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Variation to the microscope: the case of negative concord

1. *Introduction*

In this work I will consider microvariation on negative concord with preverbal n-words in the Veneto area and show that at present there are no accounts that can derive the variable strict negative concord pattern found in this area. In addition to the need of a new explanation for variable negative concord, this article aims at showing that microvariation can be as revealing as macrovariation is generally considered to be and can help us identify new empirical generalizations. Micro and macro variation can be complementary to reach a picture of the facts which is both general and detailed. Here I zoom onto one single phenomenon to show how this distributes across minimally different varieties. In this work, I present a first attempt to use an experimental methodology on dialects. This evidently presents a number of potential challenges, since it is necessary to know in advance how a given language works in its general aspects before detailed experimental questions are formulated and tested. The Veneto dialects constitute a particularly fruitful ground for this type of enterprises, as they are rather well studied in their general aspects.

2. *Negative concord: setting the problem*

The phenomenon of negative concord has been long noticed in traditional grammars and by prescriptive grammarians, as well as in the most recent theoretical work. Since Giannakidou (2000), languages are commonly split into two macro types: non-negative concord languages and negative concord languages. An example of a non-negative concord language is Standard English, in which the sentential negative marker *not/n't* never co-occurs with a negative quantifier, and it if does it yields a double negation reading, i.e., the sentence is interpreted as positive.

(1) a.   I did not see anybody
     b.   I saw nobody
     c.   %I did not see nobody

Within the second macro type, i.e., negative concord languages, Zeijlstra (2004) distinguishes between strict and non-strict negative concord languages. Strict negative concord languages are those in which the presence of the negative marker is mandatory irrespective of the position of the n-word it co-occurs with. An example of this are the Slavic languages. Standard French could be analyzed as a strict negative concord language if the preverbal negative marker *ne* is still considered as a true negative marker (but see Breitbarth 2013 for a different view), while colloquial French (and Quebec French) is considered as a non-negative concord language, since *pas* never co-occurs with elements like *personne*, *rien* etc., which are then considered as real negative quantifiers that have a quantificational force on their own[1].

(2) a.   je   n'ai   vu   personne
           I   not'have   seen   nobody
           'I did not see anybody'
     b.   personne   n'est   parfait
          nobody   not'is   perfect
          'nobody is perfect'

Non-strict negative concord languages are standard Italian and Spanish, in which the presence of the sentential negative marker is mandatory only if the n-word is in postverbal position and impossible if the n-word is in preverbal position, thereby c-commanding the sentential negative marker[2].

(3) a.   (non)   ha   parlato   nessuno
           not   has   talked   nobody
           'nobody has talked'

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[1] I will leave aside the so-called phenomenon of negative spreading, since it is most probably a different phenomenon from negative concord with the negative marker proper, as attested by the fact that negative spreading is possible in languages that do not allow for negative concord with the negative marker. For instance, it is possible to find instances of negative spreading even in late Latin texts where negative concord is never an option.

[2] Italian speakers differ on the amount of double negation readings they allow. Some of them allow for double negation in cases like (3b) if the negative marker co-occurs with the n-words, for others the co-occurrence between preverbal n-word and sentential negative marker is simply ungrammatical. An anonymous reviewer points out that there are other cases that are much more natural from the pragmatic point of view like for instance the following:

(i) all'   ultimo   appello, nessuno   (studente)   non   ha   preso   almeno   24
     at.the last   exam,   nobody   (student)   not   has   got   at.least 24
     'at the last term paper, no student did not get at least 24'

I still find these cases rather difficult, but I leave the problem of double negation aside, since it is tangential to our main topic here.

b. nessuno   (*non)   ha   parlato
    nobody   not   has   talked
    'nobody has talked'

The main problem that languages of this type pose to the theory concerns the status of n-words. Since this type of system is asymmetric, there are three possible solutions (see Herburger 2001 for one of the first attempts to evaluate among these possibilities):

a) n-words can be treated as real negative quantifiers, which do not co-occur with the negative marker as shown by (3b). This means that the cases to be explained as an exception are those represented in (3a);
b) alternatively, they can be analyzed as negative polarity items requiring the negative marker, as shown in (3a). This means that the exception would be (3b);
c) a third alternative is to treat them as ambiguous items, in which case the problem becomes how the distribution of the two alternatives is to be captured.

