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## Romanische Syntax

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### On *niente*: optional negative concord in Old Italian

Jacopo Garzonio and Cecilia Poletto

#### Abstract

In this article we investigate the negative concord pattern of Old Italian, which, although it displays a negative marker very similar to the one of Modern Italian, has the bizarre property of inducing optional negative concord. We will concentrate on the bare n-word *niente/neente/neiente* ‘nothing’ and show that in the case of this element negative concord is actually not optional but depends on the position of the n-word: when it is inside the low IP space, it triggers obligatory negative concord, when it is in the VP internal argumental position it does not. Old Italian is thus different from Modern Italian as it ties negative concord to a specific position that the n-word must occupy.

#### 1 Introduction

In this work we will take into account the distribution of the negative quantifier/negative polarity item *niente/neente/neiente* ‘nothing/anything’ in the Old Florentine variety, commonly referred to as Old Italian, OI, in traditional and also in more recent work (see a.o. Salvi and Renzi (2010)), spoken from 1200 to approximately 1350. We will show that the distribution of bare *niente* is sensitive to its adverbial versus argumental status: when *niente* is adverbial, negative concord is obligatory, when *niente* is argumental, negative concord is optional. We argue that this optionality is only apparent and has to be accounted for in terms of position: *niente* can only trigger negative concord when it is located in a position in the low IP area<sup>1</sup> above vP, where aspectual distinctions are encoded (an adverbial position presumably dedicated to bare quantifiers only), but not

<sup>1</sup> Within the cartographic approach adopted here, the low IP area refers to a set of projections where aspectual adverbs are located and the past participle can move, as first proposed by Cinque (1999).

when it stays in its argumental position. Adverbial *niente* is directly merged in this position and therefore it always displays negative concord. Argumental *niente* can stay within the VP, or be moved to the position in the low IP area, triggering negative concord. During the XIII century there are very few occurrences of preverbal *niente*, while in the following period the number increases rather drastically. We will see that the change in the negative concord system is related to this change in the position of the quantifier.

In order to prove our first point, namely that adverbial *niente* is always in the low IP area, while argumental *niente* is not, we will make use of Cinque's (1999) analysis of adverbs and use what has by now become a standard test within the cartographic approach, namely the respective order of adverbials, which are assumed to be base generated as Specifiers of FPs endowed with a semantic value that matches the one of the adverb. The distribution of *niente* with respect to adverbials of the low IP area will also show that what appears *prima facie* as a case of real optionality is actually the reflex of a complex distributional pattern. This regularity shows that this cannot be handled as a case of "double grammars" as one might be tempted to suggest. According to the double base hypothesis, one might propose that OI represents a "transitional phase" from a language with strict negative concord towards a language with non-strict negative concord, and that the effect we see here is due to the interplay between two grammatical systems. We will show that even within the optionality there are regularities, and that the complex negative concord pattern observed with respect to *niente* can be explained on the basis of one single grammar.

The empirical basis of our investigation is constituted by the same corpus used for the project *Italnet*, based on the one created by the *Opera del Vocabolario Italiano* (OVI) online corpus, which is also the basis of the recent "Grammatica dell'italiano antico" (Salvi and Renzi (2010)).<sup>2</sup> The corpus includes all the texts from 1200 to 1350, the period which is traditionally referred to as Old Italian, which displays some of the typical V2 properties (see Benincà (2006) on this). After this period the language changes radically and the Renaissance is generally considered to have a rather different grammar. We will also follow this tradition here, because we believe that before trying to provide an account of the development throughout the whole history of Italian, we need to concentrate on the first attested stage, and once we have carried out a detailed study of the distribution of *niente* during this period, we will be able to develop the analysis for further stages of the language. We have considered all the occurrences of *niente/neente/niente* in the corpus, and noticed that around the beginning of the XIV century there is a drastic change in the distribution of *niente*, which we will also discuss in section 5 and which shows that the conditions on the distribution of *niente* change within a very short time span. Therefore, we primarily concentrate on data from 1200 to 1300.

<sup>2</sup> The database consists of all the texts available in this period (see Renzi (2007) for a presentation of the OI corpus and for the reasons why all texts have been included) and that are only lexically tagged.

From the theoretical point of view, the case of OI is also interesting because it appears to violate the empirical generalization formulated by Zanuttini (1991; 1997), who shows that obligatory negative concord with postverbal n-words in the Romance domain is related to the type of negative marker used by the language under examination: if the negative marker is of the preverbal type, then negative concord is obligatory with postverbal n-words, otherwise it is not (see dialects like Piedmontese or Milanese where the postverbal negative marker does not induce negative concord, though for some varieties, it is tolerated).<sup>3</sup> This empirical generalization can be formulated as follows:

- (1) Negative markers located higher than the inflected verb in  $T^\circ$ , display obligatory negative concord with at least postverbal n-phrases, while those located lower than  $T^\circ$  do not.

The original proposal by Haegeman & Zanuttini (1996) accounts for this fact by assuming that in the Romance languages “negation can only take sentential scope if it is either marked by the head of NegP itself or is in a position c-commanding the head of NegP” (Haegeman and Zanuttini (1996: 121)). Therefore, preverbal n-words, which c-command NegP do not need to be accompanied by the negative marker, while postverbal ones do.

In section 2 we will concentrate our analysis of the texts on the bare n-word *niente/neiente/neente* ‘nothing’ and show in detail its distribution in connection to its adverbial usage. In section 3 we consider the distribution of argumental *niente* both in OI and in Old Neapolitan, as described by Ledgeway (2009), and propose that the distinction between argumental and non argumental usages concerning negative concord is to be related to the position of the quantifier. Section 4 is dedicated to a discussion of preverbal n-words. In section 5 we briefly discuss the development of *niente* after the XIII century. Section 6 concludes the article, but not our research, as the period after 1300 still requires a detailed empirical investigation.

