

# Optional Negative Concord with preverbal N-words

Irene Franco and Cecilia Poletto

Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main

## 1. Introduction

### Empirical field:

Study of Old Italian n-words in a position that precedes the inflected verb in relation to the syntax of negative concord (NC).

Definition: We refer here to n-words as words morphologically starting with the negative morpheme *n-*.

### Research questions:

- (i) How can we explain optional NC with n-words in Old Italian?
- (ii) Does a difference in the n-word position correlate with a difference in the NC pattern?

### Previous assumptions:

- Negative Concord: We take **NC** to be **a case of Agree**, cf. Zeijlstra (2008a,b). In a system following Chomsky (2000 et seq.), the n-word would have to bear [vNeg], with v=+, and the negative element *non* (or some other elements, maybe including also an empty operator) [uNeg]. See Zeijlstra (2008a,b) for another approach involving “upward agree”. In order not to take a decision on the direction of Agree, we shall provisionally use [+Neg] for both probes and goals (thus [+Neg] can stand for either [v/iNeg] or [uNeg]. In order to undergo NC, the [+Neg]-features need to be accessible in syntax, in a c-command-relationship and no impenetrable phase boundary can occur between them.
- There may be other kinds of negative features inside a word (such as those carried by negative prefixes like *un-/in*) which do not count as [+Neg].
- Importantly, **NPI licensing is a different type of dependency**, not a case of Agree (Giannakidou 2002); thus NPIs do not have [+Neg] (Zeijlstra 2008a:41). Agree and NPI licensing differ with respect to a) the **locality restrictions** of the two mechanisms b) while Agree operates only between two elements with the same type of features, NPIs can only be licensed by **non-veridical operators** (e.g. those found in if-clauses, interrogative clauses, free relatives and comparatives, verbs with subjunctive mood) or **anti-veridical operators** (for instance the negation *non* and the intrinsically negative preposition *senza*) (Giannakidou 2011).

### Main claims:

- The apparently completely optional NC of OI is the effect of a complex set of interacting conditions, which we try to identify.
- The internal structure of different types of n-words is reflected in their different syntactic distribution and semantic interpretation.

- We show that OI n-words are highly ambiguous elements, and only some of their readings qualify for [+Neg]-elements (i.e. those that undergo NC). We try to pair each reading to a distinct internal structure for OI n-words.

## Road Map

2. Setting the problem of OI optional NC
3. NC Patterns with n-words
4. Preverbal n-words with NC
5. Observations and open issues
6. Concluding remarks

## 2. Setting the problem

- Modern Italian (MI) is a non-strict NC language:

- (1) a. *Non viene nessuno* vs. b. *Nessuno viene.*  
not comes nobody nobody comes  
‘Nobody comes.’ ‘There comes nobody.’

- Old Italian displays optional NC :

- (2) Optional NC with preverbal n-words (see Stark 2006:220-1 on niente)

- a. *E **neuno** di voi si spaventi [...]*  
and noone of you REFL= fear-SBJV  
‘And may none of you get scared...’ (OVI, *VeV* 69)
- b. [...] *sicché [...] **neuno non** andasse poscia in paradiso [...]*  
SO-that noone not went-3SG-SBJV afterwards in heaven  
‘[...] so [...] no one would go to heaven afterwards [...]’ (*ibid.* 78)

- (3) Optional NC with postverbal n-words

- a. *Ma **non** valse **neente** [...]*  
but not helped-3SG nothing  
‘But it did not help [...]’ (OVI, *VeV* 82)
- b. [...] *gli altri c'han d'amor **neente***  
the others who have of love nothing  
‘[...] the others who do not have any love’ (OVI, CD 229)

Table 1. Frequency of NC with preverbal and postverbal (constituents that contain) n-words<sup>1</sup>

	+NC	-NC	<i>total</i>
<b>preverbal n-words</b>	9	<b>51</b>	60
<b>postverbal n-words</b>	<b>31</b>	9	40
<i>total occurrences</i>	40	60	100

A more fine-grained look at negative indefinites reveals that optionality of NC is only apparent and is determined by lexical and syntactic conditions.

### Methods & Definitions

- Corpus search on Opera del Vocabolario Italiano (OVI) database;
- Manual corpus search on a selection of 11 full texts;
- Search criteria: Old Florentine variety (here referred to as Old Italian, as standardly assumed since Renzi & Salvi 2010);
- Prose texts only;
- Period: from 1200 to 1370;
- We intend to identify the behavior and distribution of n-words = morphologically negatively marked bare and modified items (*niente*, *nulla* = ‘nothing’; *neuno/a* = ‘nobody’), in particular with respect to NC.
- Two studies: one on **NC pattern with n-words** (study 1, section 3, this is a joint research with Olga Kellert and Guido Mensching); another one on presence vs. absence of NC with preverbal n-words (section 4).

## 3. Optional NC with postverbal n-words (Study 1)

### 3.1 Adverbs vs. arguments

#### Findings in a nutshell:

- NC is obligatory with adverbial n-words
- NC is (apparently) optional with postverbal argumental n-words and depends on their syntax and on lexical restrictions.

The contrast between adverbs and arguments is paradigmatically shown by *niente* (‘nothing’), which can have both functions, but as an adverb it must obey NC (lack of NC is not attested, see Poletto 2014 a.o.), as an argument it does not need to.

---

<sup>1</sup> The figures in table 2 are based on a randomized sample of 100 occurrences of n-words in the OVI corpus (Old Florentine prose texts from 1200-1370).

### 3.1.1 Data

The examples below show different patterns of NC or absence thereof.