Three distinct syntactic approaches have been proposed in the literature to account for the asymmetry of n-words: Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991) propose that in negative concord languages there is an operation of factorization of negation which corresponds to movement of all n-words to the specifier of NegP in whose head the negative marker is sitting. In this way there is still only one negation to be interpreted in the clause and not several. This view allows for n-words to be real negative quantifiers, as they are in fragment answers, since the factorization process accounts for the unicity of the negative operator. A different approach is taken by Zeijlstra (2007), who sees the process of negative concord as a reflex of syntactic agreement, which evidently follows all the constraints the syntactic operation of Agree is subject to. His formulation includes elements that carry an interpretable negative feature and elements that possess an uninterpretable negative feature, which require agreement with elements having the interpretable negative feature to be licensed[3]. The basic idea is that languages differ with respect to the types of elements which

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[3] The problem of fragment answers is solved by assuming that these are actually elliptical constructions in which the n-word is licensed by a silent negative marker which has an interpretable negative feature. Whether this analysis is really viable, i.e., whether fragment answers are indeed elliptical clauses, is still under debate.

carry the interpretive negative feature, which can either be both the negative marker and negative quantifiers in languages like English, only the negative marker in languages like Italian or an empty operator in languages like the Slavic ones. Depréz's (2011) account considers NC in relation to the internal structure of n-words and proposes that the variation has to do with the span of movement internal to the n-word, negative quantifiers moving higher than n-words to the D layer. If an element is an n-word and not a true quantifier, i.e., if it does not reach the D position internally, then it has to be externally licensed by the negative markers. Real negative quantifiers do not require the negative marker if they are in a position out of which their negative feature is readable, i.e., if they are not trapped in the lower vP phase.

The variation found among the dialects of Italy with respect to the sentential negative marker is rather ample, as attested by the first comprehensive study on negation by Zanuttini (1997). The North-Western Italian dialects for instance only have structurally low postverbal negative markers (of different types as Zanuttini shows), while in Sicilian there are indications that there is a negative projection in the CP area. It would be too long to summarize all that has been done on sentential negation in the Italian dialects, therefore I will concentrate on the phenomenon of negative concord in a micro-area, Veneto, and will only consider preverbal negation to minimize the variables at hand. The reason for choosing this area is that the distribution here can shed light on the relation between n-words and the sentential negative marker. Considering the distribution of negative concord in the Veneto dialects, one can observe that none of the present accounts really captures the distribution of the negative marker.

3. *A well behaved strict negative concord language:
    modern inner city Venetian*

The first dialect to be considered is Venetian, i.e., the dialect spoken in the inner city and on the mainland in the communities of Mestre and Marghera, excluding other closely related varieties spoken in the villages around the city in the mainland and on islands that do not belong to the central areas[4]. Venetian has no obligatory postverbal negative marker: it does have a number of postverbal negative markers like *miga*, *gnente*, *no*, all defining

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[4] As I will show later on the basis of the dialect spoken on the Island of Pellestrina, including these into Venetian would blur the picture, since they are indeed different.

pragmatically different types of "not" (see Poletto 2016) which are all used in pragmatically marked contexts and which I will not consider here because they are not part of standard negation as defined by Miestamo (2005). In contrast to several other Veneto dialects like Paduan, Venetian is a strict negative concord language, as attested by the following minimal pairs:

(4) a.   no   go   visto   nisun[5]
           not   have   seen   no one
           'I haven't seen anyone'
     b.   NISUNI   no   go   visto
           no one   not   have   seen
           'I haven't seen anyone'
     c.   no   ti   me   vardi   gnanca
           not   you   me   look   not.even
           'you don't even look at me'
     d.   gnanca   no   ti   me   vardi
           not.even   not   you   me   look
           'you don't even look at me'[6]

   This has actually even intruded into the regional Italian variety, since even younger speakers who only have passive competence of the dialect produce sentences like (5):

(5) a.   nessuno   non   mi   vuole[7]
           nobody   not   me   wants
           'nobody wants me'

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[5] Venetian has two forms for "nobody", which look like they were a singular and a plural form. It might be the case that the distinction is one of specificity with the plural form, with the /i/ ending being the specific one, but one further investigation is necessary to clarify this.

