Negative concord in English and Romance: syntax-morphology interface conditions on the expression of negation
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1 Negative Concord

1.1 Introduction

Negative Concord (NC, henceforth) is one of the various labels that have been used in the literature\(^1\) to describe the fact that, in some languages, negation is semantically interpreted only once even when more than one apparently negative element occurs in a sentence. This is illustrated in (1), where the sentential negative marker and n-words are in italics.

\begin{enumerate}
  \item \textit{a.} \textit{No ha trobat ningú.} (Catalan)
      
      not has found n-person
      ‘(S)he hasn’t found anyone’
  \item \textit{b.} \textit{Non ha mangiato niente} (Italian)
      
      not has eaten n-thing
      ‘(S)he hasn’t eaten anything’
  \item \textit{c.} Marija ne voli \textit{ni(t)koga} (Serbian/Croatian)\(^2\)
      
      Mary not loves n-person-ACC
      ‘Mary doesn’t love anyone’
\end{enumerate}

The term \textit{n-word} was first introduced in Laka (1990: 105) to refer to a set of elements such as \textit{nadie} ‘n-person’, \textit{nada} ‘n-thing’ and \textit{ningún} ‘any’ which seem to behave as negative polarity items (NPIs) in certain contexts, but as universal negative quantifiers in some others. In the examples in (1), for example, the sentential negative marker is obligatory, thus indicating that post-verbal n-words are dependent elements very much in the same way as NPIs are. Conversely, the examples in (2) show that n-words seem to behave as negative quantifiers when occurring in a pre-verbal position.

\(^{1}\) Other terms that have been used are \textit{double attraction} (Jespersen 1917), \textit{neg incorporation} (Klima 1964) and \textit{negative attraction} (Labov 1972b). Den Besten (1986) introduced a distinction between \textit{negative concord proper} and \textit{negative spread}. While the former involves the co-occurrence of sentential negative markers and n-words, in the latter two (or more) n-words co-occur in the absence of the sentential negative marker.

\(^{2}\) Example taken from Progovac (1994: 3).
(2) a. *Ninguém viu o Pedro* (Portuguese)³
   n-person saw the Pedro
   ‘Nobody saw Pedro’

   b. *Nadie compró el periódico* (Spanish)
   n-person bought the newspaper
   ‘Nobody bought the newspaper’

   c. *Senki sem jött el sehova (sem)* (Hungarian)⁴
      n-person-NOM came PREF nowhere-to SEM
   ‘Nobody came along anywhere’

As shown in (3), the phenomenon under study is widespread. NC is not only observed in Romance and Slavic languages, but also in Afrikaans, West Flemish and Non-Standard English, among others.

(3) a. *Ons gooi niks weg nie* (Afrikaans)⁵
   we throw n-thing away not
   ‘We don’t throw anything away’

   b. …*da Valère niemand nie (en)-kent* (West Flemish)⁶
   that Valère n-person not NEG-know
   ‘…that Valère doesn’t know anybody’

   c. *Maria didn’t say nothing to nobody* (Non-Standard English)⁷

Not all languages behave in the same way with respect to NC, however. While in some languages it is required that n-words obligatorily co-occur with the sentential negative marker, in others there is a very intriguing asymmetry between post-verbal and pre-verbal n-words. While the former need to be licensed by the presence of the negative marker in languages such as Spanish and Italian, the latter cannot appear together with the negative marker for a negative concordant reading to obtain. These two types of languages are very often referred to as Strict and Non-Strict NC languages. They are exemplified in (4) and (5) respectively.