### 1.1 The peculiarities of bare quantifiers in OI

Before devoting our attention to *niente*, we would like to briefly mention a general property of non negative bare quantifiers, which can help us to shed light on the distribution of bare *niente*. In order to illustrate the point, we will examine in detail the distribution of the bare and non bare quantifier *tutto* ‘everything/all’, as described in Poletto (2008). OI displays a clear contrast between quantified DPs, which on a par with definite DPs can but need not be fronted through a process of scrambling to a  $vP$  peripheral Focus or Topic position, and bare quan-

<sup>3</sup> An anonymous reviewer points out to us that this is not always true in all language families. However, Zanuttini’s generalization is pretty robust within the Romance family and we would like to keep it. Our account provides a way out of the problem and confirms Zanuttini’s findings.

tifiers, which are obligatorily located before the past participle, as they are in modern French.

Therefore, quantified DPs can be found either preceding or following the past participle: (2) provides an example of postparticipial quantified DP, (3) examples of preparticipial quantified DPs.

- (2) ... ond' io òe perduto tutto lo mio onore.  
 whereby I have.1SG lost all the my honour  
 '... whereby I lost all my honour.' (Anonym., Tristano Ricc. 85, 1300c.)
- (3) a. ... ch' egli ebbe tutto questo fatto, e molte alter cose ...  
 that he had.3SG all this done and many other things  
 '... that he had done all this and many other things ...'  
 (Anonym., Tesoro Volg. 2.27, 1300c.)
- b. ... che mi teneano tutto il capo gravato.  
 that me kept.3PL all the head burdened  
 '... that kept all my mind burdened.'  
 (B. Giamboni, Libro de Vizi e delle Virtudi 3, 1292)

This phenomenon has been analysed as movement to a topic/focus area located on the *vP* left periphery as originally proposed by Belletti (2004) for modern Italian postverbal subjects, and by Poletto (2006; 2008) for preparticipial DPs in OI. We provide the layering of the relevant structural portion in (4):

- (4) [*vP* [Topic/GroundP ... [Operator/FocusP [... [VP]]]]]

As quantified XPs are generally known to be Topic only in very special contexts, we surmise that the majority of cases like (3a) are rather movement to a Focus/Operator position than to Topic.

The sample of 2000 sentences containing the word *tutto* selected from the OVI corpus contains 26 examples of *tutto* modifying a DP following the past participle and 8 examples of fronting. Therefore, fronting is found in about a third of the possible cases.<sup>4</sup> When this occurs, we believe that the DP modified by *tutto* is located in Operator/FocusP, hence higher than the VP.

When *tutto*<sup>5</sup> is used alone, it can also have an adverbial usage that has been lost in modern Italian;<sup>6</sup> more specifically, it can modify a gerund indicating a contemporary event to the superordinate clause:

<sup>4</sup> The percentages are slightly lower than the ones with fronted definite DPs.

<sup>5</sup> In the sample there are no cases of fronting when the quantified DP is modified by a relative clause. The same is true of definite DPs, which are never fronted in a pre-participial position if followed by a relative clause. We will not pursue this line of research here and concentrate on bare quantifiers (for a detailed analysis of this, see Poletto (to appear)).

<sup>6</sup> To be more precise, the usage in modern Italian is residual, and restricted to adjectives that follow a copula or are in a small clause.

- (5) a. ... elli disse tutto ridendo.  
           he said.3SG all laughing  
           ‘... he said laughing heartily.’  
           (Anonym., Tristano Ricc. 383, 1300c.)
- b. ... e poi rispuose tutto piangendo ...  
           and then answered.3SG all crying  
           ‘... and then he answered crying desperately ...’  
           (Anonym., Tristano Ricc. 405, 1300c.)

As we will see, the same is true of the quantifier *niente* ‘nothing’ (see below), which might indicate that the adverbial usage and the fronting property of the quantifier are indeed related.

If we consider only the instances when *tutto* occurs bare, then a clear asymmetry emerges, as the quantifier is always fronted; in the sample there are 23 cases of bare object *tutto* and they all display the order *tutto*-past participle; here are some examples:

- (6) a. ... e come l’ à tutto perduto.  
           and how it has all lost  
           ‘... and how he lost it all.’ (B. Giamboni, Fiore di rett. 67, 1292)
- b. Ànne tutto paghato, cinque lb., per l’ anno.  
       have.3PL everything paid 5 pounds for the year  
       ‘They have paid everything, five pounds for this year.’  
       (B. Bencivenni, Crediti, 1296)
- c. ... cui si vuol ben tutto dare.  
       to.whom REFL wants well all give.INF  
       ‘... to whom one wants to give everything.’  
       (Monte Andrea, Rime tenz.106, 1300c.)

This does not only hold true for cases of direct object *tutto*, but also for cases where it is an indirect object or another PP complement and it is also preposed to the past participle:<sup>7</sup>

- (7) a. ...s’i’ mi fosse al tutto a tte gradato ...  
           if I had to everything to you adapted  
           ‘... if I had adapted to you in everything ...’  
           (Dante, Fiore 42, 1300c.)

<sup>7</sup> In the corpus there are only two cases in which a PP containing *tutto* is not fronted: one is a case of adverbial *tutto*, the other is introduced by the preposition *di*.

- (i) a. ...che sia grande e ben fornito di tutto.  
           that is big and well supplied of everything  
           ‘... that is big and well supplied with everything.’  
           (Anonym., Tesoro volg. 5.9, 1300c.)
- b. ...elli era morto in tutto senza fallo ...  
           he was dead in all without doubt  
           ‘... he was really dead beyond doubt ...’ (Anonym., Tristano Ricc., 385, 1300c.)

Both cases are introduced by the auxiliary *essere* ‘be’ and look like an adjectival usage of the past participle, so we will leave them aside for the moment.

