

Quaderni del Dipartimento di Linguistica Università della Calabria

n. 32/2025

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Quaderni del Dipartimento di Linguistica
Università della Calabria

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Progetto PRIN 2022 “A.L.A.R.I.CO (Archivio Linguistico ARbëresh e Italo-romanzo in COntatto)” Codice Progetto 202249CYPP - Settore ERC SH4_11.

Quaderni del Dipartimento di Linguistica

UNIVERSITÀ DELLA CALABRIA

32/2025

**Lingue, Culture e Identità
Studi in Onore di Francesco Altimari**

a cura di

Luciano Romito

Matteo Mandalà

Fiorella De Rosa

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PROPRIETÀ LETTERARIA RISERVATA

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Via Nicolai, 39 – 70122 Bari – Tel. 080/5214220

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Sommario

<i>Roberto Guarasci</i> , Prefazione	9
<i>Anton Nikë Berisha</i> , Quattro Ambiti Essenziali dell'Attività del Prof. Francesco Altimari	11
<i>Mimoza Priku, Artan Haxhi</i> , Profesor Francesco Altimari: urë lidhëse midis kulturës arbëreshe dhe Shkodrës	23
<i>Rexhep Ismajli</i> , Altimari, l'arbëresh et les Balkans	31
<i>Mirko Altimari</i> , Minoranze linguistiche e diritto sindacale nell'ordinamento italiano	41
<i>Mario Francisco Benvenuto</i> , Análisis del léxico psicológico y psicopatológico en <i>El túnel</i> de Ernesto Sábato	59
<i>Labinot Berisha</i> , Su alcune particolarità generali dei canti eroici albanesi	85
<i>Roberta De Felici</i> , "Une Marginale Intégrée": Bessa Myftiu	95
<i>Fiorella De Rosa</i> , Tra lingua e declamazione: il percorso di De Rada con Puoti e Bidera	109
<i>Monica Genesin</i> , Le metafore concettuali nel dramma Emira di Francesco Antonio Santori	129
<i>Elvira Graziano</i> , La persistenza culturale e linguistica degli Arbëreshë in Calabria: tra identità, diaspora e sfide contemporanee	139
<i>Gëzim Gurga, Battista Sposato</i> , Un modello di applicazione web per l'archiviazione, l'elaborazione e la fruizione del lessico degli autori arbëreshë	155
<i>Eugenio Imbriani</i> , Le finestre del buon Dio	169
<i>Titos Jochalas</i> , Fan Noli (Θεοφάνης Μαυρομμάτης)	181
<i>Sara Manali</i> , Documentare la frattura	197
<i>Ferdinando Maria Mandalà</i> , « <i>Cummari gghè-gghè</i> »: gli arbëreshë negli studi demologici di Giuseppe Pitrè	217
<i>Matteo Mandalà</i> , Gabriele Dara Jr., l'ambiente culturale, i precursori, la famiglia	247

<i>Vito Matranga</i> , La voce del prigioniero di Ururi	275
<i>Rossella Pugliese</i> , Tra le lingue del sé	295
<i>Luciano Romito, Angelamaria Roperti</i> , Scrivere e trascrivere in dialetto calabrese	313
<i>Angelamaria Roperti, Luciano Romito</i> , Le indagini sul campo: dalla trascrizione alla registrazione del dato	339
<i>Leonardo M. Savoia, Benedetta Baldi</i> , Negation, n-words and indefinites in Aromanian	359
<i>Nicola Scaldaferrì</i> , Aspetti performativi del canto epico in lingua albanese	385
<i>Francesco Scalora</i> , Sopra alcune biografie di Scanderbeg pubblicate in Italia e in Grecia nella prima metà dell'Ottocento, e la dissertazione linguistica di Tommaso Pace	403
<i>Blerina Suta</i> , La dimensione partenopea nella poetica di de Rada	419
<i>Giuseppina Turano</i> , L'arbëresh tra perdite e innovazioni	441

Negation, n-words and indefinites in Aromanian

A comparison with Albanian

Leonardo M. Savoia, Benedetta Baldi*

Abstract. The article addresses the negation structures in Aromanian. In this language the Strict Negative Concord is applied, whereby the negative marker (NM) *nu* is always requested, also in the presence of n-words, particularly those corresponding to the arguments of the verb. In negative contexts, however, we may also find specialized indefinite elements which in turn give rise to the negative reading. This distribution, specifically the types of negative doubling, is explained by assuming that the negative operator is not realized by a lexical constituent but is postulated and made available to interpretation by the presence of NM and n-words. The Chomskyan theory of Phases and the lexical properties of n-words provide the crucial morphosyntactic tools to connect doubling and other phenomena to the transfer and Spell-out procedures.¹

Keywords: negation, n-words, indefinites, morphology, interrogative, Aromanian, Albanian

1. Introduction

In Aromanian the negative arguments *nitsun/ nikun* ‘nobody’, attested in old Romanian (Stan 2016), generally require the NM *nu* giving rise

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Al carissimo Franco, instancabile ricercatore e studioso del mondo Arbëresh, della sua lingua e della sua cultura antiche e affascinanti, generoso promotore della sua vitalità e della sua espressione, esperto operatore delle politiche per le minoranze linguistiche, profondo conoscitore della storia linguistica e culturale albanese e balcanica, apprezzato e stimato professore e collega, con sincero affetto!