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³ Example taken from Isac (2002: 119).
⁵ Example taken from Den Besten (1986: 202).
Strict NC language

(4) a. *(Nie) zniszczyłem niczyjej książki (Polish)8
    not destroyed-1.SG.MSC n-person’s book
    ‘I didn’t destroy anybody’s book’

    b. Nikt *(nie) dał Marysi książkę
        n-person-NOM not gave Mary-DAT book-GEN
        ‘Nobody gave Mary a/the book’

Non-Strict NC language

(5) a. *(No) ha visto a nadie. (Spanish)
    not has seen to n-person
    ‘He hasn’t seen anybody’

    b. Nadie (*no) compró el periódico
        n-person not bought the newspaper
        ‘Nobody bought the newspaper’

In addition, in a language such as Catalan, both types of NC seem to co-occur. As shown by the examples in (6), while the sentential negative marker is obligatory with post-verbal n-words, it is optional when n-words occur pre-verbally in NC constructions. This issue is discussed in depth in chapter 5, which is devoted to the characterisation of n-words and NC in Romance.

(6) a. *(No) ha comprat res.
    not has bought n-thing
    ‘He didn’t buy anything’

    b. Ningú (*no) ha telefonat
        n-person not has called
        ‘Nobody called’

The phenomenon of NC constitutes a problem both for semanticists and for syntacticians: as has been noted in the literature (Ladusaw 1992; Giannakidou 2000), NC poses a puzzle for compositionality, which requires the meaning of a phrase to be constructed out of the meaning of its words. Crucially, the central question is: if it is assumed that n-words bear some kind of negative import, why is

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negation interpreted only once when n-words co-occur with sentential negation or other n-words?

Such a problem does not arise if, by contrast, n-words are characterised as non-negative in nature and only the negative marker is considered semantically negative. However, an account of n-words as non-negative seems to be threatened by cases such as (5b), where it is not obvious where the negative meaning comes from.

Apart from the inherent (non-)negative nature of n-words, another issue that has been thoroughly debated is their quantificational nature, with four main positions guiding the discussion. While for some scholars n-words are universal quantifiers (Zanuttini 1991; Haegeman and Zanuttini 1991; Haegeman 1995; Giannakidou 2000), others claim that n-words are polarity items with no intrinsic negative meaning (Bosque 1980; Laka 1990; Progovac 1994). A third trend defends the view that n-words are indefinites with no quantificational force on their own (Acquaviva 1993, 1997; Ladusaw 1992, 1994; Giannakidou and Quer 1997; Zeijlstra 2004) and, finally, other scholars such as Herburger (2001) argue in favour of n-words being lexically ambiguous between NPIs and negative quantifiers.

A number of hybrid proposals, which combine elements from different perspectives such as Suñer (1995) and Rowlett (1998) are also discussed. The intricacies of each of these analyses are addressed in section 1.2.

1.2 Previous analyses of NC

The study of NC has always been surrounded by a great deal of controversy which has been carried over to the present day. As is reflected in the next subsections, two issues have traditionally been at the heart of the research on NC: whether n-words are intrinsically negative or not and what their quantificational status is. Different answers to these two separate questions and the way these answers are combined result in various theoretical accounts of NC and the nature of n-words.

Some of these analyses are diametrically opposed, indeed. For example, the assumption that n-words are quantificational and negative at the same time (see subsection 1.2.1.1) results in an analysis that is at odds with those that endorse the view that n-words are non-quantificational and non-negative (see subsection 1.2.2). To further complicate the picture, if one takes into account that the two central questions are independent from one another, a number of intermediate or mixed positions can also be defended. In subsection 1.2.1.2, for instance, n-words are assumed to be quantificational but non-negative.
Finally, a new line of research opened thanks to Kamp’s (1981) and Heim’s (1982) concept of *indefinite*, which is an expression that, not being quantificational in nature, can acquire quantifier features from other elements in the sentence. Some linguists tried to shed some light on the disconcerting syntactic behaviour of n-words by putting forward accounts of n-words as indefinites, which, combined with the negativity issue, result in two more views entering the debate; namely, n-words as non-negative indefinites (see 1.2.3.1) and n-words as negative indefinites (see subsection 1.2.3.2)\(^9\).

### 1.2.1 N-words as universal quantifiers

#### 1.2.1.1 N-words as negative quantifiers

Zanuttini (1991) and Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991) analyse n-words as universal quantifiers that are inherently negative. N-words are assumed to bear a [NEG] formal feature that needs to be checked\(^{10}\) under a Specifier-Head configuration in order for the derivation not to crash. This requirement is imposed by the NEG Criterion, a principle of well-formedness at LF\(^{11}\).

Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991) define the NEG-Criterion as an instantiation of Rizzi’s (1991) and Haegeman’s (1992) AFFECT Criterion, which regulates the distribution of elements that bear scope. The AFFECT Criterion, stated in (7), applies to lexical items which carry features that need to be checked against features of functional categories.

(7) **The AFFECT Criterion**

\[\text{a. An [AFFECTIVE] operator must be in a Spec-Head configuration with an [AFFECTIVE] Xº.}\]

\(^9\) The sections that follow presuppose some basic knowledge of the core components of the generative model of grammar assumed in the Principles and Parameters approach of the 1980s and 1990s and the Minimalist Program. Any lack of familiarity with the technical terms used in the remainder of the chapter can be remedied by reading chapter 2 before covering sections 1.2.1 to 1.3 in this chapter.

\(^{10}\) Feature-checking is what motivates movement in the Principles and Parameters approach. This notion is reformulated as feature-matching and valuation in the Minimalist Program.

\(^{11}\) LF stands for Logical Form and is one of the two levels of representation that exist as part of the generative procedure that is responsible for the derivation of linguistic expressions. LF is where the structural part of the meaning of a linguistic expression is mapped in the form of instructions for the systems of thought to interpret it (see chapter 2 for a comprehensive description of the generativist model of grammar).
When the formal feature involved is [NEG], the AFFECT Criterion is more specifically referred to as the NEG Criterion. This is formalised in (8), and can be considered a subcase of the condition in (7). In order to satisfy the NEG Criterion, n-words are assumed to move to Spec, NegP either overtly or covertly, i.e. either before or after Spell-Out.

(8) The NEG Criterion
   a. A NEG operator must be in a Spec-Head configuration with an Xº [NEG];
   b. An Xº [NEG] must be in a Spec-Head configuration with a NEG operator.

(Haegeman and Zanuttini 1991: 244)

The NEG Criterion is modelled along the lines of the WH-Criterion in (9), which is another instantiation of the AFFECT Criterion in (7) applied to WH-elements. According to this condition, WH-elements such as *who* and *what* undergo fronting in WH-questions for feature-checking purposes either before or after Spell-Out.

(9) The WH-Criterion
   a. A WH-operator must be in a Spec-Head configuration with an Xº [WH];

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12 The distinction between overt and covert movement no longer exists in the most recent version of the Minimalist Program. Rather, movement must take place within a strong phase before it is handed out to the phonological component to be Spelled-Out (see chapter 2 for details).

13 Data from West Flemish have been taken to be strong evidence in favour of the need for a Specifier-Head relationship to be established between n-words and their licensors in NC structures. As shown by the examples in (1), in West Flemish NC only obtains if the n-word scopes over the sentential negation. Otherwise, a Double Negation reading arises.

(1) a. …da Valère niemand nie kent. (West Flemish)
    that Valère n-person not knows
    ‘… that Valère does not know anybody.’

b. …da Valère nie niemand kent.
    that Valère not n-person knows
    ‘… that Valère does not know nobody.’ (Double Negation reading)
b. An X° [WH] must be in a Spec-Head configuration with a WH-operator.

It is assumed that WH-elements are positively specified with a [WH] feature that needs to be checked against the [WH] feature of the functional category C(omplementiser) under a Specifier-Head relationship. Haegeman (1995) outlines four pieces of evidence in favour of treating WH-structures and negation along the same lines. First, both WH-elements and negation have the ability to license NPIs such as anyone or anything, as illustrated in (10) and (11).

(10) a. Did you see anyone?
   b. I did not see anyone.
   c. *I saw anyone.

(11) a. Who said anything?
   b. No one said anything.
   c. *I said anything.

(Haegeman 1995:70)

Secondly, she observes that subject-auxiliary inversion is triggered in both WH-constructions and structures with fronted negation. This is shown in (12).