- b. Anzi t' avrà del tutto rifiutato ...  
 To.the.contrary you.ACC have.FUT.3PL of all refused  
 'On the contrary he will have refused you at all ...'  
 (Dante, Fiore 55, 1300c.)
- c. ... che sia per tutto ditto ...  
 COMP be.SBJV.3SG for all said  
 '... that is said completely ...' (Dante (?), Detto d'Amore, 1300c.)

Notice furthermore that there can be combinations of preposed bare quantifiers with preparticipial scrambled definite DPs;<sup>8</sup> the quantifier *tutto* is located in front of preposed DPs or PPs in all the available examples:

- (8) Vedemmo che fue tutta in quattro parte divisa ...  
 saw.1PL that was all in four parts split.F  
 'We saw that the whole was split in four parts ...'  
 (B. Giamboni, Libro de' Vizi e delle Virtudi 32, 1292)

This suggests that the position of the bare quantifier in the low IP area is higher than the one of pre-participial DPs.

The general conclusion we can reach on the basis of the former data is that the quantifier *tutto* can but need not be fronted when it modifies a DP, while it must be fronted when it is a bare QP.<sup>9</sup> On this basis, we argue that the obligatory preparticipial position found only with the bare quantifier is the result of an obligatory movement to a low functional projection in the IP area, which is higher than the position where definite DPs are preposed. This position is most probably dedicated to bare quantifiers, and is similar to the one found in modern French, where items like *tout/tous* 'all' must be fronted, unless they are focalized. In what follows we will see that in OI also the bare quantifier *niente* has its own dedicated position, like modern French *rien* 'nothing' (see Kayne (1975) on this).

## 2 Adverbial *niente*

As already noted for the bare quantifier *tutto*, *niente*, the n-word for 'nothing', usually corresponding to the inanimate object (or more rarely the subject) of the verb can also be used as an adverb, meaning 'at all' in negative contexts, as shown by the fact that it is also used with intransitive and reflexive verbs. This usage has been maintained (with some restriction on the verb class) only in some modern non-standard varieties (like the Veneto dialects and the Veneto

<sup>8</sup> See Poletto (2006) on an analysis of OV orders in terms of movement to a low left periphery of the vP phase as proposed in Belletti (2004) for modern Italian.

<sup>9</sup> The same type of pattern has been noted by Grewendorf and Poletto (2005) in Cimbrian, where bare quantifiers display an OV option, while quantified DPs and definite DPs do not. OV orders are more generally known to be possible with quantifiers in the Scandinavian languages (see Svenonius (2002)).

regional variant of the standard language), but is nowadays not possible in the standard language.

- (9) a. Elli *non* si ispezzerebbe *niente*.  
 he NEG REFL break.COND.3SG nothing  
 ‘It would not break at all.’ (Anonym., Tesoro Volg. 3.2, 1300c.)
- b. Egli *non* si dee *niente* disperare.  
 he NEG REFL must.3SG nothing give.up.to.despair  
 ‘He must not despair at all.’ (Anonym., Tesoro Volg. 9.6, 1300c.)

The first argument to show that adverbial *niente* is not located in the object position, but higher is that in OI it is compatible with an object, and it always precedes it:

- (10) a. Molte cose dissero di che *non* mostrano *niente*  
 many things said.3PL of that NEG show.3PL nothing  
 la veritade.  
 the truth  
 ‘They said many things, but they don’t reveal the truth about them at all.’ (Anonym., Tesoro Volg. 3.4, 1300c.)
- b. Tempo *non* appartiene *niente* alle creature che  
 time NEG belongs nothing to.the creatures COMP  
 sono sopra ’l cielo.  
 are.3PL over the sky  
 ‘Time does not belong at all to the creatures that are in heaven.’  
 (Anonym., Tesoro Volg. 1.9, 1300c.)

The following examples show that argumental direct object *niente* can occur after a dative or another PP, but this order is not attested with the adverbial usage:

- (11) a. Perché *non* fa a questo fatto *niente*.  
 because NEG does to this fact nothing  
 ‘It does not change this fact.’  
 (B. Giamboni, Fiore di Rettorica 22, 1292)
- b. E *non* vede in lui *niente* perché sia degno  
 and NEG sees in him nothing because is.SBJV worth  
 del pane.  
 of-the bread  
 ‘And he does not see anything in him for which he would deserve bread.’ (Z. Bencivenni, Paternostro, 1310)

While direct object *niente* can occur to the right of other arguments, adverbial *niente* invariably precedes all complements. This shows that the position of adverbial *niente* has to be dissociated from the one of argumental *niente*: only the adverb is always higher than all arguments.





- b. ... e non dormono *niente*.  
 and NEG sleep.3PL nothing  
 ‘...and they don’t sleep at all.’  
 (B. Giamboni, Libro de’ vizi e delle Virtudi 11, 1292)

Therefore, we propose the following empirical generalization:

- (16) *Empirical Generalization*:  
 adverbial *niente* only displays Negative Concord.

In other words, when *niente* is an adverb, there is no optional negative concord, which, for this reason, can be considered a property of argumental n-words. The fact that negative adverbs generally trigger negative concord is confirmed by the behavior of other negative adverbs: elements like *mai* ‘never’ always display negative concord, both in pre- and postverbal position:

- (17) a. ...elli istava tutto tempo tristo e dolente e  
 he stayed.3SG all time sad and grieving and  
*mai* non faceva bella ciera.  
 never NEG did.3SG nice face  
 ‘... he was sad all the time, and suffering, and never had a good aspect.’ (Anonym., Reggimento de’ Principi Volg. 3.2.11, 1288)
- b. Ché *non* retorna *mai* la parola ch’ è detta.  
 since NEG comes.back never the word COMP is said.F  
 ‘Since a spoken word never comes back.’  
 (B. Latini, Tesoretto, 1274)
- c. *Non* si posa *mai* in alcun ramo verde.  
 NEG REFL lays never on any branch green  
 ‘It never stays on a green branch.’  
 (Anonym., Tesoro Volg. 5.34, 1300c.)