¹ The Aromanian and Albanian data we present were gathered through field research with native informants at the beginning of July 2023 and in June 2025. I thank my informants for their intelligent and generous cooperation, and, among others, the colleague Spiridhulla Poçi for Vlleht, Piro Mistaku for Libofshë, Vilma Veriga for Korça, the colleague Mimoza Rekaj for the Gjirokastër Albanian, Paola Napolitano for S. Benedetto Ullano, Antonella Massaro for Chieuti, and Angela Rella and Lucia Magruffio for Barile. The informants were informed of the type of questionnaires and interviews and participated willingly.

to so-called Strict-Negative-Concord (like current Romanian, cf. Manea 2013). The NM is necessary with the indefinites *tsë'va* 'nothing/ anything' (including the *wh*- element *tsë* 'what'), *ver* / *veB* masculine/ *veBE* feminine 'anybody' (from the Latin focalizer **vere*) to give the negative reading. *nu* is also the sentence negation form. Part of the article is dedicated to the comparison between the Aromanian negative system and the Albanian one of Gjirokaštër. This comparison, in addition to its documentary interest, provides us with a set of partially similar phenomena which will allow us to clarify the negative organization of languages which combine Strict Negative Concord with the use of indefinite quantifiers specialized for irrealis (negative, interrogative) contexts.

We will concentrate on the occurrence of n-words and the indefinite nature of the lexical elements that can combine with the NM. The point is that the latter can be used alone in the scope of negation or other operators. We start by adopting the analysis of negation generally pursued in literature, whereby the so-called (negative) polarity words are indefinites introducing a variable 'x', which requires a negated existential closure operator (Acquaviva 1994: 114, Manzini and Savoia 2011: 130, 152 ff., Manzini and Pescarini 2024). More precisely, negation is not lexicalized by a negative quantifier, namely a morpho-lexical constituent, but is postulated by the presence of n-words, including the NM, which trigger the negative reading.

Aromanian data cover varieties spoken in southern Albania, including Rëmën of Myzeqeja (Libofshë), Fërshërot of Korça and Vllehtë of the Gjirokaštër area.² Aromanian shows the features of heritage languages, insofar as its transmission and use involve family members, friends, or the village circle, and is influenced by contact with Albanian, the official and majority language. In North Macedonia and Albania, Aromanian is assigned the status of a linguistic minority with the legal forms of protection (Stoica 2021). The data of Albanian come from the Tosk spoken variety of Gjirokaštër and serve to provide us with a comparison with the language of contact. A crucial point which we will investigate is the behavior of the

² As regards the geographical diffusion and number of Aromanian speakers, see Caragiu Marioțeanu (1975, 2016) and Capidan (1932). According to Stoica (2021) Aromanian is an identity language subject to the typical mechanisms of minority non-standardized varieties in situations of contact and social competition. Caragiu Marioțeanu (1975, 2016) characterizes Aromanian as the native Romance variety that has regularly developed from the vulgar Latin spoken in the Southern Balkans region (south of the Danube).

Aromanian indefinites in comparison with that of the Albanian indefinites, where an interesting convergence appears.

2. N-words in Aromanian

Aromanian negative sentences have the NM *nu* as in the examples in (a). N-words require the negative clausal marker (NM) *nu* occurs. Therefore, Aromanian varieties show strict NC, whether the n-word follows the verb, examples in (b,b'), or precedes it, examples in (c,c'), as an evidenced element. Naturally, two n-words can combine, as in (3d). We use a simplified IPA transcription. More precisely we use [ɛ ɔ] for mid-low vowels, *ẽ* for the central vowel, *ü* for the rounded front high vowel, *th* and *dh* for the interdental fricatives, [ʃ] and [tʃ] for the palato-alveolars, [ts] for the coronal affricate, *gj* for the voiced palatal stop.³

- | | | | | |
|--------|----------------------------|----------|------------|------------|
| (1) a. | nu | ved | fitʃor-i | |
| | NM | see.1sg | boy-pl.Def | |
| | 'I do not see the boys' | | | |
| b. | nu | in-i | nitsun | |
| | NM | come-3sg | nobody | |
| | 'Nobody is coming' | | | |
| b'. | nu | ved | tsẽ'va | |
| | NM | see.1sg | nothing | |
| | 'I see nothing' | | | |
| c. | nitsun | nu | vini | |
| | nobody | NM | come.3sg | |
| | 'Nobody is coming' | | | |
| c'. | tsẽ'va | nu | jɲ | areseʃti |
| | nothing | NM | me.Obl | please.3sg |
| | 'Nothing I like!' Libofshë | | | |

³ Abbreviations: Acc = accusative, Alt = alternants, Asp = aspect particle, Comp = complementizer, subordinative element, CP = Complementizer Phrase/Phase of Inflection, DE = downward exhaustification, ϕ = nominal agreement features, Impf = imperfect, Inf = infinitive, INFL = inflection. IPrt = interrogative particle *a*, Min = minimizer, Mood = mood, NC = negative concord, NM = negative marker, ND = negative doubling, NPI = negative polarity item, O = (logic) operator, Obl = oblique, OCl = Object Clitic, Prt = particle, Past = past, PP = past participle, pl = plural, Prep = preposition, Q = interrogative, Refl = reflexive clitic, sg = singular, vP = vP phase. Prt indicates the clausal introducers *s* of Aromanian and *të* of Tosk Albanian.

- (2) a. nu i vedz-u-i
 NM OCl see-Past-1sg
 'I did not see them'
- b. nu jë gri nikun
 NM me.Obl call.Past.3sg nobody
 'Nobody called me'
- b'. mini nu fets tsi'va / itjë'va
 I NM do.1sg nothing
 'I do nothing'
- c. nikun nu jë gri
 nobody NM me.Obl call.Past.3sg
 'Nobody called me'
- c'. itsë'va nu s fets-i
 nothing NM Refl do.Past-3sg
 'Nothing happened' Vlleht
- (3) a. nu u mëka-i
 NM it it eat-Past.1sg
 'I did not eat it'
- b. mini nu ved nitsiun
 I NM see.1sg nobody
 'I see nobody'
- b'. nu ved iftsë'va
 NM see.1sg nothing
 'I see nothing'
- c. nitsiun nu mi ved-i / nu mëkë tsë'va
 nobody NM me see.3sg / NM eat.3sg nothing
 'Nobody sees me/ eats nothing'
- c'. iftsë'va nu tihi'si
 nothing NM happen.Past.3sg
 'Nothing happened'
- d. nitsiun nu mëkë tsi'va
 nobody NM eat.3sg nothing
 'Nobody nothing' Korça

We note that the postverbal position of the subject, and, specifically, of the indefinite negative item is usually admitted in Aromanian, exactly like in Italian and other Romance languages. This position is canonical in the

In the presence of two (or more) n-words the NM is required, as typically in varieties with doubling, in (4).