14 There is an asymmetry between WH- and negative constituents, as Haegeman (1995) acknowledges and discusses. While sentence-initial WH-constituents always trigger inversion, not all sentence-initial negative constituents do so. Compare (1a) and (1b), from Haegeman (1995: 71 and 72).

(1) a. Not often does Jack attend parties.
   b. Not long ago, it rained.

Haegeman argues that (1b) is not interpreted as a negative sentence—a term that she uses in an intuitive way. Evidence for this claim comes from the failure of expressions such as not long ago, not far away and in no small measure to be coordinated with a tag containing neither, which is used as a diagnostic for negativity.

(2) a. Not often does Jack attend parties, and neither does Bill.
   b. *Not long ago, John bought a house, and neither did Bill.

The type of negation that triggers inversion is referred to as sentential negation, while the type of expressions in (1b) are considered 'local negation' or constituent negation. WH-constructions are analogous to sentential negation.
A third argument for a uniform treatment of WH-constructions and negation stems from the observation that both structures introduce inner island effects, where an intervening operator in an A-bar position bans movement out of an A-bar position. As seen in (13b), when negation is inserted, it blocks long construal of the adjunct as they know.

(13)  a. Bill is here, as they know.
     b. *Bill is here, as they don’t know.

Finally, according to Haegeman (1995), the similarity between readings of multiple WH-expressions and NC supports the claim that WH-constructions pattern with negation. As illustrated in (14a), two occurrences of WH-words in a single sentence are only represented once at LF: a single WH-operator binds two variables. Likewise, in (14b), multiple occurrences of negative expressions receive only a single negative interpretation at LF.

(14)  a. Qui disait quoi ? (French)
     who said what
     For which x, y [x: a person; y: a thing] [x said y]
     
     b. Personne ne disait rien
     n-person not said n-thing
     ‘No one said anything’
     No x, y [x: a person; y: a thing] [x said y]

At least the first three pieces of evidence that Haegeman (1995) discusses have been counterargued in the literature. It has been shown that while it is true that WH-constructions and negation share some semantic and syntactic properties, these are not exclusive to these two constructions, and may actually follow from more general semantic constraints (Giannakidou 1997, 1999; Zeijlstra 2004). Thus, a uniform syntactic treatment of WH-structures and negation is not fully motivated.

In particular, Giannakidou (1997) discusses Haegeman’s (1995) second argument and shows that the similarity between WH- and negation inversion is not found consistently across languages, but may exist to the extent that both constructions can
trigger inversion in circumstances that may be the same for certain language groups. She points out that not all languages that show WH-inversion also have inversion in negative structures, as is the case of Spanish and Greek. Besides, there are languages that do not have WH-inversion at all. Therefore, the fact that in a given language both WH-constructions and negation trigger subject-auxiliary inversion might be coincidental to a certain extent: the syntactic similarity between the two structures is probably due to the fact that similar feature-checking requirements are at work.

Giannakidou (1997) further argues that WH-inversion is unmarked, while negative inversion is marked. Unlike WH-words, which move directly to Spec, CP, it is assumed that n-words in negative inversion structures move from Spec, NegP to Spec, CP after topicalisation takes place. Therefore, subject-auxiliary inversion after negative fronting follows from applying the NEG Criterion after topicalisation so that the n-word is in a Spec-Head relation with a negative element in the Cº head.

Concerning Haegeman’s (1995) first and third arguments, namely the ability to license NPIs, and the fact that they both introduce island effects, Zeijlstra (2004: 197) argues that they follow from the circumstance that both NPI licensors and island introducers are non-veridical, which is precisely a semantic feature that both WH-constructions and negation share. Therefore, the fact that both interrogative elements and negation can license NPIs and introduce island effects does not justify a uniform syntactic treatment of these constructions. Zeijlstra (2004) also mentions another difference between WH-constructions and NC: while NC is clause bound, WH-structures with more than one WH-word are not, which significantly discourages a unified analysis of WH- and negation.