Another adverbial element behaving this way is *mica* ‘not at all’. Interestingly, in some varieties of modern Italian *mica* can appear in preverbal position as the only negative element of the clause.

- (18) a. *Mica* ci vado.  
 NEG there go.1SG  
 ‘I am not going.’
- b. *Mica* sai che ore sono?  
 NEG know.2SG what hours are.3PL  
 ‘Do you know what time it is?’

This configuration is absent in Old Italian.<sup>10</sup> *Mica* can appear only in postverbal position but before objects and past participle (i.e. in the low IP area) and always displays negative concord.

- (19) a. *No* 'I vo' celare *mica*.  
 NEG it want.1SG hide.INF NEG  
 'I do not want to conceal it.' (N. Poponi, 1300c.)
- b. *La grandezza delle magioni non cessa mica*  
 the largeness of.the houses NEG extinguishes NEG  
*la febbre.*  
 the fever  
 'The large size of a home does not extinguish the fever.'  
 (Anonym., Tesoro Volg. 7.68, 1300c.)
- c. *Lo re Artù nonn è mica morto.*  
 the king Arthur NEG is NEG dead  
 'King Arthur is not dead.'  
 (Anonym., Tristano Riccardiano, 1300c.)

*Mica* can be raised to preverbal position only in a cluster with *né* (or *non*), a configuration derived through movement of the whole negated constituent from its basic position, as in (20) to [Spec, Focus] in CP, as in (21).

- (20) *E quando 'l Grande Kane seppe queste cose, egli*  
 and when the great Khan knew.3SG these things he  
*non si spaventòe né mica.*  
 NEG REFL feared.3SG NEG  
 'And when the Great Khan learned these things, he didn't get scared.'  
 (Anonym., Milione toscano 77, 1310c.)
- (21) a. *Né mica disse istamane cotestui il paternostro di san*  
 NEG said.3SG this.morning he the paternoster of saint  
*Giuliano.*  
*Giuliano.*  
 'This morning he did not say the paternoster of Saint Julian.'  
 (F. Sacchetti, Trecentonovelle 33, XIV cent.)
- b. *Federigo di Stoffo già né mica par che*  
 Federigo of Hohenstaufen already NEG seems COMP  
*si celi ...*  
 REFL hide.SBJV.3SG  
 'Frederick of Hohenstaufen does not appear to hide ...'  
 (Monte Andrea, Rime 8.1, 1300c.)

<sup>10</sup> In old southern varieties it was possible to have *mica* before the preverbal *non*:

(i) *Mica no li respuse ...*  
 NEG NEG him.DAT answered.3SG  
 (Anonym., Storie de Troia e de Roma, 1258, variety of Rome)

Like in modern Italian and in modern Florentine, OI *mica* has lost its nominal properties (see Manzini-Savoia 2002); it is in the IP layer, since it precedes *bene*.

- (22) La maestà s enza forza *non* era *mica bene* al sicuro.  
 the majesty without strength NEG was NEG well in.the safe  
 ‘To be king without strength was not secure.’  
 (Anonym., Deca Prima di Livio Volg. 2.55, 1350c.)

Therefore, we conclude that adverbial *n*-words always trigger negative concord and they are merged inside the low IP area (see (12)), not in *v*P. However, as we will see in section 4, *niente* occurs very rarely in a preverbal position before the turn of the XIV century, while afterwards the cases of preverbal *niente* become as widespread as postverbal occurrences.

### 3 Argumental N-words

In addition to the fact that the position of adverbial *niente* is a fixed one, while the one of the argument is not (see the scrambling data above), a striking difference between adverbial and argumental *niente* is that the argumental usage can be found without negative concord, although *niente* can also occur in negative polarity item contexts like the following case:

- (23) Dimmi, Merlino, dell’ avere d’ Atene fu  
 tell.me.DAT Merlin of.the possessions of Athens was  
 trovato *niente*?  
 found nothing  
 ‘Tell me, Merlin, was anything from the goods of Athens discovered?’  
 (P. Pieri, Storia di Merlino 42, 1310)

At first sight the presence of the preverbal negative marker *non* is optional with argumental *niente*:

- (24) a. ... l’ altre parti della diceria, delle quali *non* è  
 the other parts of.the message of.the which NEG is  
 detto neente ...  
 said nothing  
 ‘... the other parts of the message, about which nothing is said ...’  
 (B. Latini, Rettorica, 1261)
- b. E fede senza opera, ovvero opera senza fede, è  
 and faith without deeds or deeds without faith is  
 neente a potere aver paradiso.  
 nothing to can.INF have.INF heaven  
 ‘And faith without deeds or deeds without faith are worth nothing  
 for going to heaven.’ (B. Giamboni, Vizi e Virtudi 14, 1292)

The empirical generalization we draw from these examples is the counterpart of (16):

(25) Argumental *niente* triggers negative concord only optionally.

We will not interpret these data as a simple oscillation in the internal grammar of the speakers, due to the co-existence of two grammatical systems (one with and one without negative concord) for various reasons. First of all, we would expect this optionality to apply to adverbial *niente* (*mai* and *mica*) as well, but this is not the case. Secondly, as we will see, there are distinctions between bare object *niente* and *niente* when it is preceded by a preposition (which we will refer to as P+*niente*). Again, this is not expected if we attribute optionality to the coexistence of two grammatical systems.

Rather, we argue that the possibility of having *niente* as the only negative item in the clause must be connected to its argumental status and be derived from the syntactic properties that only the argumental usage displays.