[6] Interestingly, when the preverbal n-word is the subject, for some speakers it is also marginally possible to avoid the preverbal negative marker which however crops up again if there are other postverbal n-words in the sentence:

(i) a.   nisuni   (?no)   ze   vegnuo   dirme   che   ti   geri   rivà
           nobody   (not)   is   come   to.tell.me   that you   were   arrived
           'nobody came to tell me that you had arrived'
     b.   nisuni   no   ga   dito   gnente
           nobody   not   has   said   nothing
           'nobody said anything'

   Notice that this is the same tendency we will see in the dialect of Pellestrina, as we will see in the next section.

[7] An anonymous reviewer points out that in the case of (5a) negation can be left out more easily, and that this could just be a prosodic constraint. I do not think that this type of phenomenon can be made sense of on the basis of prosody, since we clearly see a hierarchy in the distribution of SNC in different dialects which cannot be easily captured in prosodic terms.

b.   neanche   non   mi   guardi
     not.even   not   me   look.at
     'you do not even look at me'

On this basis, one can conclude that Venetian behaves as the Slavic languages (see Zejilstra 2007) in always requiring the preverbal negative marker even when n-words are preverbal. Evidently, this is not a problem for any of the syntactic accounts mentioned above, which all take into consideration strict negative concord languages. However, the microvariation of the presence of negation in these contexts is rather complex, as we will see. The type of variation found in Veneto dialects that we are going to examine only concerns preverbal n-words. Postverbal n-words are completely stable, and always require negative concord as shown below:

(6)   *   (no)   me   vole   nisuni
          (not)   me   wants   nobody
          'nobody wants me'

Furthermore, it is well known that there are no languages which have the reverse of non-strict negative concord, i.e., languages in which we find it only with preverbal n-words but not with postverbal ones. Therefore, I propose to keep the two phenomena separate and I will only analyze the phenomenon with preverbal n-words.

4.   *The plot thickens: the case of Pellestrina*

The dialect of Pellestrina, an island located on the southern external part of the Venetian lagoon, displays a clear dichotomy between adverbial n-words and argumental ones. This variety shows that strict negative concord is not mandatory, but variable and that it is sensitive to the type of n-word found in preverbal position, as it is shown in a study made by Pedrocco (2017) on thirty native speakers of the island on an evaluation test which lasted approximately 30 minutes. The test was presented in the dialect by a researcher who is a native speaker of the dialect and included 29 main clauses (plus an equal number of filler sentences) with minimal pairs with and without the preverbal negative marker[8].

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[8]   The test also included embedded clauses: in this part of the test three main verbs selecting subjunctive and three selecting indicative were considered, in order to test whether negative concord is

The speakers had to evaluate the sentence on a basis of a 3 point scale, the conditions of the test were: the presence of an adverb in preverbal position, (we selected *gnanca* 'not.even' and *ancora/gnancora* 'not yet') the presence of an argument in preverbal position (we selected *nisun*, 'nobody' *gnente* 'nothing') tested in both subject and object function. The subject was in its regular preverbal position. Since Pellestrinoto is an SVO language like all Romance languages, the preverbal position of the object was obtained through a focalization. In order to better induce focalization of the object and fronting of the adverbs, all sentences were presented with a context preceding them, the clause to be evaluated was presented in capital letters.

The results of the evaluation test show that there are clear distinctions depending on the preverbal n-word in the sense that even if all tested preverbal elements are optionally found with and without the negative marker, there are clear distinctions in the preference between adverbs and arguments, as is shown in Table 1 where I summarize the results for the various preverbal elements in main clauses[9]. The first value corresponds to the sentence with NC, the second to those without NC. In all these cases there is no clear-cut result in the sense that no option is completely excluded but it is clear that in all cases the NC variant is preferred to the non-NC one.

Tab. 1[10]

	Nianca	Neancora	Nisun Subj	Nisun Obj	Gnente Sub	Gnente Obj
NC	2,7	2,72	2,57	2,62	2,55	2,32
Non NC	1,8	1,8	**2,37**	1,7	1,86	1,68

These numbers are the result of a judgement task and report the middle of the evaluations of the various speakers on a scale from 1 to 3. Comparing the results between adverbs and arguments, it is clear that adverbs yield better results with NC than arguments. Hence, one of the factors determining strict NC is the adverb versus argument distinction. The same type of dichotomy has been observed by Garzonio (2008, 2018) and Garzonio and Poletto (2012) for Old Italian varieties, in particular Old Florentine and Old

influenced in some way by mood. Since we did not find any significant difference between subjunctive and indicative and between main and embedded clauses, we present here only the data for main clauses.