- (4) nikun nu fats-i itʃɛ'va
 nobody NM do-3sg nothing
 ‘Nobody does nothing’
- Vlleht

When the NM is inserted before the matrix verb, the n-word in the dependent clause is interpreted in the scope of negation; in other words, the n-word requires to be read in combination with the NM, as in (5).

- (5) i. nu minduesk s ved nitsiun / ifti'va
 NM believe-1sg Prt see.1sg nobody / nothing
 'I do not think I see anyone/ anything' Korça
- ii. nu mëndesk s ved nitsun / tsë'va
 NM believe-1sg Prt see.1sg nobody / nothing
 'I do not think I see anyone/ anything' Libofshë
- iii. mini nu vkeu s ved nikun
 I NM want.1sg Prt see.1sg nobody
 'I do not want to see anyone' Vllehtë

In the place of n-words we may find simple indefinites, more precisely the specialized indefinite form for *anybody*, namely *ver/ver-e* (cf. Capidan 1932). In the case of ‘anything’, it is the item *tsë’va/ itjë’va* that occurs with the indefinite interpretation. Simple indefinites are allowed in both negative and other existential contexts, where they are read in the scope of an operator, such as negation, in (6a,a’)-(8a,a’), or interrogative (irrealis), in (6b,b’,b’’)-(8b,b’).

- (6) a. nu ini vEr
 NM come.3sg one/ person
 'Nobody is coming'

- a'. n ɔm vëdz-u-t tsë'va
 NM have.1sg see-Part nothing
 'I did not see anything'
- b. vin-i vër?
 come.3sg anybody
 'Is anybody coming?'
- b'. i ai gri-të o vër?
 him-it have.2sg call-PP Art anybody
 'Did you call anything?'
- b''. ai vëdz-u-t tsë'va?
 have.2sg see-PP anything?
 'Didn't you see anything?' Libofshë
- (7) a. nu ved vɛɛ/ vɛɛ-ɛ
 NM see.1sg anybody.m/f
 'I do not see anybody'
- a'. nu fëts tsi'va
 NM look.at-1sg thing
 'I made nothing'
- b. u s jine vɛɛ?
 Prt Prt come.Subj.3sg anybody
 'Will anybody come?'
- b'. fats tsë'va?
 do.2sg thing?
 'Do you do anything?' Vllehtë
- (8) a. nu ɛst vër
 NM is anybody
 'There is nobody'
- a'. nu ved iŋtsë'va
 NM see.1sg thing
 'I do not see anything'
- b. (ma) jin-i vër / vër ɔm?
 Asp come-3sg anybody
 'Is anybody coming?'
- b'. tihi's-i tsi'va?
 hapen.Past-3sg thing?
 'Did anything happen?' Korça

(9) a. nu ve'dz-u vɛkɛ-dʒej
 NM see. Past-3sg any-thing
 'I saw nothing'

b. nu dau tsi'va a vɛ-k-uj/ vɛ-k-ej
 NM give.1sg anything Prt anybody-Obl.m/f
 'I give nothing to nobody'

c. nu i grɛs a (itʃ)vɛ-k-uj
 NM to.him call.1sg Prt (not)anybody-Obl.m
 'I do not call anybody' Vllehtë

(10) i.	ma	in-i		un?	
	Prt	come-3sg		one?	
		'Is someone coming?'			Libofshë
ii.	mini	ved		un / un-e	
	I	see.1sg		one.m/f	
		'I see someone'			
	mini	ved		tsi'va	
	I	see.1sg		something	
		'I am seeing something'			
	Korça				
iii.	mini	fëts		unë dzej	
	I	do.1sg		something	
		'I do something'			Vllehtë

(11) itʃë'va nu s fets-i
anything NM Refl do.Past-3sg
'Nothing happened'

Vllehte

Hence, we must conclude that the simple indefinite *ver* is associated with a modal operator (question or negation); as expected, in negative contexts the NM is necessary, as with n-words. The indefinite *tsë'va* presents these readings, but it seems also admitted as an epistemic element.

3. Albanian

The comparison with Tosk Albanian highlights important correspondences. As in Aromanian, Albanian n-word are mandatorily combined with the clausal negative marker, namely *nuk/ s/ mos*, which shows strict Negative Concord, regardless of the position of the n-word. In Albanian, n-words are composed of a negative modifier as *mos*, or a minimizer, such as *as* (see Mann 1977), which precedes an indefinite, such as the wh- word *kuf* 'who' or *në* 'one', *neri* 'person', and *gjë* 'thing', according to the local varieties (cf. Savoia 2025). In the variety of Gjirokastrë, in (12), the element *as* combines with the indefinites *neri* 'person' in *as-neri* 'no one', and *gjë* 'thing', in *as-gjë* 'nothing'. (12a, a') illustrate the NM *nuk* in declarative sentences and the NM *mos* in the imperative; (12b, b') and (12c, c') illustrate the n-words in postverbal and preverbal positions respectively.

- | | | | | | | |
|---------|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|---------|--|
| (12) a. | ai | nuk | ε | bë-r-i | atë | |
| | he | NM | it | do-Past-3sg | it | |
| | 'He did not do it' | | | | | |
| a'. | mos | i-a | | jep! | | |
| | NM | him/her-it | | give! | | |
| | 'Do not give it to him/ her!' | | | | | |
| b. | nuk | paɸ | | as-ɲe'ri | | |
| | NM | see.Past.1sg | | nobody | | |
| | 'Nobody saw me' | | | | | |
| b'. | nuk | paɸ | | as-gjë | | |
| | NM | see.Past.1sg | | nothing | | |
| | 'I saw nothing' | | | | | |
| c. | këtu | as-ɲe'ri | nuk | ɸɛh | (as)gjë | |
| | here | nobody | NM | see.3sg | nothing | |
| | 'Here, nobody sees nothing' | | | | | |
| c'. | as-gjë | | nuk ndodh-i | | | |
| | nothing | | NM happen-Past.3sg | | | |
| | 'Nothing happened' | | | | | |
| | Gjirokastrë | | | | | |

Albanian shares with Aromanian the various distributional properties which characterize the occurrence of the negative elements. Notably, both n-words, in (13a), and indefinites, in (13b,c), can occur in preverbal position, where they require the NM.