One interesting observation which we believe is on the right track comes from Bayer (2009), where non standard usages of adverbial *nothing/nichts* are shown to be possible in Older varieties of German and English and are said to be still possible to some extent:

(26) Karl hat *nichts* gearbeitet.  
 Karl has nothing worked  
 ‘Karl has not worked at all.’ (Bayer (2009: 33))

This adverbial usage is shown to be incompatible with the presence of a direct object DP in German and English varieties. Bayer’s proposal to explain this incompatibility is that in these cases the adverbial *nichts* is first merged in the object position. Although we have clear evidence that adverbial *niente* in OI is located in the low IP area and not in the argumental position (as shown in section 2, it always occurs before any DP or PP internal arguments, it occurs before the low Adverb *bene*, and it is compatible with objects), we still think that somehow Bayer’s intuition is correct and that *niente* is indeed structurally ambiguous and can exploit an adverbial but also an argumental position inside the VP.<sup>11</sup> The possible positions of bare argumental *niente* are illustrated in (27):

(27) a. [<sub>AspP</sub> perfect *mai* ... [<sub>AspP</sub> completive *tutto* [<sub>XP</sub> *niente* [<sub>VoiceP</sub> *bene* [<sub>VP</sub>]]]]]  
 b. [<sub>AspP</sub> perfect *mai* ... [<sub>AspP</sub> completive *tutto* [<sub>XP</sub> [<sub>VoiceP</sub> *bene* [<sub>VP</sub> *niente*]]]]]

<sup>11</sup> Notice that both *tutto* and *niente* have an adverbial usage in addition to the argumental one, a usage which has in both cases disappeared from the language. Although we will not develop the argumentation here, we believe that this is related to the different positions of these quantifiers in OI and modern Italian.

(27) illustrates the hypothesis according to which argumental *niente* can occur in two positions: it can either be located in the same position of the adverb (and in this case negative concord applies) as in (27a), or it can stay in its merge position inside the VP (and in this case there is no negative concord). This hypothesis makes two predictions: a) there should be no negative concord in the cases when argumental *niente* follows the low adverbs like *bene*, and b) negative concord should be obligatory when argumental *niente* precedes *bene*. Unfortunately, the corpus (which includes all the texts available for OI in the relevant period of time) does not provide us with examples of the relative order between argumental *niente* and the relevant low adverb. We have tested the OVI corpus for the following low adverbial forms: *bene*, *ben* ‘well’, *male*, *mal* ‘bad(ly)’, *di sicuro* ‘surely’, *del tutto* ‘completely’, *sempre* ‘always’, *così*, *sì* ‘in this way’. None of them are found in the relevant context, hence our prediction is untestable, at least for OI (but see below). Unfortunately, other adverbs mentioned in Cinque’s hierarchy are too high to be relevant, therefore the test is not applicable.<sup>12</sup> However, there are other, more indirect arguments that show that argumental *niente* can occupy more than one position and that negative concord is not optional, but related to the position of argumental *niente*.

### 3.1 Minimal variation: the system of Old Neapolitan

We have seen that the lack of relevant data prevents us from testing the prediction concerning adverbs formulated in the preceding section, namely that also argumental *niente* should display obligatory negative concord when moved higher than low adverbs.

A way to prevent this problem is to look at other Old Italian dialects (the one we use here only includes Florentine texts, as mentioned in the introduction), which have a very similar syntax, and could be investigated to test whether our hypothesis that negative concord is mandatory when *niente* has moved out of its argumental base position is correct.

Old Neapolitan, investigated by Ledgeway (2009), is such a variety. As argued at length by Ledgeway, Old Neapolitan displays a very similar system with respect to OI. The item *niente* exists in Old Neapolitan too, and it also has usages as a negative polarity item (exemplified in (28a) and the peculiar adverbial usage already illustrated for OI *niente* (exemplified in (28b):

<sup>12</sup> There are rare cases of *niente* occurring in front of the past participle in the earlier texts, which become progressively more frequent in later texts; in all these cases *niente* obligatorily triggers negative concord, which shows again that negative concord is tied to the position of the n-word:

(i) No lli era *niente* tenuto.  
 NEG him.DAT was.3SG nothing owed  
 (Anonym., Novellino 7, 1300c.)

- (28) a. M' avite da di *niente* cchiù?  
 me.DAT have.2PL COMP say.INF nothing more  
 'Have you anything else to tell me?'  
 (Scarpetta III, 7 quoted from Ledgeway, 2009: 691)
- b. ... per quella feruta *non* essendo spaventato *niente* ...  
 for that.F wound NEG being scared nothing  
 '... not scared at all for that wound ...'  
 (LFT 172.24 quoted from Ledgeway, 2009: 691)

Moreover, *niente* is generally located lower than *mai*, just like in OI:<sup>13</sup>

- (29) ... tu *nun* capisce maie *niente*!  
 you NEG understand.2SG never nothing  
 '... you never understand anything.'  
 (De Filippis 204 quoted from Ledgeway, 2009: 691)

However, one interesting difference noticed by Ledgeway is the fact that Old Neapolitan, on a par with modern Italian, obligatorily requires the preverbal negative marker *non* when the n-word is postverbal. According to our analysis, this predicts that in Old Neapolitan, bare *niente* always moves to the IP space. This prediction is borne out, as there are several cases of *niente* combined with *cchiù* 'no/anymore' in Ledgeway's corpus, and only the order *niente-cchiù* is found, as shown below:

- (30) a. Io non ve dico *niente cchiù* ...  
 I NEG you.DAT say.1SG nothing anymore  
 'I do not tell you anything more ...' (Scarpetta, XIX century)
- b. Non potimmo fa *niente cchiù*.  
 NEG can.1PL do.INF nothing more  
 'We cannot do anything more.' (Scarpetta)

In turn, this confirms our hypothesis that obligatory negative concord is related to the position of *niente*: when *niente* has been moved, negative concord applies obligatorily.