(4) Adverbial niente

- a. niente<sub>postV, Adv+NC</sub>  
*E ha ne la detta via molti nimici, i quali die e notte assaliscono* [+NC]  
and has in the said road many enemies the which day and night assault  
*altrui, e non dormono niente, e se trovano alcuno in questa via [...]*  
other and not sleep nothing and if find someone in that road  
‘And he has many enemies on that road, who assault others day and night  
and do not sleep at all, and if they meet someone on that road [...]  
(OVI, *VeV* 487)
- a.’ niente<sub>postV, Adv+NC</sub>  
*Molte cose dissero di che non mostrano niente la veritade [...]* [+NC]  
Many things said.<sub>3PL</sub> of which not show.<sub>3PL</sub> nothing the truth  
‘They said many things about which they did not show the truth at all [...]  
(OVI, *Tesoro* 53)
- b. niente<sub>postV, Adv-NC</sub>  
*\*dormono niente/ \*mostrano niente la veritade* [-NC]  
sleep.<sub>3PL</sub> nothing/show.<sub>3PL</sub> nothing the truth (not attested)
- c. niente<sub>preV, Adv+NC</sub>  
*\*niente non dormono/ \*niente non mostrano la veritade* [+NC]  
sleep.<sub>3PL</sub> nothing/show.<sub>3PL</sub> nothing the truth (not attested)
- d. niente<sub>preV, Adv-NC</sub>  
*\*niente dormono/ \*niente mostrano la veritade* [-NC]  
sleep-3PL nothing/show.<sub>3PL</sub> nothing the truth (not attested)

(5) Argumental niente

- a. niente<sub>postV, Arg +NC</sub>  
*[...] del quale non si puote vedere niente, la cui altez[z]a* [+NC]  
of-the which non SE could see nothing the that highness  
*e larghezza non si potrebbe stimare.*  
and width not SE could estimate  
‘[...] of which one cannot see anything, the height and width  
of which one could not estimate’  
(OVI, *Trattato* 153)
- b. niente<sub>postV, Arg -NC</sub>  
*Rispose l’abate e disse: Voi andate e farete niente,* [-NC]  
answered.3SG the abbot and said.3SG you go.2PL and will.do.2PL nothing  
*però che non è ancora venuto il tempo che stabolito est*  
because that not is yet come the time that established is

‘The abbot answered: you will go and will do nothing, since the established time has not come yet’  
(OVI, *Cronica fior.* 106)

(6)

a. niente<sub>preV, Arg</sub> -NC

... e **niente** poteva acquistare contro a quel popolo, [-NC]

and nothing could gain against to that people

*però che Dio l'amava.*

but that God them loved

‘...and he couldn’t gain anything against those people, because God loved them’

(OVI, *Novellino* 36)

b. niente<sub>preV, Arg</sub> +NC

*Che dolore, ch'io me ne parto vivo e sano e vinto* [+NC]

what pain that I me there part alive and healthy and defeated

*de la bataglia: niente no mi fa male*

from the battle nothing not me makes bad

*se no la vita che tanto mi dura!*

if not the life that much to.me lasts

‘What a pain that I am leaving the battle alive, healthy and defeated:

nothing hurts if not my life which lasts so long’

(OVI, *San Gradale* 155)

Table 2. NC pattern with adverbial vs. argumental *niente*

	<b>niente<sub>Adv</sub></b>		<b>niente<sub>Arg</sub></b>	
	+NC	-NC	+NC	-NC
<b>preV</b>	N.A.	N.A.	✓	✓
<b>postV</b>	✓	N.A.	✓	✓

Table 2 shows that:

- (i) When *niente* is an argument it can but must not obey NC both in preverbal and postverbal position;
- (ii) When *niente* is an adverb, it can only occur in postverbal position and must obey NC.

See section 4 for NC with preV argumental *niente*.



Hypothetical free relative

- (10) *Di punire chi torrà **neuna** bottega a **neuno** di questa arte.*  
COMP punish-inf who take-away any store of anyone of this craft  
'Who takes away any store from anyone of this craft (is) to be punished.'  
(OVI, *Oliandoli* 31)

If-clause

- (11) a. [...] *s'egli avesse konperato o ricevote karte di **neuno** peço di tera [...]*  
if he have-3SG-SBJV bought or received documents of NPI piece of land  
'[...] if he had bought or received documents on any piece of land [...]'  
(OVI, *Ricordi di compere e cambi* 224)
- b. [...] *se tra queste à cosa **neuna** che tti piaccia*  
if among these has thing any that you=pleases  
'[...] if among these things there is anything that you like'  
(OVI, *Disciplina Clericalis* 76)

Interrogative

- (12) a. *volete voi **neente** di queste cose che noi abbiamo guadangiato?*  
want-2PL you-PL nothing of these things that we have gained  
'Do you want anything of the things that we have gained?'  
(OVI, *Panciaticchiano* 196)
- b. *Dimmi, Merlino, dell' avere d'Atene fu trovato **niente**?*  
tell.me-DAT Merlin of.the possessions of Athens was found nothing  
'Tell me, Merlin, was anything from the goods of Athens discovered?'  
(OVI, *Merlino* 48)

Only some of these cases are possible also in modern Italian (typically interrogative contexts):<sup>2</sup>

- (13) a. *Volete niente per colazione?* (MI)  
want-2PL nothing for breakfast?  
'Do you want anything for breakfast?'
- b. *\*Se vedi niente, dimmelo* (MI)  
if see nothing, tell me  
'If you see anything, tell me'

- We follow Zeijlstra (2011), Gianollo (2015), according to whom the lexical entry of negative indefinites is syntactically complex and can be decomposed into two elements: a negative operator and an indefinite, spelled out as a single unit but able to take scope independently.
- Since *niente* functions as an NPI here, it is has no [+Neg] feature. What remains is only the indefinite element (and the nominal structure below).