- (13) a. as-*peri-u* nuk i-a dha-*f*
 nobody-Obl NM him-it give-Past.1sg
 'I did not give it to anybody'
- b. *je'ri* nuk *më* fle-t
 nobodyNM OCl.1sg call.3sg
 'Nobody calls me'
- c. *gjë* nuk ndodh-i
 nothing NM happen-Past.3sg
 'Nothing happened'
- Gjirokastër

Negative Concord applies between the NM on the epistemic verb and the n-word in the dependent clause. Thus, in (14), the n-word must be read in combination with the NM.

- (14) nuk mendo-j *të* takɔ-j (as-)peri
 NM think-1sg Prt meet-1sg nobody
 'I don't think to see anybody'
- Gjirokastër

Simple indefinites are allowed in both negative and other existential contexts, where they are read in the scope of an operator, such as negation, in (15a,a'), or interrogative (irrealis), in (15b,b'). The latter is introduced by prosodic properties, or, optionally, by the particle *a*.

- (15) a. nuk erdh-i *je'ri*
 NM come.Past.3sg one/ person
 'Nobody came'.
- a'. nuk pa-*f* *gjë*
 NM see.Past-1sg thing
 'I saw nothing'
- b. erdh-i *je'ri?*
 come.Past-3sg nobody
 'Did anyone come?'
- b'. ti pe *gjë?*
 you see.Past.2sg thing?
 'Did you see anything?'
- Gjirokastër

We note that Strict-NC is preserved in a part of the Italo-Albanian varieties spoken in Southern Italy, as in that of Chieuti in (4), which applies the same distribution seen above for Gjirokaštër. In other varieties the negative word in preverbal position excludes the NM (cf. section 4). (15'a,a') illustrate the occurrence of the n-word in postverbal position and (15b,b') the preverbal position of the n-word. In both contexts the NM *ngë* occurs.

- (15') a. ngë Joh mos-ja'ri
 NM see.1sg nobody
 'I see nobody'
- a'. ngë Joh mos-gjë
 NM see.1sg nothing
 'I see nothing'
- b. mos-ja'ri ngë më thë're-t
 nobody NM OCl.1sg call-3sg
 'Nobody calls me'
- b'. mos-gjë ngë bëren
 nothing NM make.Past-3pl
 'They made nothing!' Chieuti

Finally, indefinites associated with negation differ from 'somebody/something', in (16i.), where the formative *ndo-* from *në do* 'if one wishes' (Mann 1977, Demiraj 1986) give a epistemic reading referring to the universe of discourse.

- (16) i. pe ndo-jë ?/ ndo jë gjë?
 see.Past.2sg someone?/ something?
 'Did you see someone?/ something?' Gjirokaštër
- ii. vjën ndo-ja'ri?
 come.3sg someone?
 'Is someone coming?' Chieuti

The correspondence between Aromanian and Albanian negation is interesting. In both languages the strict Negative Concord requires that the n-words are always combined with the NMs, respectively *nu* and *nuk/ s/ mos* 'not'. Moreover, we find indefinite forms which can occur in negative contexts, giving rise to negative reading, and in modal contexts, specifically in interrogative sentences. Such indefinites differ from epistemic existential elements like *somebody/ something*'.

4. Syntax of n-words

NC phenomena are a crucial topic discussed in the literature on negation (Chierchia 2013, Zeijlstra 2022, Manzini and Pescarini 2024). The idea that negation is implemented by an overt constituent, for example the clitic *non* in Italian *nu* in Aromanian and *nuk* in Albanian, is the traditional way of dealing with NC. According to Rizzi (1982: 120) the negative clitic, Italian *non* or French *ne*, are the markers of the scope of negation: ‘the scope of a negative quantifier is the S which immediately contains an occurrence of [the marker] construed with the quantifier’. Rizzi separates the ordinary negative marker from the Negative Polarity Items, the n-words, defined negative quantifier-like elements, substantially seen as existential quantifiers (Laka 1990). An important aspect of the variation is that in some languages such as Italian, the NM occurs only if it precedes the n-word, while an n-word in preverbal (subject) position excludes it, as in (18a) vs (18b) (Rizzi 1982: 121).

- (18) a. Mario *non* ha visto *nessuno*
 Mario *neg* has seen *nobody*
 b. *nessuno* ha visto Mario
 nobody has seen Mario

According to Rizzi the structural position of the n-word *nessuno* ‘nobody’ subsumes the scope of negation. The negative clausal operator *neg* is independently realized or is incorporated by the n-word that, in Rizzi, moves to the head *neg*, in (19).

- (19) [*nessuno*_i [+ neg] [*e*_i ha visto Mario]

From a structural point of view, the element on the left fixes the scope of negation by c-commanding the element on the right. Thus, the NM c-commands the negative polarity items at its right, but if the negative argument or adverbial precedes, this relation is no longer available and the NM is not inserted (cf. Manzini and Savoia 2005, section 6.6.3). As for Albanian, Turano (1995, 2000) essentially follows Rizzi in assuming that n-words are negative quantifiers, which must be c-commanded by the scope licenser, i.e. the NM *nuk/ mos*, or the interrogative mood, morphologized or not by the particle *a*. C-command explains doubling and licensing of simple indefinites if preceded by the NM.