The NEG Criterion accounts for how n-words are licensed in the syntax. However, both n-words and the sentential negative marker have been assumed to be semantically negative (i.e. they both carry a [NEG] feature). The fact that negation is interpreted only once in NC structures still remains unexplained. Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991: 246-247) postulate a process of negative absorption, referred to as *Neg-factorisation* which is assumed to apply at LF. Regulated by the NEG Criterion, such an operation allegedly cancels the negative meaning of several raised quantifiers that are under the scope of a single negative operator.

The assumption that n-words are inherently negative by virtue of containing a [NEG] feature has been very often under attack. If n-words are semantically negative, the prediction is that they should be able to express sentential negation on their own in all contexts, which is disconfirmed by the available data. Consider, for example, the Catalan pair in (15).

(15) a. Si et demanen res, no contestis. (Catalan)
   if to-you ask-3.pl n-thing not answer-2.sg.subj
   ‘If they ask you anything, don’t answer’
b. Si et demanen alguna cosa, no contestis.
   if to-you ask-3.PL something not answer-2.SG.SUBJ
   ‘If they ask you anything, don’t answer’

The example in (15b) shows that the n-word res ‘n-thing’ can be replaced by the non-negative item alguna cosa ‘something’ without changing the meaning in a conditional context, thus providing evidence against the inherent negativity of n-words. Moreover, the approach which treats n-words as universal quantifiers also faces problems in accounting for the fact that n-words seem to behave as existential quantifiers in post-verbal NC constructions and in non-negative contexts such as the examples in (15).

A very recent reformulation of Haegeman and Zanuttini’s (1991) approach is found in Watanabe (2004), who argues that NC should be embedded into the general theory of feature-checking. As a novelty, he claims that checking of the negative feature that n-words carry is triggered by an uninterpretable focus feature that n-words bear. In line with Chomsky (1995, 1998), he further assumes that feature-checking involves copying of features onto the Probe. Although Chomsky abandons this idea in later work (Chomsky 2000, 2001 and 2005), Watanabe (2004) shows that it can account for Neg-factorisation. The evidence he uses to defend feature-copying as a mechanism that makes Neg-factorisation possible is drawn from an analysis of elliptical answers in line with Merchant’s (2001).

Watanabe (2004) argues that any analysis that treats n-words as non-negative ultimately faces a dead end in not being able to successfully account for ellipsis phenomena. For instance, in Giannakidou’s (2000) account (see subsection 1.2.1.2 for a discussion of it), n-words in elliptical answers cannot contribute the negative meaning of the clause, since they are non-negative. Rather, she claims that the n-word is interpreted within a clause which has been partially elided. The negative marker of the elided part is actually what carries the negative meaning that speakers interpret in the short answer.

(16)  Q: Ti idhes?  (Greek)
       what saw.2SG
       ‘What did you see?’

       A: TIPOTA dhen idha.
           n-thing not saw.1.SG
           ‘Nothing’

15 In Chomsky’s recent literature, a Probe/selector is a category that seeks for a Goal, i.e. a category with matching features with which the Probe will establish an Agree-relationship that will allow uninterpretable features to be deleted/valued.
According to Watanabe (2004), Giannakidou’s (2000) hypothesis is flawed in that a negative open proposition, i.e. the elliptical answer, takes an affirmative open proposition as its antecedent: if it were possible for negative propositions to take affirmative antecedents, with the elided negative marker being responsible for the negative meaning of the elliptical answer, nothing should prevent an example such as (17) from being interpreted as (18b). Such an interpretation of the answer to the question in (17) never obtains, though.

(17) Q: Nani-o mita no? (Japanese)  
what-ACC saw Q  
‘What did you see?’

A: Hebi.  
snake  
‘A snake’

(18) a. Hebi-o mita  
snake-ACC saw  
‘I saw a snake’

b. Hebi-o minakatta  
snake-ACC saw-NEG-PAST  
‘I didn’t see a snake’

Watanabe (2004) defends the position that for an open proposition to take an affirmative proposition as its antecedent, the elided part cannot contribute the negative meaning even if it contains a negation marker. He goes on to show that feature-copying renders the sentential negative marker inactive, thus allowing inherently negative n-words to co-occur with a negative marker yielding an NC reading.