- (14) Argumental: [<sub>IndefP</sub> *niente* [<sub>ClassP</sub> [<sub>RestrP</sub> 0]]]

---

<sup>2</sup> For similar (but not identical) phenomena in Spanish, see Herburger (2001), Zeijlstra (2008a:36).

## Second empirical generalization

The non-veridical contexts in which n-words function as NPIs in OI are much wider than in modern Italian. The only context remaining in modern standard Italian are questions.

→ However, these are not real cases of missing NC.

*Question for future research: why have the contexts of NPI licensing been restricted from OI to modern Italian?*

### 3.2.2 Purely nominal *niente*

Cases in which *niente* does not mean ‘nothing’ but ‘absence of matter’ (in an ontological or religious sense) are also not relevant in determining the system of NC.

- (15) a. [...] *che prima era niente*  
that before was nothing  
‘[...] that in the beginning (i.e. before the creation of the world) there was (the) nothing’  
(OVI, *V. Cronica* 17)
- b. *ma quella materia era fatta di niente*  
but that stuff was made of nothing  
‘but that stuff was made out of nothing (=out of no matter)’ (OVI, *Tesoro* 32)

- It seems that *niente* here is a bare noun and not an n-word (thus it does not have a [+Neg] feature)

- (16) Nominal *niente*: [<sub>RestrP/NP</sub> niente [<sub>Restr°</sub> ]]
- The reason why these cases do not exist in modern Italian has nothing to do with a change in the NC system, but with a) the fact that the contexts in which *niente* can be used as a noun are very restricted in MI, and b) the fact that MI the presence of the article is obligatory in modern Italian but not in OI.
  - Very frequent in PPs such as in (13b), see 3.4.

→ However, these are not real cases of missing NC

### 3.2.3 N-words in copular constructions

Another case of apparent optionality exists in cases when the n-word is merged in a copular/existential construction, see (17) and (18):

(17) *Il Re (...) assai li dicea, che per amore*

[+NC]

the king much him told that for sake  
*di chavalleria egli dovesse tòrre: non era neente ch'elli il volesse*  
of chivalry he must-SBJV take: not was nothing that he it wanted-SBJV.  
‘The king told him many times that he should take (one)  
for chivalry’s sake: (but) there was nothing he wanted’ (OVI, *Panciaticchiano* 179)

- (18) *Lo re Piero d’Araona (...) si provide di non mettersi* [ -NC]  
the king Peter of Aragon SE provided to not put-self  
*a battaglia campale, però che lla sua forza era niente*  
to field battle because that the his power was nothing  
*apo quella del re di Francia.*  
by that of.the king of France  
‘King Peter of Aragon decide not to fight in a field battle  
because his power was nothing next to that of the King of France’ (OVI, *V. Cronica* 565)

There is a semantic difference between copular constructions of the type in (17), which is **existentially quantified**, and copular constructions like (18), in which the n-word functions as a **nominal predicate**. This is shown by the fact that in modern Italian a sentence like (17) would contain the locative clitic *ci*.

### Third descriptive generalization

- a. Copular construction with existential meaning → Obligatory NC  
b. Copular constructions where the n-word is a nominal predicate → No NC

N-words in cases like (18) can be analyzed as **minimizers**, where *niente* means ‘something of little value/import’. These cases exist residually also in modern Italian:

- (19) a. *E questo è niente! Dovessi vedere cosa ha comprato.* MI  
and this is nothing! Should see what has bought!  
‘And this is nothing! You should see what he bought!’
- b. *Il suo orgoglio è niente in confronto al suo arrivismo.* MI  
the his pride is nothing in comparison to-the his careerism  
‘His pride is nothing in comparison to his careerism’

→ Hence, in this sense, Italian has not changed, and we do not need to see these as exceptions to the NC rule, since *niente* also in these contexts is not negative, i.e. it has no syntactically active negative feature [+Neg] capable of triggering NC.

- It might be the case that these examples are more frequent in OI than in the modern variant because in OI the morpheme *ente* was still felt as a separate nominal morpheme (*neente/niente* < NEC ENTE(M) ‘and not (a) being’ (see the overview and other proposals in Iliescu (2011); ENS, -ENTIS is a Late-Latin deverbal nominal (originally a pres. part. of ESSE). Note that in OI this item has three different forms: *neente, neiente, niente*. The

existence of the variant *neente* might have helped to identify the classifier *ente*. (see Kayne 2015)

(20) Nominal predicate: [ClassP *niente* [RestrP 0]]

→ future work, comparative statistical analysis between OI and modern Italian on this type of *niente*.

### 3.2.4 Intermediate summary

So far, we have identified at least five readings of OI n-words, to which we can assign the following categories and internal structures (exemplified with *niente*).

- |      |    |  |                                    |
|------|----|--|------------------------------------|
| (21) | a. | [QP <i>niente</i> [Q° [0 +Neg]] [IndefP [ClassP [RestrP 0]]] | (negative indefinite) <sup>3</sup> |
|      | b. | [QP <i>neente</i> [Q° [0 +Neg]]]                             | (adverb)                           |
|      | c. | [IndefP <i>niente</i> [ClassP [RestrP 0]]]                   | (NPI)                              |
|      | d. | [ClassP <i>niente</i> [RestrP 0]]                            | (minimizer)                        |
|      | e. | [RestrP/NP <i>niente</i> ]                                   | (nominal expression)               |

Only two of them (21a,b) are [+Neg] and thus enter NC.