<sup>13</sup> The two grammatical systems are also similar in allowing for preverbal n-words in general to be followed by a negative marker (a property which has disappeared from both Neapolitan (i) and Italian (ii)):

- (i) Volea che *nessuno* re *non* vincesses ...  
 wanted.3SG COMP no king NEG won.SBJV.3SG  
 'He wanted that no king won ...' (Lupo de Specchio, Summa I 61.3, 1468)
- (ii) E *neuno non* andasse poscia in paradiso ...  
 and no-one NEG went.SBJV.3SG after in heaven  
 '... (that) no one went in heavens after that ...'  
 (B. Giamboni, Vizi e Virtudi 44, 1292)

## 3.2 Scrambling positions

We can indirectly derive an argument in favor of the hypothesis in (27) considering scrambling cases: as proposed in Poletto (2006), (2008) and (2011) OI has scrambling to the *vP* left periphery (see Belletti (2004) a.o. for the assumption of the existence of a *vP* periphery). Cases of OV where the direct object and PPs precede the past participle (but crucially, not the auxiliary) are to be analyzed as movement to Topic and Focus positions located at the edge of the *vP*. As we have seen above, bare *niente* cannot be a Topic, but it can be a Focus. In the texts, there are various cases where the element *niente* is clearly focussed, as is evident from the interpretation of the context (see Poletto (to appear) for a discussion on this). When an XP is focussed, other XPs precede it and are located in a Topic, or better GroundP position (see Poletto and Pollock (2005), (2009) for arguments on the existence of GroundP in the CP left periphery and its position higher than FocusP). The presence of Focus always requires a background against which the XP is focussed and OI makes this visible through movement of the backgrounded element to GroundP. Therefore, cases where *niente* is clearly focussed generally display another XP preceding it, as shown in (31):<sup>14</sup>

- (31) a. Perché *non* fa a questo fatto *niente*.  
 because NEG does to this fact nothing  
 ‘It does not change this fact.’  
 (B. Giamboni, *Fiore di Rettorica* 22, 1292)
- b. ... *non* sapendo di Paolo *niente* ...  
 NEG knowing of P. nothing  
 ‘... not knowing anything about Paul ...’  
 (D. Cavalca, *Vite di Eremiti*, 1330c.)

The relevant structure for these cases is illustrated in (32):

- (32) [<sub>AspP</sub> perfect *mai* [<sub>AspP</sub> completive *tutto* [<sub>XP</sub> [<sub>VoiceP</sub> *bene* [<sub>GroundP</sub> *di Paolo* [<sub>FocusP</sub> *niente* [<sub>vP</sub> ~~*niente* [*di Paolo*]~~]]]]]]...

In cases where bare *niente* occurs on the right of argumental PPs, scrambling has occurred in the low left periphery of the *vP*: *niente* moves to a *vP* peripheral Focus position while the PP in front of it moves to a *vP* peripheral Topic/GroundP (see Poletto (2006; 2008) for a detailed analysis of scrambling). This structure implies the assumption that the PP *di Paolo* cannot move to GroundP unless there is *niente* in the Focus Position. In other words, the activation of GroundP depends on the activation of Focus in the periphery of the OI *vP*. Hence, these cases cannot be interpreted as simple movement of the PP

<sup>14</sup> Notice that cases like these are sharply ungrammatical in modern Italian, where bare *niente* must precede all other arguments. This is in line with the fact that OV orders have disappeared from the grammar of Italian since the Renaissance period.



which leaves *niente* in situ, because there is no GroundP without a FocusP.<sup>15</sup> Notice that the hypothesis illustrated in (27) makes the prediction that these cases should always have negative concord, because negative concord is triggered only if *niente* moves out of the VP. The prediction is borne out, there are no cases where we observe scrambling which do not have negative concord.

### 3.3 PPs including *niente*

Another piece of evidence in favor of the idea that lack of negative concord is only possible in the merge object position, while movement of the quantifier triggers negative concord, is provided by the following observation: bare *niente* can also occur preceded by a preposition. In these cases the percentage of negative concord drops dramatically. In the texts of the XIII century (until 1302) there are 69 occurrences of bare object *neente* with negative concord and only 11 of non negative concord. If we consider PPs, the percentages are the opposite ones: only 4 have negative concord and 44 lack negative concord. Also the form *niente* displays a similar asymmetry: when it is bare, it has negative concord in 73 cases, with only 8 cases of absence of negative concord, while when it is in a prepositional phrase, 19 occurrences lack negative concord, and only 5 have negative concord. These data are summarized in Table 1:

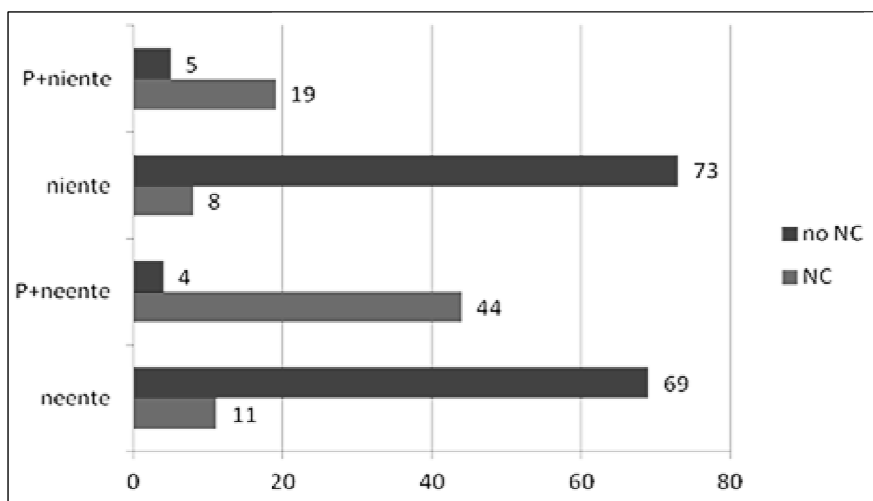


Table 1: Negative Concord of postverbal *niente/neente* in the XIII c.

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the properties of the low left periphery in OI see Poletto (to appear).