[9] A partially similar dichotomy has been noticed by Garzonio (2008) and Garzonio and Poletto (2012) for Old Italian, where adverbs require strict NC while arguments do not.

[10] The data are extracted out of Pedrocco (2017).

Paduan, where fronted adverbs always trigger NC, while arguments do not. The fact that the adverbial versus argumental status plays a role is particularly evident in the case of *niente*, which can be interpreted as an adverb or as an object and only displays obligatory NC when it is an adverb. I report here some data on Old Paduan from Garzonio (2018), who shows that Old Paduan had strict NC only with adverbs:

(7) a. nexun   me'n   porave   departire.
         nobody   me'not   could   part
                                          (*Lamento della sposa padovana*, p. 807)
     b. in questo muodo la   dona   may   no   se ingravierave
         in this   way   the woman never not would.become.pregnant
                                          (*El libro Agregà de Serapiom*, Erbario, CCCLII)

The same tendency is evident in Old Florentine (see Garzonio and Poletto 2012 and Poletto 2014), since arguments only have optional NC while adverbs always co-occur with the negative marker:

(8) a. e   **neuno**   **di**   **voi**   si   spaventi...
         and none   of   you   himself scares
     b. e   **neuno**   **non**   andasse poscia   in   paradiso...
         and nobody   nor   went   then   in   paradise
                                          (B. Giamboni, *Vizi e Virtudi* 44, 1292)
     c. io spero di dicer di lei quello che **mai non** fue detto d'alcuna
         I hope to say of her that   that never not was said of'anyone
                                          (Dante, *Vita Nuova*)

It is thus not surprising to find the same tendency to strict NC to be more prominent with adverbs than with arguments. From the data reported further interesting differences emerge: The contrast between the subject *gnente* with respect to subject *nisun* is particularly interesting, since it shows that it is not simply the thematic role that counts, but also the n-word itself. A similar effect is found in Old Florentine, where preverbal *niente/neente/neiente* is very rare in all the texts until the XIV century, the form that occurs in preverbal position is *neuna cosa*, literally 'not one thing', where the classifier is lexically present (see the discussion in Garzonio and Poletto 2012)[11].

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[11] Another difference is found between subject *nisun* and object *nisun*, although the difference is most probably not really significant (but see Section 5).

These results are rather astonishing from the point of view of a theory like the one proposed by Zejilstra, who assumes that languages are either strict or non-strict negative concord, because here we have a language that is a hybrid while all approaches do not expect any distinction between adverbs and arguments or between different n-words. The only account that would probably have the flexibility to account for the situation we have in Pellestrina would be the one proposed by Déprez, but in order for this to go through, we would have to find independent evidence that the internal structure of the various n-words is different. Before presenting a possible solution, let us first examine a third case, namely the dialect of Zamignana.

5.   *Further distinctions: the case of Zemignana*

The analysis of Zemignanese (a rural variety spoken in village of Zemignana at the borders between the provinces of Venice, Padua and Treviso) also shows that strict negative concord (SNC) depends on different factors. Here the test sentences were the same used in the dialect of Pellestrina, but the way to administer them was different. The first task was a translation task triggered by the same context used with Pellestrina speakers and the second was an insertion task of the n-word plus the negative marker where the speaker was free to add or not the negative marker in front of the inflected verb plus a grammatical judgment test with a 5 point scale. Here too we used 50% of fillers and interviewed 40 speakers from Zemignana split into three classes corresponding to different ages (20-30; 40-50, 50-60). The reason was that we surmised that there might be a difference in terms of age, which was not found in the results. Therefore, I will consider the results of all the speakers together. As in the previous tests we excluded those speakers who did not perform at ceiling with fillers and considered only 32 speakers. Here we report the number of speakers that judged the sentence as grammatical. Since the tests were more extensive than the one carried out in Pellestrina, it is not really possible to compare the two in real statistical terms. Furthermore, here the numbers are those of the speakers that find the sentence with the preverbal n-word grammatical and not the middle value of the judgements as in the test on Pellestrinoto. However, the tendencies that emerge are the same: The results of the two tests were the following[12]:

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[12] I report here the results of the test of filling the gaps. Unfortunately, the test is not completely balanced since some of the sentences with arguments were not considered grammatical in either ver-

Tab. 2

Element	Nianca	Niancora	Nisun S	Nisun O	Gnente S	Gnente O
NC	31	56	7	15	17	24
No NC	1	1	25	3	5	0

The conclusions we can draw from the tests are the following: first of all the data of Zemignana confirm the fact that there is a clear distinction between adverbs and arguments, since with adverbs SNC is regular, while with arguments it is not. Although the data of Zemignana show more tolerance than those in Pellestrina, this is the same distinction found in Pellestrinoto above and in Garzonio (2018) for Old Paduan and Garzonio and Poletto (2012) for Old Italian. As for arguments, the case of *nisun* subject is much better with non NC, while *gnente* subject does the opposite. So, once again it seems that the n-word itself plays a role in the distribution of strict NC. If we control for this variable, i.e., keep the n-word the same, we see that another distinction emerges, which was obscured in the dialect of Pellestrina, since the distinction was not very big.

If we compare *nisun* subject and *nisun* object we see that there is a clear asymmetry, because *nisun* subject is judged better without NC while *nisun* object does the opposite. The same is true to a certain extent also for *gnente*, which does not allow as much non-NC as *nisun* does, but definitely more for the subject than for the object, where NC is mandatory. At this point, we have to explain three observations:

(a) why adverbs require NC more than arguments
(b) why *gnente* requires more NC than *nisun*
(c) why subjects have less NC than objects

This is evidently not to be explained in a "rigid" framework as the one proposed either by Haegeman and Zanuttini or by Zeijlstra unless further assumptions are made.

sion due to the pragmatic difficulty found in focusing objects and in having preverbal subject *gnente*. Here only the results of pronominal *nisun* e *gnente* were tested, since they cannot occur as modifying a nominal expression.

6. *Negative concord as doubling*

I propose that both Haegeman and Zanuttini's account and Zeijlstra's account have captured an aspect of the complex problem of NC correctly. Both analyses assume that there must be some sort of syntactic relation between the negative marker and the n-word. For Haegeman and Zanuttini, it is a spec-head relation, while for Zeijlstra it is an agree relation, so in a sense they are similar with respect to the relation that is established between the negative marker and the n-word, but they differ with respect to the conditions under which the relation is met. Suppose that the agreement procedure is the generalization to all contexts of the phenomenon that we call doubling, i.e., the presence of the same element with the same function more than once in the same clause. This is for instance rather evident for the diachronic development of clitic doubling, where the last stage of evolution is the one in which the clitic becomes an agreement marker, i.e., it is always obligatory. However, at the first stages of development clitic doubling is sensitive only to some properties, like for instance definiteness or specificity, animacy etc. in the case of DP doubling. Suppose that (clitic) doubling and agreement are indeed one and the same process, i.e., copying of features from one element to another. The difference in the distribution has to do with the fact that in cases usually dubbed as "agreement" all features trigger the copying procedure, while in cases of doubling, only some of them are active in triggering the process. It is well known that clitic doubling of arguments follows a universal hierarchy in its evolution which can be expressed by means of an implicational scale according to which the elements that are most bound to the discourse (as first and second person pronouns) are the first to be doubled, while the last are those that have quantificational properties, like quantifiers, wh-items (see Poletto 2008 among others). I report here the hierarchy I discussed in Poletto (2008):

(9)   Full Pronouns   definite DPs   QPs   wh-variables

Doubling can vary in different languages according to the point in which a given language "cuts" in the hierarchy to allow or disallow doubling, but the hierarchy is the same, i.e., we never find languages that double indefinites with a clitic without also doubling definite DPs, or that double wh-items without doubling pronouns (see Poletto 2008 for a discussion of the hierarchy). Furthermore, what we observe for DP doubling is that doubling

