s Cycle (Gianollo 2016) (see also Non-ne & Num-ne)

**Stage 1:** simple negative morpheme nē (negative head);

**Stage 2:** reinforced negative morpheme formed by nē + oinom (oun) (head + max. projection)

**Stage 3:** new simplified negative morpheme nōn (negative head).

The French morphemes ne and pas constitute a single instance of negation by being generated in the same NegP (Zanuttini 1997 and references): pas in (Spec, NegP) and ne in NegP. Crucially, EN, in the subordinate clause ‘je n’ai été bien reçu’ only displays the negative head ne, excluding the element with the maximal projection status. Simultaneously, the Late Middle English sentence displays two negative markers syntactically different: the verb not with a maximal projection status, and the negative marker ne with a head status: ne only realizes EN

**Generalization**

only languages (and structures) displaying a negative head allow the

**Analysis**

When the negative marker is merged in the TP-domain, as it is generally assumed (Zanuttini 1997; Poletto 2008), it gives the standard negation reading; when it is merged in a higher position, i.e. the CP-domain (à la Laka 1990 and à la Greco 2020), it gives the expletive negation reading since the vP-phase has already been closed – (phases are underlined) (see Greco 2020 for Surprisal Negative Sentences)

a. [CP … [vP [Xn non … ] ] (NE)

b. [CP … [Xn non … ] [vP … ] (ENE)

Crucially, the high position of negation in ENEs can also explain why they cannot occur under factive predicates: they select a reduced CP, leaving no space for several functional phases including, arguably, negation (Grewendorf 2002; Haegeman 2012)

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Focusing on a special type of EN: Exclamatives

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