We propose that the clear asymmetry between bare *niente* and P+*niente* with respect to negative concord has to do with the fact that bare *niente* can exploit three positions, and that two of them trigger obligatory negative concord. They are: a) the merge position, where no negative concord occurs, b) the scrambling position, where negative concord is obligatory c) the position of adverbial *niente* where negative concord is also obligatory.

P+*niente* can only occur in the merge position inside the VP or in a scrambling positions at the left edge of the  $\nu$ P, where negative concord is obligatory, because the adverbial position is only open to bare *niente*. This explains why in both cases negative concord is apparently optional: this is so, because only the merge position inside VP allows for lack of negative concord. However, given that bare *niente* has one more position where negative concord can apply (the one corresponding to the bare adverb), evidently the number of cases where negative concord is found in the corpus is much higher.

Summing up our proposal:

- 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  $\nu$ P 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  $\nu$ P 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  $\nu$ P, is available also to PPs.

#### 4 Pre- and postverbal position

Up to now, we have not considered the preverbal position of *niente*, and what happens when the element is located in this position; let us now consider this case. Another interesting fact, already noted by Zanuttini (2010) for Old Italian and Martins (2000) for Old Romance in general, is that n-words in preverbal position also allow for negative concord (which is either excluded in modern Italian, or gives rise to double negation contexts). This is also true for *niente* if one considers the data after 1300:

- (33) a. ... e *niente* poteva acquistare contro a quel popolo.  
 and nothing could.3SG gain.INF against to that people  
 ‘... and he could not gain anything against those people.’  
 (Anonym., *Novellino* 36, 1300c.)

- b. ... dee egli togliere ad altrui sua vivanda, che  
 must he take.INF from other his food COMP  
*niente* non vale?  
 nothing NEG is.worth  
 ‘... must (a wise man) take the food away from an other man who  
 is not worth?’ (B. Giamboni, *Tesoro volg* 7.74, 1300c.)

One very striking fact is however that before the year 1300 there are no cases of preverbal *niente* with negative concord, and that in general *niente* is very rarely found in preverbal position: if we divide the OI corpus in two and restrict the search to the texts before 1300, there are only 11 cases of bare *neente* in preverbal position against 80 of *neente* in postverbal position. Approximately the same rate is obtained with the form *niente*, where there are 11 cases of preverbal *niente* over 75 cases of *niente* in postverbal position.

Therefore, the system of the XIII century does not allow for preverbal *niente* with negative concord and also the rate of preverbal *niente* is generally rather low. Reading the texts it is easy to see why this is so: in the preverbal position the bare form *niente* is generally substituted by *neuna cosa* literally ‘not-one thing’ which expresses the same meaning:

- (34) Neuna cosa è più da schifare ne li amici che  
 no.F thing is more COMP avoid in the friends COMP  
 le lusinghe.  
 the adulations  
 ‘Nothing more than adulations should be avoided in friends.’  
 (Anonym., *Fiori e vita di filosafi* 20, 1275)

The complex item *neuna cosa* was at that time definitely not a single word, as there are elements like *altra* ‘other’ that can occur in between *neuna* and *cosa*. On the other hand, *neuna cosa* is almost exclusively preverbal up to the beginning of the XIII century: in the corpus there are 64 cases of preverbal *neuna cosa* without negative concord and 48 cases of preverbal occurrences with negative concord, for a total of 112 cases. The postverbal occurrences are only 11 with negative concord and none without negative concord. The data are summarized in Table 2:

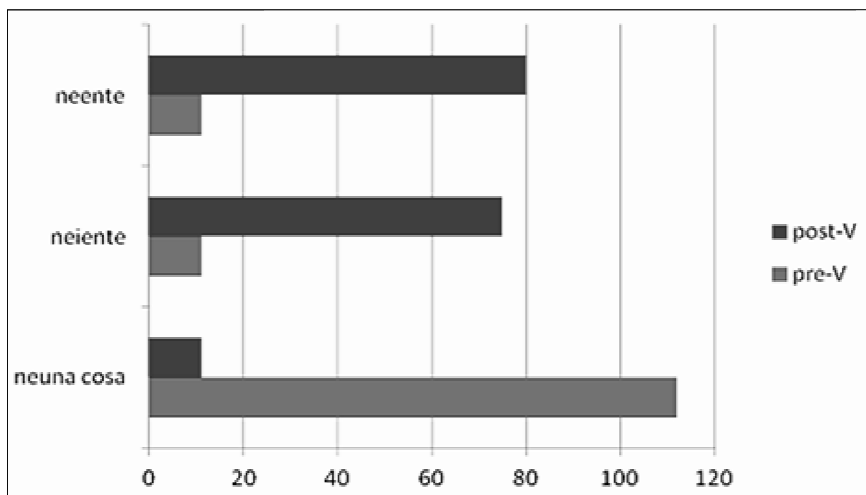


Table 2: Position of *neuna cosa*, *niente* and *neente* in the XIII c.

We propose that the item corresponding to ‘nothing’ is realized as bare *niente* in postverbal position, and that the few preverbal occurrences of bare *niente* in the older system are to be attributed to focalization, a phenomenon which is known to occur independently in OI.

We also surmise that the cases of postverbal *neuna cosa* are due to the fact that at this time there was an ambiguity between ‘nothing’ and ‘not a single thing’, and that the 11 cases of postverbal *neuna cosa* are to be interpreted as focalizations meaning precisely ‘not a single thing’, as the following example shows, where *neuna cosa* is actually contrasted with *dodici vergati di Guanto*:

- (35) Non si ricorda che gli facieses recare  
 NEG REFL remembers COMP him.DAT did.SBJV.3SG bring.INF  
 neuna cosa da Sant’Omieri se nno dodici vergati di Guanto.  
 no.F thing from S. if not 12 vergati di Guanto  
 ‘He does not remember that he had to bring anything if not 12 *vergati di Guanto* (a type of fabric).’ (C. de’ Cerchi, lettera a G. Rinucci, 1291)

The reason why *neuna cosa* never allows for lack of negative concord is thus due to the fact that when it is postverbal, it is always in the *vP* peripheral position in Focus and never in the argumental position.