Obviously, as noted by Chierchia (2013: 230), this mechanism could also apply to postverbal negative subjects, thus deriving sentences such as Italian **viene nessuno* in the sense ‘nobody comes’. Manzini and Pescarini (2024: 674) criticize, among other aspects of the analysis of Zeijlstra, the distinction between semantic and syntactic negative properties. This appears entirely ad hoc, whereby French *pas* is semantically negative but lacks the feature [uNEG]. By consequence, it combines with *ne* but it is excluded by n-words [uNEG], in (22). In fact, Zeijlstra considers ‘ne’ not a CNM, as it cannot negate by itself, but an element of negative polarity NPI, that is, a word that must be licensed by a negative element, in French *pas* or n-words:

- (22) [Op_{-[iNEG]} je ne_[NPI] mange *pas [_{vp} rien_[uNEG] ‘I eat nothing’
French

According to Chierchia (2013: 234) negative polarity items which block NC are n-words endowed with a negative feature which enters ‘into a concord relation with abstract negation’. The feature [+n-D] of these elements, such as Italian *nessuno*, implies a covert negation, as in (23), where O_{Alt} is a focus operator (interrogative) introducing a scalar reading for indefinites.

- (23) O_{Alt} ¬ [nessuno[+n-D] non [+n-D] ha chiamato ...
‘Nobody called’

Obviously, covert entities end up reproducing exactly the structure with overt doubling as in (20a)!

We pursue the hypothesis that n-words are existential indefinites (Manzini and Savoia 2005, Chierchia 2013), which introduce a variable ‘x’ bound by an existential quantifier in the scope of a modal operator, and sentential negation amounts to closure of the variable ‘by a negated existential operator’ (Acquaviva 1994). We also apply this analysis to the negative marker (NM) and assume that it is itself a type of n-word. Negative operator is, therefore, triggered by the occurrence of n-words in the clause. N-words are indefinite associated with some types of lexical restrictions, expressed in Aromanian by the *nits/nik* element which combines with un ‘one’, and in Albanian by the prefixed element. If we are on the right track, we would expect that NC is the most natural state of things. These elements specify the internal argument of the event; they do not therefore

lexicalize the negative/modal operator, but simply imply its existence, as suggested in the logical form in (24).

- (24) *nu o ved* 'I do not see him' Libofshë
 $\neg \exists x [{}_C [\text{nu } x] [{}_o [{}_{\text{INFL}} \text{ved}]] \dots$

In the case of the cooccurrence of the NM with an n-word in postverbal position, in (25), the NM *nu* 'not' and the n-word *tsë'va* 'nothing' introduce the argumental variables.

- (25) $\neg \exists x [{}_C \text{nu}_x [{}_o \text{ved}_{\text{INFL}} [{}_{\text{VP}} [{}_{\text{VP}} \text{tsë}'\text{va}_x$
 'I do not see anything' Libofshë

Following Chomsky, we exclude head movement, the traditional mechanism of (verb) agreement, as a non-genuine syntactic rule. This sweeps away the cartographic treatments of NC and the probe-goal mechanism triggered by [+/-interpretable] features, as proposed by Zeijlstra (2022). Chomsky's Strong Minimalist Thesis assumes that Internal Merge and External Merge 'implement the simplest structure-building operation', where 'EM is associated with θ -roles and IM with discourse/information-related functions' (Chomsky 2021: 15, 18). Chomsky (2021: 36) relates verb inflectional morphology to the amalgamation operation, where Merge creates inflected verbs [INFL, [v, root]], which realize the properties of INFL in the CP phase. If the objects constructed in syntax are mapped by Transfer operation onto interpretable representations (Chomsky 2015), we conclude that morphology is part of the syntactic computation, and lexical elements are endowed with interpretive content. Agreement manifests the identity between referential features corresponding to the same arguments (Manzini and Savoia 2018).

5. Aspects of Negative Concord

N-words trigger the D(ownward)-E(haustification) procedure of the referential domain (Chierchia 2013: 8), i.e. the search for meaning in a context of scalar interpretation. This means that indefinites are associated with a range between a given quantity and the minimum, namely nothing (independently of negation). Negative words grammaticalize this search, orienting it towards the minimum value of the scale. With some n-words

An interesting property shared by Aromanian and Albanian is to have at disposal a set of indefinites which in negative contexts activate the end-of-scale reading, but differently from n-words such as *nobody* and *nothing*, also admit a non-end-scale exhaustification in the scope of other operators which open presuppositional alternatives, such as interrogatives. They differ from indefinites such as *somebody/ something*, which presuppose the existence of a referent. Thus, Aromanian *nits(i)un* and *nikun* 'nobody' support an end-of-scale exhaustification, so triggering the negative operator to fulfil this property. By contrast, simple indefinites such as *ver* 'anybody' or *tsë'va* 'anything' present the end-of-scale interpretation in negative sentences and a graduate exhaustification in contexts of focus/ interrogative. The same organization characterizes Albanian, where unlike n-words like *as-je'ri* 'nobody', limited to negative reading, indefinites like *je'ri o gjë* admit the two reading according to the negative or interrogative context. The specialized nature of these indefinites, substantially required to be read in the scope of a modal Operator, is the crucial aspect of these elements.

In Aromanian and in Albanian n-words occur both in postverbal and preverbal position, as shown in (1a,b)-(6a,b). In these languages the postverbal position of the subject is generally adopted, on a par with many Romance languages, for non-topical subjects, typically the indefinites. This means that the subject is E-Merged within the Spell-out domain at the vP phase, in (26a). No special condition is requested, and some functional property, e.g. weak focus or discourse-linking, may be implemented at the semantic level. In the sentence *nu in-i nitsun* 'Nobody is coming', *nitsun* 'nobody' is inserted in the vP Phase, in (26a), and agrees with the verb in INFL, in (26b); the NM is merged in CP in (26c), where the variables coincide in the properties introduced by the verb. The derivational requirements are fulfilled, and the sentence is understood.