### 3.3 Optional NC with postverbal N-words inside PPs

#### 3.3.1 Cases to be excluded

Garzonio & Poletto (2012): the amount of missing cases of NC is much higher with PPs than with bare arguments.

→ We surmise that, at least for *niente*, the reasons for this effect mostly have to do with:

- a) the high frequency of nominal *niente* in PPs
- b) a number of very frequent idioms of the type prep.+*niente* derived from such nominal uses

- **Purely Nominal *niente*** without the article (‘absence of matter’ and the like, see 3.2.2).

- (22) a. *E creò loro anime di niente.*  
and created their souls of nothing  
‘And he created their souls out of nothing.’ (OVI, *Tesoro* 25)
- b. *Appresso fece di niente una grossa materia.*  
then made of nothing a great matter  
‘Then he made a great matter out of nothing.’ (OVI, *Tesoro* 23)
- c. *non si puote fare di niente qualeche cosa*

<sup>3</sup> See Zeijlstra 2011, Gianollo 2015.

not<sub>REFL</sub>=can make of nothing some thing  
'One cannot make something out of nothing.' (OVI, *Ottimo Commento* 626)

The nominal nature of *niente* is also shown by the alternation with *niente* introduced by an article:

(23) [...] *che Dio producesse in essere le cose dal niente.*  
that God produced-SBJV in be-INF the things from.the nothing  
'[...] that God created the things from nothing' (OVI, *Ottimo Commento* 627)

- **Idioms derived from *niente* as a minimizer** (with the meaning of "of little value/account").

⇒ *avere per niente*, meaning 'to attach little value to sth. or s.o.' (also *riputare per niente*, *tenere per niente*):

(24) a. [...] *avegna che del detto suo facesse gran beffi*  
despite that of-the word his made-SBJV-3SG great mockeries  
*e il suo fatto avesse per niente.*  
and his deed have-SBJV-3SG for nothing  
'Even though he made a great mock of his words and disesteemed his deeds.'  
(OVI, *VeV* 86)

b. *E se non la teme; no 'l castigare, ch'egli ha per niente tuo castigamento.*  
and if not it=fears not him=punish that he has for nothing your punishment  
'And if he doesn't fear it, do not punish him, for your punishment is not important for him.'

(OVI, *Tesoro* 215)

⇒ **Idiomatic meanings of *per niente*** :

'in vain'<sup>4</sup>

(25) *E se ciò non faceste tutto questo sia per niente...*  
and if this not do-SBJV all this be-SBJV for nothing  
'And if you didn't this, all this would be for nothing' (OVI, *Tesoro* 299)

---

<sup>4</sup> Logically, an n-word that has no [+Neg]-feature is totally independent of elements marked [+Neg]-elements in the same clause. Therefore we can find it in preverbal position followed by *non*: *Per niente non vieta la legge, che nulle debba avere dignità infino a venticinque anni* (OVI, *Tesoro* 286): 'The law does not prohibit in vain (= it prohibits on purpose) that he must not have any dignities before the age of 25.'

‘free of charge’

- (26) *X rimane al comperatore per niente* (stereotyped formula)  
X remains to-the buyer for nothing  
‘the buyer obtains X free of charge’ (OVI, *Pratica*, around 30 occurrences)

- Idiomatic expressions of the form V+a niente meaning ‘to destroy’, ‘to disappear’. The verbs tolerating this structure are *venire, recare, arrecare, tornare, ridurre, mettere*. These structures are extremely frequent and seem productive with inherently directed motion verbs implying a goal (see Tortora (1997) on a definition of IDMs).

- (27) a. [...] *fuoro i Romani così recati a niente*  
were the Romans so brought to nothing  
‘[...] the Romans were destroyed’ (OVI, *Orosio* 242)
- b. [...] *e come n'è or caduto e tornato a niente.*  
and how of.it is now fallen and come.back to nothing  
‘[...] and how it has fallen and been destroyed’ (OVI, *Fiori di Rettorica* 74)
- c. [...] *onde quegli della detta congiura vennero a niente, e furono cacciati di Siena*  
from-which those of the said conspiracy came to nothing and were-3PL chased from S.  
‘so that those the people involved in the mentioned conspiracy were defeated and driven away from S.’ (OVI, *Tito Livio I* 95)

→ Again, these are not real cases of missing NC.

### 3.3.2 Real cases of *niente* as a negative quantifier

Argumental *niente* (in “prepositional objects”) as a negative quantifier is generally found **with NC in postverbal position**, see (28) (or very frequently preposed without NC):

- (28) a. [...] *non si spaventaro di niente*  
not REFL=frightened-3PL of nothing  
‘[...] they were not afraid of anything’ (OVI, *Tito Livio I* 409)
- b. ‘*Maria, no sia di niente sbigottita, [...]*’  
M. not be of nothing amazed  
‘Mary, be not amazed of anything, [...]’ (OVI, *San Gradale* 68)
- c. *Il legato come ingrato signore non li volle sovenire di niente,*  
the emissary as an ungrateful lord not them wanted provide of nothing  
‘the emissary, like an ungrateful lord, did not want to provide them with anything’  
(OVI, *V. Cronica L. XI*, cap. 225)

→ In order to ascertain whether P+n-word really have a different NC pattern with respect to bare arguments other n-words have to be taken into account.

### 3.3.3 Intermediate summary

- The higher frequency of cases of missing NC with postverbal [PP ... *niente*] are to be attributed to the fact that *niente* can be
  - a noun
  - a minimizer-like element in OI
- Such readings of *niente* do not have a [+Neg] feature ⇒ no NC.
- They are also the basis of several idioms, that thus do not show NC either.