Furthermore, OI displays an asymmetry between the preverbal and the postverbal position, with *neuna cosa* being preverbal and *niente* postverbal, if we factor out Focus.<sup>16</sup> This asymmetry clearly recalls the class of asymmetries between the preverbal and the postverbal position that in the traditional G&B framework were analyzed as instances of head government, namely cases where

<sup>16</sup> This means that all postverbal cases of *neuna cosa* are due to Focus in the *vP*, but also all preverbal cases of *niente* are due to Focus, in the CP.

a null element (in our case the noun corresponding to *cosa*) can be licensed by the verbal head under government, while this is evidently not the case for the preverbal position, which is not governed by the verb.

Notice however that for the parallel to be perfect we should also find *neuna* in postverbal position and not *niente*, which is also a compound of a negative prefix *n-* plus the word *-ente* (this is very evident in the allomorph *ne-ente*) which meant ‘existing item, something that exists’, similarly to English ‘no-thing’.

Therefore we propose that *niente* has an incorporated ‘thing’ (existential) element, which also allows it to be generated in the object position, but given that this item is a single word, there is also the possibility to treat it as an adverb, ignoring its original nominal portion. This is evidently not the case for *neuna cosa*, which is never used as an adverb, because the nominal part is morphologically and syntactically independent.

Coming back to our main point, namely the hypothesis that negative concord is related to the position of *niente*, and more precisely, that negative concord is only triggered when *niente* moves out of its original VP internal position, we can further support this idea with the following argument:

All the 9 cases of preverbal *neente* and the 11 ones of preverbal *niente* found in the XIII texts are argumental cases, (and they do not have negative concord). The adverbial form does not seem to raise during this period. This radically changes around the turn of the century, but at least the older system is stable.

We can therefore conclude that our generalization is pretty stable and that in the OI variant of the XIII century negative concord is only triggered when *niente* is moved out from its argumental position either in a *vP* peripheral position or in its adverbial position in the low IP area. When *niente* moves out of its argumental position to get Nominative case or to be focused directly in the CP area no negative concord is found. In our view, this is so because *niente* cannot move through an A’ Position (like the *vP* left peripheral Focus position or the adverbial position in the low IP area) to reach either the A position where Nominative is assigned or the higher Focus.<sup>17</sup> This means that negative concord on OI until the end of the XIII century is related to an area of the sentence structure, the low functional field immediately preceding (actually at the edge of) the *vP*.

## 5 A change in the system

As mentioned a few times above, the system of negative concord radically changes around the year 1300. We will not attempt to provide a detailed analysis of the new system, but we think that at least a summary of the differences found can be helpful to future research.

<sup>17</sup> We assume here that once any element has moved to the low *vP* Focus, it cannot further move to the higher CP Focus, the movement would not be motivated. Moreover, the same holds true for the adverbial low IP position, which is a different type of A’ position and is also criterial in Rizzi’s (2007) sense.

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.

The change is probably related to another astonishing fact, namely the rise of contexts where preverbal n-words like *neuno/a/i* plus Noun display negative concord. At the same time, also the number of postverbal n-words without negative concord raises. This seems to last for a relatively brief period of time, and it can probably be traced back to French influence in texts like *La Tavola ritonda o l'Istoria di Tristano* but this is also the system found in authors like Zuccherò Bencivenni, where no plausible French influence can be claimed to be at work. Before we can make sense of this change, it is necessary to consider the whole system of negation and negative concord across the two centuries, and relate it on the one hand to the distribution of other quantifiers and on the other to a more general change in the architecture of the clause, an analysis we will not try here.

## 6 Conclusions

In this work we have examined the distribution of the bare n-word *niente/neente* 'nothing' in the OI variety of the XIII century. We have first noticed that in general bare quantifiers have a dedicated position within the low IP space defined in Cinque (1999): this is very clear for a bare quantifier like *tutto* 'all', which can occur before or after the past participle when it is modified by a DP, but must occur before the past participle when it is bare. We have also noted that bare *tutto* has an adverbial usage that is not found in modern Italian. The same appears to be true for *niente*, which can also be either an argument of the verb or display an adverbial usage approximately meaning 'at all'. *Niente* generally occurs after the past participle, but we can use low adverbs to show that in its adverbial usage, *niente* is indeed located in the low IP space, as it systematically occurs before the adverb *bene*.

On the other hand, adverbial *niente* has obligatory negative concord, while argumental *niente* does not. We have proposed that this is so, because negative concord is only triggered when the argument leaves its original position inside the VP and reaches either a scrambling position at the edge of the vP or the adverbial position in the low IP area. Scrambled *niente* has indeed obligatory negative concord, as expected.

Further evidence for this are the following arguments: first, the percentages of bare *niente* with negative concord are much higher than the percentages of P+*niente* with negative concord. This is so, because the position for bare quantifiers is not available to P+*niente*.

Moreover, although the OI texts do not provide evidence for movement of bare *niente*, Old Neapolitan does: in this variety *niente* systematically occurs before a low adverb like *cchiù* ‘anymore’ and negative concord is obligatory.

An additional argument is provided by the fact that *niente* is very rare in preverbal position, while the preverbal element is *neuna cosa*. The few cases of preverbal *niente* are all without negative concord, as the argument has been extracted directly from its thematic position to get case in the preverbal subject position or to be contrastively focussed. Moving through an adverbial or scrambling A’ position would block any further movement to subject position or to the CP-Focus position, because these are criterial positions. Hence preverbal cases are correctly predicted to be without negative concord.

We conclude that in the OI variety of the XIII century, negative concord of *niente* is related to a precise area in the low IP area. Whether this is so also for later stages of Italian remains to be seen. If this hypothesis is correct, this might have interesting consequences on the general theory of negative concord, which would thus be related to movement to (or through) a particular low IP area.

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