is more frequent and diachronically starts out with those elements more similar in features to the clitic itself in the sense that they are pronominal and definite, for instance the hierarchy starts out with pronouns, which are the first elements to be doubled, then it goes to definite DPs, which also have definiteness in common with clitics and only later it extends to quantifiers and wh-variables. The same observation can be made for wh-clitic doubling, which starts out from those wh-items that are wh-words, i.e., which do not contain a lexical restrictor just like the wh-clitic (see Munaro 1999 and Benincà and Poletto 2004) and that are arguments, like clitics tend to be in all Romance languages. Under the view that doubling is a phenomenon of copying of some of the features of the doubled XP, as proposed by various authors (see Nunez 2004; Barbiers 2008), we expect that implicational hierarchies as the one known for clitic doubling of DPs and wh-items manifest themselves in other domains as well. I surmise that one such domain is precisely negative concord since the negative marker is at least in Romance also a head like clitics. The stage of strict negative concord observed by Zeijlstra and Haegeman and Zanuttini is the one corresponding to agreement clitics, where all types of XPs are doubled. The stages represented by strict negative concord in the Veneto dialects correspond to a preliminary evolutionary stage, where not all elements are doubled. This means that strict NC could be triggered only by some of the features or structural properties n-words can have, like for instance the presence or absence of a N. In addition to this, there is another requirement that agreement and doubling must obey, i.e., the fact that probe and goal must be visible to each other, either by being in the same phase or by the lower one being at the edge of the lower phase, which is visible to the next phase up. According to Garzonio and Poletto (2012), this is the reason why in Old Italian (Old Florentine) postverbal adverbial *niente* must display NC while argumental *niente* can avoid it. Adverbs are located in the low IP area, i.e., in the same phase where the sentential negative marker is located, while arguments can remain in a vP internal position and not be visible from the higher phase.

(10) [AspP [adverbial n-word]…[vP [Topic][Focus] [VP] [argumental n-word]…]]

Garzonio and Poletto also argument in favor analysis of this type and propose that NC is obligatory with adverbial *niente*, because this is in the IP while it is optional with argumental *niente*, since this can either be in the same position as the adverb or in the base position inside the VP and in

this case be shielded from agreement by the PIC. I will put forth, following Garzonio and Poletto (2012) and the independent proposal made by Déprez (2011) that NC is sensitive to phases, as any other agreement phenomenon. The point is however that we have to assume that in the modern Romance languages, where NC with postverbal n-words is obligatory, we have obligatory movement of the n-word outside the VP, and in any case at least to the edge of the vP. There is a very clear argument against the idea that the reason why NC with postverbal n-words is endemic depends on the fact that postverbal n-words are not visible because they are trapped inside the lower vP phase: it this were so, postverbal subjects of transitive verbs, which are standardly assumed to be at the edge of the vP, should be visible from the outside, hence we should find at least some language that displays no NC with postverbal subjects. However, this is not the case.

A second argument against the idea that phases play a role in determining obligatory NC with postverbal n-words is the following one: As I have recently noted in Poletto (submitted), modern Italian has a clear hierarchy of n-words in the argumental positions, which is however not the one that is expected. Consider the following examples quoted from Poletto (submitted):

(11) a. non   mi   ha   regalato niente   nessuno
         not   to.me   has   given   nothing   nobody
         'nobody has given anything to me'
     b. non   mi   ha   regalato nessuno   niente
         not   to.me   has   given   nobody   nothing

(12) a. non   ho   regalato niente   a   nessuno
         not   I.have   given   nothing   to   nobody
         'I haven't given anything to anybody'
     b. * non   ho   regalato   a   nessuno   niente
         not   I.have   given   to   nobody   nothing

(13) a. non   lo   ha   regalato nessuno   a   nessuno
         not   it   has   given   nobody   to   no one
         'noone has given it to anybody'
     b. % non   lo   ha   regalato a   nessuno   nessuno
         non   it   has   given   to   no one   nobody