## 4. Optional NC with preverbal argumental n-words (Study 2 and 3)

### 4.1. Study 2

Study 2 lead us (together with O. Kellert and G. Mensching) to the hypothesis that NC was a disambiguating strategy, employed in non-veridical contexts, to identify n-words with real negative quantifiers, rather than with non-veridical NPIs. The reason beyond the need for such a strategy is that OI n-words are ambiguous between real quantifiers and indefinites. Our hypothesis was based on the following observations.

**Preverbal subjects** optionally appear with *non* in a series of specific morphosyntactic and semantic contexts, mostly non-veridical.

- It seems that all these contexts can also appear without *non*, but not (or very rarely) the other way round, i.e., e.g. a statement describing an action that actually happened as in (29a,b) or a statement held true as in (29c) is usually not constructed with *non*.
- It seems that these contexts that do not allow *non* show the verb in the indicative.

### Contexts in which *non* does typically not appear:

- (29) a. *che neuno uomo uscì di Firenze*  
that no man went-ind-out of Florence  
'that nobody went out of Florence' (OVI, *P. Cronica* 23)
- b. *E niuno portò altro che l'armi e la vivanda*  
and noone carried-ind other than the weapons and the food  
'And noone carried anything else than weapons and food'  
(OVI, *Tito Livio I* 277)
- c. [...] *che i Romani fossero vinti neuno dubita*  
that the Romans were defeated noone doubts-ind  
'Nobody doubts that the Romans were defeated.'  
(OVI, *Vegezio* 7)

**The contexts in which *non* does appear are:**

**1. (Sub)clauses with the verb in the present or imperfect subjunctive**, selected by verbs expressing order, demand, hypotheses and so on, or consecutive subclauses ('so that ...):

- (30) a. [...] *avea comandato che niuno non avesse lancione o dardo* [...]   
had ordered that noone not had-SBJV lance or darts  
'[...] he had ordered that noone should lances or darts [...]'   
(OVI, *Valerio Massimo* 426)
- b. [...] *sì [...] che neuno uomo no divisase certamente il colore*   
so that no man not distinguished-SBJV certainly the color  
'[...] so [...] that noone could distinguish the color with certainty'   
(OVI, *San Gradale* 17)

**2. Clauses with the verb in the conditional tense**

- (31) a. *che neuno non chiederebbe mai biltadi nè curiositadi di robe*   
that nobody not would.ask never beauty.pl nor curiosities of things  
'That no one would ever ask for any pretty or peculiar thing'   
(OVI, *Zucchero* 93)
- b. *neuno non vi ne sarebbe specificato*   
nobody not loc of.it would.be specified  
'Nobody would be specified about it'   
(OVI, *Orosio* 257)

**3. Clauses expressing possibility or necessity**, containing a) future tense or b) the modals *potere* and *dovere*.

- (32) a. *E niuno non negherà che [...]*   
And nobody not deny.fut that  
'And nobody will deny that'   
(OVI, *Filocolo* 394)
- b. *un' acqua ismisurata, che niuno uomo nolla può passare*   
a water unmeasured that no man not.it can pass  
'a huge water [stream] that nobody can cross'   
(OVI, *Gismirante* 184)
- c. *che niuno non dee tanto mangiare che...*   
that noone not must so-much eat that  
'that noone should eat so much that...'  
(OVI *Santà* 133)

**4. Clauses containing the verb *sapere*** (both modal and non-modal *sapere*)

- (33) *e che neuno uomo non sapea che ne fosse adivenuto*   
and that no man not know.past that of.it/him were.sbjv become.past.part.  
'and that nobody knew what became of it/him'   
(OVI, *Novellino* 272)

- (34) *era tanto diversa che **neun uomo no** saprebe dire di quale maniera*  
was so different that no man not know.cond say.inf of which manner  
'It was so different that nobody would be able to say in which way...'  
(OVI, *Storia San Grad.* 167)

→ Once again, the fundamental difference has to do with non-veridical contexts (see 3.2.1 for NPIs)

**Preverbal non-subject *niente* (topicalized or focalized)** follows the same system.

Future research: Other n-words

Conclusions and intuitions following from Sections 3.2.1 and 4:

- n-words in OI are **ambiguous between real negative indefinites and NPIs** (however this ambiguity is to be analyzed, this is an empirical observation).

Working hypothesis to explain **optional NC with preverbal n-words**.

- In postverbal position, in NPI contexts NC is an indicator that the n-word is not a NPI.
- How could the OI speakers assure a non-NPI reading in a non-veridical context with preverbal n-words (which do not usually permit NC)?

**⇒NC as an optional device to make sure that a preverbal n-word is not interpreted as an NPI?**

- Although NC and NPI licensing are two different phenomena, they seem to be related so that when NPI licensing is possible, NC can be used to disambiguate the interpretation.

However, a further study, (study 3) gave a more varied picture of results.

#### 4.1. Study 3

##### Study 3 Methods:

- Extraction of several preverbal n-words (*niun-; neun-; nessun-; niente; neente; neiente; null-*) in their bare or modified forms and observation of NC pattern;
- 11 medieval full texts analyzed manually (no parsed corpus of OI is available yet).