- (26) a. ($\neg \exists x,y$) [(C) [NM [INFL [_{vP} DP (cf. (3a))
 nu_x in-i_y nitsun_{φx} Libofššë
 b. < ini_φ, nitsun_φ > → [_{INFL_φ} ini [_{nitsun}]]
 c. < nu_x, [_{INFL} ini [_{nitsun_x}]] > → [_{CP} nu [_{INFL} ini [_{nitsun}]]]

The insertion of the NM follows the usual procedure whereby it is selected in the workspace. The only requirement concerns its preverbal position on the basis of the selection restriction in (27). The NM *nu* precedes the verb in INFL and the OCl. We can think that a simple positioning requirement such as (27) is generally applied in varieties with Strict-NC.

$$(27) \quad \text{nu} \longleftrightarrow _ (\text{OCl}) \text{INFL}$$

The n-word and indefinites occur freely, as we expect if indefinites are degree scale DE elements independently of the NM (Chierchia 2013). The negative reading is satisfied both by the specialized n-word *nitsun/ nikun* ‘nobody’, and by indefinites such as *tsë'va* and *ver*, both in postverbal and preverbal position. All these elements have indefiniteness properties which must be interpreted in the scope of a negative or interrogative operator to obtain correct reading⁴. We note that in Aromanian the alternation between n-words and simple indefinites is excluded in the interrogative contexts with indefinite reading. More precisely, n-words require *nu* in negative questions, (28a)-(29a). Differently from Italian *nessuno* ‘nobody’ or *niente* ‘nothing’, Aromanian n-words cannot occur in the scope of the interrogative operator, where only indefinites are possible, as in (28b)-(29b). Of course, *ver* and *tsë'va* are also admitted in interrogative negative contexts, in (28b)-(29b).

- (28) a. *nu* *ai* *vidz-u-t* *nitsun/ver / tsë'va?*
 NM have.2sg see-PP nobody /anybody/
 anything
 ‘Did not you see anybody/ anything?’
 b. *ai* *vidz-u-t* *ver / tsë'va?*
 have.2sg see-PP anybody/ anything
 ‘Have you seen anybody/ anything?’ Libofshë
- (29) a. *nu* *vin-i* *nikun / ver?*
 NM come-3sg nobody /anybody
 ‘Does not anyone come?’
 b. *arë* *vin-i-t* *vεε?*

⁴ The connection between the Romanian indefinite *vreun* ‘any’ and the negative and interrogative contexts is highlighted by Maiden et al. (2021: 187) from a historical perspective. Donka (2013: 225) in turn characterizes *vreun* as an existential element that must be authorized by an operator who introduces alternative interpretations.

have.3sg	come-PP	anybody	
‘Did anybody come?’			Vllehtë

Consider now the context where the n-word precedes the verb. This order is discussed in the literature in relation to the languages in which the preverbal position of an n-word, typically the subject, blocks the insertion of the NM, as Italian in (27). Both Aromanian and Albanian do not differentiate between pre- and postverbal position, requiring the NM in any case. However, examples where the n-word in first position excludes the NM have been provided by my informant of Libofshë (also based on a specific request in this regard). It is interesting to note that old Romanian documents this possibility, as discussed in Manea (2016). Thus, even if we generally have examples such as (30a,b), variably structures as (30a’,a”,b’) emerge.

- | | | | | | | |
|---------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|
| (30) a. | nitsun
Nobody | nu
NM | ma
Asp | in-i
come-3sg | | |
| | ‘Nobody is coming’ | | | | | |
| b. | o
Prt.Obl | nitsun
nobody | nu
NM | i
him-it | om
have.1sg | da-t
give-PP |
| | ‘I have given it to nobody’ | | | | | |
| a’. | nitsun
nobody | mi
OCl | | ved
see.3sg | | |
| | ‘Nobody sees me’ | | | | | |
| a” | nitsun
nobody | in-i
come-3sg | ya
Prep | kas-a
house-Def | mεu
my.fsg | |
| | ‘Nobody comes to my house’ | | | | | |
| b’. | o
Prt.Obl | nitsun
nobody | (nu)
NM | i
him | am
have.1sg | gri-t
call-PP |
| | ‘I did not call anybody | | | | | Libofshë |

The non-strict NC also characterizes some Italo-Albanian dialects (Arbëresh), which can be assumed to have borrowed this phenomenon from the Italian contact varieties. This is the case, for instance, of the Arbëresh varieties of S. Benedetto Ullano, in northern Calabria, and Barile, in northern Lucania⁵. In these dialects, the n-words in postverbal position

⁵ Partial negative concord also characterizes the Arbëresh variety of Piana degli Albanesi, in Sicily. As in the Arbëresh dialects exemplified in the text, a negative subject in preverbal position excludes the NM (Garzonio and Messina 2023).

in (31a) combine with the NM *nëng/ ëng*, while the n-word in preverbal position exclude the NM, as in (31b,c).

- (31) i. a. *ngë më thërre-t mos-jë'ri*
 NM me call-3sg nobody
 'Nobody calls me'
- b. *mos-jë'ri më thërre-t*
 nobodyOCl.1sg call-3sg
 'Nobody calls me'
- c. *mos-jë'ri-u i-a dhe-v-a*
 nobody-Obl it-him/her give-Past-1sg
 'I haven't given it to anyone' S. Benedetto
- ii. a. *ëng erdh-i (mös-)ja'ri*
 NM come.Past-3sg nobody
 'I see nobody'
- b. *mös-ja'ri erdhi*
 nobody come.Past-3sg
 'Nobody has come!'
- c. *mös-ja'ri-u-t i-a dhe-j gjë*
 nobody-Obl-Def him/her-it give.Past-1sg thing
 'I didn't give anything to anyone' Barile

We underline that thematic and case properties don't interact with NC. In other words, any preverbal n-word, i.e. both subjects and objects in the highlighted/ topical initial position may exclude the NM (cf. Chierchia 2013: 237).