If we maintain a non-focused reading, the order of n-words is rather clear, and it is: direct object-subject-indirect object. This is clearly not the basic word order, since we would expect the subject to occur first. The basic ten-

et here is that agreement occurs when the two elements are in the same phase, otherwise the PIC blocks agreement. Under the premises, this means that at least the direct object must indeed have moved out of the vP and landed in the position where adverbial *niente* occurs, thereby triggering obligatory NC, since the n-word and the negative marker are in the same phase. However, also postverbal subject and indirect object n-words trigger NC, which means they must also be visible from the higher phase, i.e., at least have moved to the vP edge in order to circumvent the PIC, either separately, or as a block (i.e the remnant vP, since Italian verbs always move out of the vP including the past participle, as Cinque 1999 shows). I will leave the two options open, since the at present there is no clear evidence for any of the two options. Anyway, NC with postverbal n-words is never variable, as we noticed earlier. This means that being in the same phase is not the right property that can account for the invariability of NC with postverbal n-words and variability of NC with preverbal ones. What could then be an alternative solution is provided by the similarity with other agreement phenomena. The distinction that we find between NC with postverbal n-words and preverbal n-words is reminiscent of a generalization formulated by Guasti and Rizzi (2002) but in the reversed order of the elements triggering the agreement process: they notice that subject agreement always selects the most complete agreement pattern available in the language when the subject is preverbal, while postverbal subjects can display a) full agreement, b) incomplete agreement or c) even no agreement at all. As shown by Poletto (2014) the same applies to objects: in those Romance languages where the object can be preposed to the past participle, we always find the highest agreement form when the object is pre-participial, but this is not the case when the object is after the past participle. Guasti and Rizzi attribute this to the Spec-head relation of preverbal subjects with the inflected verb, which is the same idea that Haegeman and Zanuttini actually put forth for negative concord. Whatever the explanation of this effect might be, it is clear that there are asymmetries in the copying of features which depend on the position of the probe and the goal. The phenomenon of negative concord goes in the opposite direct with respect to subject agreement: the most complete agreement pattern is found with postverbal n-words, while preverbal ones can agree or not. The fact that the negative marker, which is the goal is higher than the n-word, which is the probe, has actually brought Zeijlstra to propose that the Agree procedure can go upwards just to account for negative concord. If the asymmetry between strict and non-strict negative concord is of the same type as agreement patterns with subjects and objects, we can state

that in one of the two configurations, the copying of features is not complete. We can capitalize on the observation that the phenomenon is sensitive to the amount of identical features the two elements have in common in the sense that makes agreement more probable is more features are identical. The fact that SNC is more frequent with adverbs than with arguments can be explained by the fact that the negative marker is itself an adverbial element, so the copying procedure is favored. The reason why the element corresponding to "nothing" is more prone to be doubled than the element corresponding to "nobody" is also an effect of this, since "nothing" can be used as an adverb in the Veneto dialects, especially with intransitive and psych verbs, but occasionally also with transitive ones (see Garzonio and Poletto 2012 for a discussion of this). The last effect to be found has to do with subjects and objects: notice that preverbal objects are always in an A′-position, because they are focused, while subjects are not. The position of the negative marker must also be an A′-position, since this is an adverb. In this way we can capture the three effects found in the data. This can see this as an effect of similarity in terms of featural content, since we know that doubling is more prone to occur when the two elements that form the pair have more features in common. We can dispense with the idea of phases, which is not viable in view of the data in (10) and explain variable SNC by means of the observation that doubling depends on the amount of features the two elements of the doubling pair have in common. What remains to be understood is why negation works in the opposite way with respect to argument agreement, a problem which can only be solved by comparing the two phenomena in detail, an enterprise which lies beyond the domain of the present work.

7.   *Concluding remarks*

In this article, I have shown that what is generally considered in the literature to be a binary choice between strict and non-strict negative concord cannot be considered as such. More specifically, it is only strict negative concord, i.e., negative concord with preverbal n-words, that is subject to variation. I have identified three factors that determine this variation: the argumental versus adverbial status of the n-word, its position as (canonical preverbal) subject or (focused) object, and the lexical item itself. I have proposed that SNC is a doubling effect which is subject in its variability to the amount of features the two doubling elements of the pair have in

common: the more features they have in common, the more doubling will be widespread across dialects and the first to manifest in a diachronic sense. This explains why adverbs and the element meaning "nothing" are more prone to double that "nobody", since the sentential negative marker is itself an adverb, and "nothing" can be used as such in the Veneto dialects. The reason why the subject is less prone to double than the focused direct object has to do with the fact that only the subject is in its argumental position, the focused object occupies an A′-position, just like the negative marker. This account can only be formulated on the basis of very fine-grained distinctions as those derivable from a microvariationist perspective, such as dialectology allows.

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