### Study 3 Results:

Table 3. Presence or absence of NC in 11 full texts

Author	Title	with NC	without NC	Total
Alighieri	Convivio	0	61	61
Alighieri	Vita Nuova	0	6	6
Cappellano	De Amore	11	150	161
Compagni	Cronica	0	26	26
Anonimo	Fior de' Filosafi	2	47	49
Giamboni	Fior di Rettorica	1	29	30
Giamboni	Vizi e virtù	2	43	45
Villani	Cronica	15	183	198
Anonimo	Compagnia S. Gilio	0	28	28
Anonimo	Lettera de' Cerchi	1	1	2
Anonimo	Novellino	2	17	19

First observations:

- NC with preverbal N-words is limited to at most 10% of the occurrences of preverbal N-words;
- Not all cases of preverbal N-words with NC are subjects and not all cases occur in a non-veridical context, see (35) or (36b);

- (35) *né d'altra parte da niuno Ghibellino d'Italia non poteano avere soccorso*  
and.not from other part from no Ghibellino of Italy not could.<sub>3PL</sub> have help  
'And they could not be helped in other ways by any other Ghibellino in Italy'  
(Villani, *Cronica*, 412)

→ Problematic for our previous hypothesis

## 5. Observations and open issues

NC with a preverbal N-word is often present in one of the following contexts.

### 5.1. The preverbal N-word is a PP

- (36) a. *Ma quello che mi dicesti delle merci e non proverando,*  
But that that to.me said.<sub>2SG</sub> of.the merchandise  
*se voi' intendeste bene, per niuna ragione no mi dee nuocere.*  
If you heard well, for no reason not to.me must harm  
'What you said to me about the merchandise, if you heard well, shall not harm me for  
any reason'  
(Cappellano, *De Amore*, ch. 12, 10-11)

- b. *Lo re Artù, il quale fu domandato per li cavalieri de-re perch'egli fosse venuto,*  
The king Arthur the which was asked by the knights of king why he was come  
*ed elli rispose: "Per cagione di portarne lo sparviere".*  
And he answered for reason of bring.of-it the sparrowhawk  
*Al quale, uno de' cavalieri della corte disse:*  
To-the which one of knights of-the court said  
*"Per neuno modo non ne puoi portare lo sparviere".*  
For no way not of-it can.2SG take.inf the sparrowhawk  
'...King Arthur, who was asked by the knights of the kings why he had come, answered:  
"To bring there the sparrowhawk". To him, one of the court knights said "You can by no means  
bring the sparrowhawk'.  
(Cappellano, *De Amore*, ch. 32, 75)

Hypothesis: are PPs not real negative quantifiers, which is why they may undergo NC and not yield a DN reading?

## 5.2 The preverbal N-word is given information

Observation: the fronted item is not new or contrastive information, but rather given information, as it is already present in the discourse context.

- (37) a. *Anche ciascheduna femmina si truova bugiarda,*  
Also each woman imp finds liar  
*perciò che femina niuna non si truova ch'ella non pensi d'ubidire*  
Because that woman none not imp finds that she not thinks of obey.inf  
'Moreover each woman is a liar, because there is no woman who means to obey'  
(Cappellano, *De Amore*, ch. 33, 86)
- b. *Contr'al folle non è uopo neuna cosa, perchè neuna cosa non sa usare*  
Against the lunatic not is suitable no thing because no thing not can use  
'Nothing is suitable to the lunatic, because he cannot use anything'  
(Anonimo, *Fior de' Filosafi*, 14)

## 5.3 The preverbal N-word is modified by a relative clause

- (38) a. *Però che nulla convenenza, che promisono per gli patti al re Carlo*  
But that no convenience that promised.3pl for the treaties to-the kind Charles  
*e Comune di Firenze, non voleano attenere*  
And Municipality of Florence not wanted to attain  
'Because they didn't want to attain any convenience that they had promised King  
Charles and Florence Municipality with treaties'  
(Villani, *Cronica*, 119)

- b. *e a niuno ch'adomandi degna cosa*  
And to nobody that asks-sbjv suitable thing  
*non si fa a noi di negare il nostro atore*  
Not imp makes to us of deny.inf the our actor  
'We shall not ignore anyone who asked us an appropriate question'  
(Cappellano, *De Amore*, ch. 17b, 37)

Hypothesis: it is not clear to us why this should allow for NC, but the content of the relative clause is generally considered as presupposed and it restricts the quantifying domain of the N-word.

#### 5.4 The preverbal N-word occur in a complement to a factive (performative) predicate

- (39) a. *Fu sopra-cciò proveduto, e fatti per certi uficiali certi ordini molto forti,*  
Was above this decided and made by some officers certain orders very strong  
*che niuna donna non potesse portare nulla corona...*  
That no woman not could wear no crown  
'It was strongly ordered and decided by some officers that no woman could wear any crown...'  
(Villani, *Cronica*, 356)
- b. *E comandò a' baroni che neuno non li insegnasse spendere questo oro*  
And ordered to the barons that nobody not them teach.sbjv spend this gold  
'And he ordered to the barons that nobody should teach them to spend this money'  
(Anonimo, *Novellino*, ch. VII)

Hypothesis: again the embedded clause in which the N-word occurs has a presupposed content, but we don't know exactly how to relate this to the presence of NC. Notice that in this cases the embedded clause predicate is often in subjunctive mood.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Starting from the observation that NC is apparently optional in OI, we have observed the following pattern:

### Postverbal n-words

- We have shown that **the NC system of OI postverbal n-words is not as optional as generally thought**. It is actually **much more similar to the one of modern Italian** once the following factors have been controlled for:
  - a) the fact that elements such as *niente* can be interpreted as bare nominals (since OI did not have the same article system that modern Italian has)
  - b) the fact that the element *niente* can be interpreted as a minimizer meaning 'of little import/value' due to the fact that its internal classifier was probably still analyzed as a real nominal restrictor
  - c) the fact that in PPs there is a systematic series of (mostly idiomatic) exceptions, such as idioms of the form [VP V [PP *a niente*]] meaning 'to destroy'.