What is the syntactic status of the n-word in first position?. Excluding raising to Spec-XP, Chomsky (2024: 7 ff) proposes that I(nternal)-M(erge) and Copy can deal with elements theta-marked occurring in a non-thematic position at the edge of the phase, where the two copies are in a cc-configuration. The element at the phase edge is I-Merged, and boxed, i.e. it is accessible for interpretation at the Conceptual-Intentional system but it is segregated with respect to the derivation.

[...] the element E is IM-ed to the phase edge as being put in a box, separate from the ongoing derivation D. E must however be accessible to D at later phase levels for interpretation at the interfaces [...] it is immune to theta-marking (Chomsky 2024: 8)

Hence, *clausal* categories such as ‘force- and information-related (interrogative, topic, focus)’ are associated with IM. IM doesn’t distinguish between A- and A’-movement, DP-INFL vs [_C DP, and takes place at vP- or CP edge-phase, also deriving (quantified/topicalized) first position subjects and IM-ed boxed DPs ‘will be accessed for instructions at later phases’ (Chomsky 2024: 5, 9).

As we proposed in the discussion around (27), in varieties with Strict Negative Concord the NM is however inserted in negative sentences. This appears the natural state of things, in the sense that in languages endowed with a NM specialized for negative reading, we expect that it occurs. What does the block of doubling depend on? All preceding analyses imply a sort of mechanism whereby the element in first position also subsumes the role of the NM, in the sense that the element in first position is sufficient to manifest the scope of negation (cf. Manzini and Savoia 2005, Manzini and Pescarini 2025). However, we will take a simpler route, where the preverbal subject is in a topical/focal position, something like an evidenced element, typically a discourse-linked topic, as supported by judgements of the informants (we will take up this point again in the following section).

If so, this can be referred to the Chomsky’s IM formulation, insofar as the DP or PP in preverbal position is inserted in a non-thematic position where it is interpreted as a clausal category. As discussed around (27), in varieties such as Aromanian and Albanian, with Strict-NC, this position is compatible with the occurrence of the NM. Thus, in sentences *nitsun nu ma ini* ‘Nobody is coming’ (Libofshë), or *asnjë'ri nuk me thëriti* ‘Nobody called me’ (Gjirokastër), the n-word is IM-boxed at the CP-edge, while the copy *nitsun* or *as-një'ri* is deleted by Economy. EM introduces the theta-marked EA as the agreement in INFL, as in (32).

- (32) $(\neg \exists x,y)$ [_{DP} [_C NM [_{Asp} [_{INFL} [_{vp} DP
 nitsun_y nu_x ma ini_φ nitsun_y Libofshë

In the varieties in (30a',b') and (31), like in Italian, the insertion of the NM is excluded by an n-word in preverbal position. We conclude that these languages share the restriction in (27) with the strict-NC languages, i.e. the basic condition to trigger negation, but their n-words are subcategorized for the NM, as in (33), whereby n-words require the NM. We could conceptualize this as a sort of deficiency of n-words.

- (33) n-word $\longleftrightarrow$ / NM

Be it as it may, in the other contexts, n-words are susceptible either of an indefinite interpretation (in the scope of an interrogative) or of a negative reading. Naturally, in this second case the absence of the NM is the consequence of the preverbal position. In fact, we can deal with this occurrence as an IM position, segregated from ongoing derivation and boxed at the edge of C, where it is accessible at later phase levels for interpretation. It is of note that the subject's position is vacuously differentiated from the focal/topical one as in the traditional approach, if IM can target the vP edge independently of the subjecthood of the boxed DP. The position in the matrix is reached by externalization criteria. Therefore, the same interpretation at interfaces is available. Then, in the Arbëresh or Aromanian varieties with Italian-like Non-strict-NC, both the preverbal subject and topicalized elements exclude doubling, as in (34):

- (34) $(\neg \exists x)$ $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{DP} \\ \text{nitsun} \\ \text{mos-jë}'\text{ri} \end{array} \right]_{\text{C}} \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{INFL} \\ \text{ini} \\ \text{më thërre-t} \end{array} \right]_{\text{vP}} \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{DP} \\ \text{nitsun} \\ \text{mos-jë}'\text{ri} \end{array} \right] \text{Libofshë S.Benedetto}$

We can wonder why the topic-like position of n-words is able to trigger negation. The immediate answer is that 'nobody' and 'nothing' are lexically restricted to an end-to-scale DE, evoking negation.

Indefinites are existential elements free to occur in the theta domain within VP or in boxed domain, in interrogative and negative contexts. The rest of the work is done by interpretation at CI, in (35):

- (35) $(\neg \exists x / O_{\text{Alt}})$ $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{(NM)} \\ \text{'(nu)'} \end{array} \right]_{\text{C}} \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{INFL}_{\phi} \\ \text{vini} \end{array} \right]_{\text{vP}} \left[\begin{array}{c} \text{DP} \\ \text{vër}_x \end{array} \right] \text{'Nobody comes/ does anybody come?'} \text{Libofshë}$

The comparison with Albanian and its varieties has allowed us to highlight some important properties of n-words and indefinites in negative contexts.

6. A short comparison and some conclusions

The data we have examined show that the occurrence of an n-word in preverbal position can exclude the NM and that the preverbal element seems to imply the IM to the edge of the phase CP. To briefly deepen these

points, we take into consideration the negation in some Romance varieties⁶. In the Romansh variety of Donat (Grisons), negation is activated by a negative minimizer, precisely *betf* (< *bukka), inserted in postverbal position in declarative sentences, as in (36).

- | | | | | | |
|------|----------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| (36) | jou | bef | betf | (vep) | |
| | I | drink | Min/NM | wine | |
| | 'I don't drink wine' | | | | Donat |

Minimizers may be understood as lexical elements introducing a minimal quantity (Garzonio and Poletto 2008: 60 ff.), which in some languages preserve a 'part-whole' relation, [$\subseteq$], with the indefinite, as in French in (37) (Baldi and Savoia 2022, Savoia and Baldi 2023).