The reason why NC seems optional is related to the following different structures that *niente* can lexicalize, examples with the nominal and minimizer can originate cases of missing NC:

- (40) a. [QP *niente* [Q° [0 +Neg]] [IndefP [ClassP [RestrP 0]]] (negative indefinite<sup>5</sup>)  
b. [QP *neente* [Q° [0 +Neg]]] (adverb)  
c. [IndefP *niente*[ClassP [RestrP 0]]] (NPI)  
d. [ClassP *niente* [RestrP 0]] (minimizer)  
e. [RestrP/NP *niente*] (nominal expression)

### Preverbal n-words

- Preverbal n-words obey NC only in at most 10% of the total occurrences of preverbal n-words,
- In some cases NC with preverbal n-words is attested in non-veridical clauses, i.e. when another operator competes as a potential licenser for the n-words, which may be interpreted as a non-veridical NPI, in OI.

→ We suggested that NC is thus a disambiguating strategy to identify the n-word as a real negative quantifier, even in a non-veridical NPI context.

- This cannot be the full story, as NC with preverbal n-words is also attested in other cases:  
e.g. when the n-word is  
- a PP  
- given information  
- modified by a relative clause  
- in a complement clause to a factive (performative) predicate.

→ The real reason (or perhaps a combination of factors) determining NC with preverbal n-words is yet to be identified!

### References

- Andersson, J. (2006): "Generalized domain widening *überhaupt*". In: D. Baumer, D. Montero & M. Scanlon (eds.), *Proceedings of the 25th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*. Somerville, MA: Cascadia Proceedings Project, 58–66.
- Chierchia, G. (2013): *Logic in Grammar: Polarity, Free Choice, and Intervention*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2000): "Minimalist Inquiries - The Framework". In: R. Martin, D. Michaels & J. Uriagereka (eds.), *Step by Step: Essays on Minimalist Syntax in Honor of Howard Lasnik*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 89-115.
- Cinque, G. (1999): *Adverbs and Functional Heads. A Cross-linguistic Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Garzonio, J. & Poletto, C. (2012): "On 'niente': optional negative concord in Old Italian". *Linguistische Berichte*, 230: 131–53.
- Giannakidou, A. (2002): "Licensing and Sensitivity in Polarity Items: From Downward Entailment to Nonveridicality". In: M. Andronis, A. Pycha & K. Yoshimura (eds.), *CLS 38: Papers from the 38th Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society, Parasession on Polarity and Negation*, 29-54.
- Giannakidou, A. (2011): "Negative and positive polarity items". In: K. von Stechow, C. Maienborn & P. Portner (eds.), *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning*, Vol. 2. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1660-1712.

---

<sup>5</sup> see Zeijlstra 2011, Gianollo 2015

- Gianollo, Ch. (2015): *Negative Indefinitpronomen und Satzstruktur in latin*. Ms. Universität zu Köln.
- Herburger, E. (2001): *The negative concord puzzle revisited*. *Natural Language Semantics* 9: 289-333.
- Iliescu, M. (2011): "Pour une romanistique panromane. Coup d'œil sur l'étymologie de l'italien niente *rien*". In: A. Overbeck, W. Schweickard & Harald Volker (eds.), *Lexikon, Varietät, Philologie Romanistische Studien Günter Holtus zum 65. Geburtstag*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 97-103.
- Kayne, R. (2015): *English 'One' and 'Ones' as Complex Determiners*, MS., [ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/002542/current.pdf?s=ApvShRPguO4zqS98](http://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/002542/current.pdf?s=ApvShRPguO4zqS98)
- Krifka, M. (1995): "The Semantics and Pragmatics of Polarity Items". *Linguistic Analysis* 25, 1-49.
- Poletto, C. (2014): *Word Order in Old Italian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Renzi, L. & Salvi, G. (2010): *Grammatica dell'italiano antico*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Stark, E. (2006): *Indefinitheit und Textkohärenz. Entstehung und semantische Strukturierung indefiniter Nominaldetermination im Altitalienischen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Zeijlstra, H. (2008a): *Negative Concord is syntactic agreement*. Ms. University of Amsterdam. (Lingbuzz/000645): [www.academia.edu/9963325/2008.\\_Negative\\_Concord\\_is\\_syntactic\\_agreement.\\_Ms\\_University\\_of\\_Amsterdam.\\_Lingbuzz\\_000645](http://www.academia.edu/9963325/2008._Negative_Concord_is_syntactic_agreement._Ms_University_of_Amsterdam._Lingbuzz_000645)
- Zeijlstra, H. (2008b): "On the syntactic flexibility of formal features". In: T. Biberauer (ed.), *Limits of parametric variation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 143-173.
- Zeijlstra, H. (2011): "On the Syntactically Complex Status of Negative Indefinites in Dutch and German". *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 14: 111-138.

#### Sources

- OVI (Opera del Vocabolario Italiano): <http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu>.
- OVI, *Bosone da Gubbio* = Bosone de' Raffaelli da Gubbio (1333), *Fortunatus siculus o sia l'Avventuroso Ciciliano*. G. F. Nott (ed.), Milan: Silvestri, 1833.
- OVI, *Cronica fior.* = Anonymous (1300), *Cronica fiorentina* (Testi fiorentini del Dugento e dei primi del Trecento, a cura di Alfredo Schiaffini, Firenze, Sansoni, 1926, pp. 82-150.
- OVI, *Calimala* = (1334), Statuto dell'Arte di Calimala del 1334. P. Emiliani-Giudici (ed.), *Storia dei Comuni italiani, vol. III*, Florence: Le Monnier, 1866, pp. 171-367 [text pp. 180-367].
- OVI, *Compagnia* = (1284), Capitoli della Compagnia di San Gilio. A. Schiaffini (ed.), *Testi fiorentini del Dugento e dei primi del Trecento*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1926, pp. 34-54.
- OVI, *Disciplina Clericalis* = Anonymous (1300). Volgarizzamento di un frammento della *Disciplina Clericalis* di Pietro di Alfonso. In A. Schiaffini (ed.), *Testi fiorentini del Dugento e dei primi del Trecento*, Florence: Sansoni, 1926, pp. 73-81.
- OVI, *Fiori di Rettorica* = Giamboni, Bono (1292), Fiore di rettorica (redazione beta). G. B. Speroni (ed.), Pavia: Dipartimento di Scienza della Letteratura e dell'Arte medioevale e moderna, 1994, pp. 3-107.
- OVI, *Merlino* = Pieri, Paolino (1330), *La Storia di Merlino*. M. Cursietti (ed.), Rome: Zauli, 1997
- OVI, *Novellino* = Anonimo (1300), *Il Novellino*. G. Favati (ed.), *Il Novellino*, Genova: Bozzi, 1970.
- OVI, *Oliandoli* = (1313), Statuto dell'Arte degli oliandoli. A. Castellani (ed.), *Il più antico statuto degli oliandoli di Firenze*, «*Studi linguistici italiani*», IV, 1963-64, pp. 3-106 [text pp. 11-57].
- OVI, *Orosio* = Giamboni, Bono (1292), *Delle Storie contra i Pagani di Paolo Orosio libri VII*. F. Tassi (ed.), Florence: Baracchi, 1849.
- OVI, *Ottimo Commento* = Anonimo [1334], *L'Ottimo Commento della Commedia, t. III Paradiso*. A. Torri (ed.) Pisa: Capurro, 1829.
- OVI, *P. Cronica* = Pieri, Paolino (1305). *Cronica*. A. F. Adami (ed.), Rome: Monaldini, 1755.
- OVI, *Panciatichiano* = [1355], *Novelle del codice Panciatichiano 32*. G. Biagi (ed.), *Le Novelle antiche dei codici Panciatichiano-Palatino 138 e Laurenziano-Gaddiano 193*, Florence: Sansoni, 1880, pp. 133-204.
- OVI, *Pratica* = Balducci Pegolotti, Francesco [1350]. *Pratica della mercatura (La)*, sec. XIV p.m., (a cura di Allan Evans, The Mediaeval Academy of America, Cambridge [Mass.] 1936.)
- OVI, *Rettorica* = Latini, Brunetto (1261), *La Rettorica*. F. Maggini (ed.), Florence: Le Monnier, 1968.
- OVI, *Ricordanze* = (1332), *Ricordanze di Santa Maria di Cafaggio* (1295-1332).

- OVI, *Ricordi do compere e cambi* = [1290], Ricordi di compere e cambi di terre in Val di Streda e dintorni. A. Castellani (ed.), *La prosa italiana delle origini: I, Testi toscani di carattere pratico*, Bologna: Pàtron, 1982, pp. 215-54 [text pp. 216-54].
- OVI, *San Gradale* = Anonimo (1325), *La storia del San Gradale. Volgarizzamento toscano dell'Estoire del Saint Graal*. M. Infurna (ed.), Padova: Editrice Antenore, 1999.
- OVI, *Specchio* = Passavanti, Jacopo (1355), *Lo Specchio della vera penitenza*. F. Polidori (ed.), Florence: Le Monnier, 1856, pp. 1-187.
- OVI, *Tavola* = Anonimo (1350), La Tavola ritonda o l'istoria di Tristano. F. Polidori (ed.), *La Tavola Ritonda o l'istoria di Tristano*, Bologna: Romagnoli, 1864.
- OVI, *Tesoro* = Anonimo (1300), Il Tesoro di Brunetto Latini volgarizzato da Bono Giamboni. *Il Tesoro di Brunetto Latini volgarizzato da Bono Giamboni, raffrontato col testo autentico francese edito da P. Chabaille, emendato con mss. ed illustrato da Luigi Gaiter*, 4 vols., Bologna: Romagnoli, 1878-1883.
- OVI, *Tito Livio I* = Anonymous (1350), Deca prima di Tito Livio volgarizzata. C. Dalmazzo (ed.), *La prima Deca di Tito Livio, volgarizzamento del buon secolo*, Torino: Stamperia Reale, 1845-46.
- OVI, *Trattato* = Giamboni, Bono (1292): Il Trattato di Virtù e di Vizi. C. Segre (ed.), *Il Libro de' Vizi e delle Virtudi e Il Trattato di Virtù e di Vizi*, Torino: Einaudi, 1968, pp. 123-156.
- OVI, *V. Cronica* = Villani, Giovanni [1348], Cronica. G. Porta (ed.), *Giovanni Villani, Nuova Cronica*, 3 vols., Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo / Ugo Guanda Editore, 1990-1991.
- OVI, *Valerio Massimo* = Anonimo (1326), Il volgarizzamento B del secondo libro [di Valerio Massimo] secondo Vat e FL/3. V. Lippi Bigazzi (ed.), *Un Volgarizzamento inedito di Valerio Massimo*, Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 1996. pp. 1-70.
- OVI, *Vegezio* = Giamboni, Bono (1292). *Dell'Arte della guerra di Vegezio Flavio volgarizzata libri IV*. Francesco Fontani], Florence, Marenigh, 1815.
- OVI, *VeV* = Giamboni, Bono (1292), Il Libro de' Vizî e delle Virtudi. C. Segre (ed.), *Il Libro de' Vizî e delle Virtudi e Il Trattato di Virtù e Vizî*, Torino: Einaudi, 1968, pp. 3-120.