- | | | | | |
|------|----------------------|-------------|------------|--------|
| (37) | Je ne veux | pas | de cadeaux | |
| | I not want | Min(imizer) | of gifts | |
| | 'I don't want gifts' | | | French |

In Romansh, the negative minimizer is excluded by n-words, as in (38a,b).

- | | | | | | |
|---------|-------------------|--------|---------|---------|-------|
| (38) a. | iA | e | va'n-eu | nij | |
| | SCIExpl | be.3sg | come-PP | nobody | |
| | 'Nobody has come' | | | | |
| b. | nij | (k) | e | va'n-eu | |
| | nobody | Comp | be.3sg | come-PP | |
| | 'Nobody has come' | | | | Donat |

This distribution might suggest that minimizers have different properties than clausal NMs, insofar as they favor complementary distribution. In fact, this idea is not supported by clear evidence. Contrary, there are languages where exclusion involves also the NM, as for example in the Lombard-Alpine dialect of Soglio (Grisons), where the n-word can exclude both the NM *nu* and the minimizer *mia*, as shown by the comparison between (39a) and (39b). On the other hand, in many varieties with minim-

⁶ Again, I thank with gratitude my clever native informants: Bartolomé Tschärner for Donat, Stefania Roulet for Sarre, Bruna and Maria Ravicchio for Cantoira and Fiorella Willy for Soglio.

izers, these can combine with n-words, as in the Franco-Provençal of Sarre (Aosta Valley), where the minimizer *pa*, in (40a), also occurs with n-words, as in (40b). In other Franco-Provençal varieties, such as that of Cantoira, the coexistence of the NM and minimizer is possible as long as they are in separate Spell-Out domains, as in (40a), while it is excluded if the n-word is preverbal, as in (41b).

- (39) a. i (nu) a (mia) vd-ü nagyŋ / nagot
 SCI NM have.1sg Min see-PP nobody/ nothing
 'I didn't see anybody/ anything'
- b. i a vd-ü nagyŋ / nagot
 SCI have.1sgsee-PP nobody/ nothing
 'I didn't see anybody/ anything' Soglio
- (40) a. lo vɛj-o pa
 OCl see-1sg Min
 'I don't see him'
- b. vɛj-o (pa) ɲũ / rě
 see-1sg Min nobody/ nothing
 'I don't see anybody/ anything' Sarre
- (41) a. e j ě-t ɲiŋ vi'ɲ-ü ɲüŋ
 SCLExp Loc have-3sg Min come-PPnobody
 'Nobody has come'
- b. ɲüŋ e j ě-t vi'ɲ-ü
 nobody SCLExp Loc have-3sg come-PP
 'Nobody has come' Cantoira

A possible conclusion is that minimizers and NMs have the same nature⁷, that is, they are nominal elements that introduce a variable bound by an existential quantifier into the scope of a modal operator, associated with the internal argument of the verb (Manzini and Savoia 2005: § 6.6.3), as in (41).

(41) [_N minimal degree [x]]

⁷ This is not unexpected, because NMs are originally a type of indefinite or other types of quantifiers, as Latin (and Italian) *non* from *ne+oīno* 'non uno', or Albanian *nuk* from *ne+qu* 'and not' (Mann 1977).

The exclusion caused by the preverbal position of the n-word, as in (34), is explained by the “boxed” position of the n-word, implying a derivation in which negation is not implemented by the NM. In (38) the n-word replaces the NM, i.e. the minimizer *betf*, triggering the negative reading regardless of its position. The simplest solution is that in the languages where the clause negative marker (NM/ Min) is excluded by n-words, there is no selection restriction like (27).

However, the examples in (38) and (41) highlight another aspect. The negative structures show the expletive SCL, *ič* in Donat, *e i* in Cantoira (cf. Manzini and Savoia 2005: §2.6), where the n-word is treated as an indefinite in a focused position. Therefore, the n-word is not treated as a true subject, independently of its position in the sentence. A possible analysis is that in these sentences the n-word is IM-ed in a segregate position, and the syntactic subject is realized by the expletive, as in (42a,b).

- (42) a. $(\neg \exists x)$ $\text{njn}_{\text{x}} [\text{CP } e \text{ i } \text{et}_{\text{infl}\phi} [\text{vP } \text{vi}'\text{nü}_{\phi} \dots \text{'Nobody has come'}$
 b. $(\neg \exists x)$ $[\text{CP } e \text{ i } \text{et}_{\text{infl}\phi} [\text{vP } \text{vi}'\text{nü}_{\phi} [\text{DP } \text{ny}\eta_{\text{x}} [\text{VP } \text{Cantoira}$

Concluding, let's consider the alignment between phases and the elements merged in Spell-out domains. As schematized in (43a), the fully inflected n-word is associated with the Spell-Out domain in vP, while C-IN-FL hosts the non-inflected n-words *nuk/s/mos*. Otherwise, the inflected n-words can occur as non-derivational IM elements, in (43b).

- (43) IM $[\text{C}$ NM INFL || (IM) $[\text{vP}$ $[\text{vP}$
 a. nuk_{ϕ} *verb* $_{\phi}$ n-word $_{\phi}$ /indefinite $_{\phi}$
 b. n-word $_{\phi}$ /indefinite $_{\phi}$ nuk_{ϕ} Gjirokastër

This asymmetry is generally manifested in the distribution of agreeing lexical elements in Spell-Out domains (Manzini et al. 2022), where externalization is driven by *Elsewhere*. The distribution of n-words may be expressed in (44), at least as a first generalization.

- (44) Asymmetry in NC
 a. Partial negative agreement with the NM in CP: the lexical subject is unrealized or IM-ed
 a. Full negative agreement (inflected n-words) in vP

Regarding the distribution of NCs, we have elements to conclude that negative doubling is free: n-words are a type of indefinites postulating

negation and, consequently, there is no implicated requirement limiting doubling. There are languages in which n-words are inserted by IM and interpreted as segregated from derivation, with clausal effects.

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ISBN 979-12-5965-597-4



9791259655974