The feature-copying mechanism yields the same result as the Neg-factorisation operation that Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991) had to stipulate to account for NC readings with inherently negative n-words, according to Watanabe. Before outlining the formal details of feature-copying, however, let us say that in Chomsky’s MP (see chapter 2), one of the main syntactic mechanisms for feature-checking is Agree, where a set of formal features on a Probe looks for a Goal containing a set of matching features. In Chomsky (2000), it is assumed that the Goal must be active for

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16 Examples taken from Watanabe (2004: 567 and 568).
Agree to obtain and that for a Goal to be active, it must contain an uninterpretable feature\textsuperscript{17}.

Watanabe argues that the negative feature of both the sentential negative marker and n-words is interpretable. What makes the Goal active, therefore, is not a negative feature, but an uninterpretable focus feature carried by n-words. He summarises his hypothesis as follows:

‘Negative doubling arises when the neg-feature of the Neg head undergoes checking with the neg-feature of negative concord items that are made active by an unintepretable focus feature. The additional raising of a negative concord item to Spec, NegP is due to the EPP feature of the Neg head.’

(Watanabe 2004: 578)

The NC reading follows from the application of feature-copying (Chomsky 1995, 1998), according to which a feature H, acting as the Probe, seeks a feature F, the Goal, as represented in (19). Once Agree has taken place, the feature F is copied onto H, the Probe, as shown in (20)\textsuperscript{18}.

\begin{align}
(19) & \quad H [... [XP \ldots F \ldots ] \ldots ] \\
(20) & \quad [(XP) H + F [... [XP \ldots F \ldots ] \ldots ]] 
\end{align}

The configuration in (20) results in two negative features in the negative head. However, since they are assumed to be copied without any hierarchical order, Watanabe argues that they cancel each other out, hence rendering the negative marker non-negative. Applied to Catalan, for example, in a sentence such as (21a), both the negative marker \textit{no} --the Probe, according to Watanabe (2004)-- and the n-word \textit{res}, the Goal, would carry an interpretable negative feature. The n-word, in addition, would bear an uninterpretable focus feature, [uFoc], which activates it as a Goal. In (21b), the [iNeg] feature of the Goal is copied onto the Probe, and the [uFoc] feature is checked via Agree, as shown by the strikethrough. In co-occurring in the same head, the two negative features cancel each other out. The result is that

\textsuperscript{17} In Chomsky (2005), the most recent version of the MP, it is assumed that Probes contain unvalued features, while Goals contain matching (valued) features. Given Chomsky’s (2001) assumption that a feature F is uninterpretable iff F is unvalued, only uninterpretable features could act as Probes. This is the opposite of Watanabe’s proposal, where the interpretable negative feature of the negative marker acts as a Probe. In Pesetsky and Torrego (2004), valuation and interpretability are assumed to be independent concepts, which makes it possible for interpretable features to be unvalued and, hence, act as Probes. Pesetsky and Torrego’s work is discussed in chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{18} Diagrams have been taken from Watanabe (2004: 581).
only the n-word, *res* ‘n-thing’, is responsible for the negative meaning of the sentence.

(21)  

a. \[ \text{No ha vist } res. \]  
\[ \text{not has seen n-thing} \]  
\[ \text{‘He didn’t see anything’} \]  

b. 
\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{NegP} \\
\mid \\
\text{NegP} \\
\mid \\
\text{No} \\
\mid \\
[\text{iNeg}] \\
[\text{iNeg}] \\
[\text{vP}] \\
[\text{uFoc}] \\
\end{array}
\]

Watanabe’s (2004) proposal is very interesting, for it offers a fully compositional analysis of elliptical answers and cases such as (21). However, such an approach turns out to be problematic for more complex cases of NC, such as the example in (22), where the sentential negative marker licenses two post-verbal n-words.

(22) \[ \text{No ha dit } res \ a \ ningú. \]  
\[ \text{not has said n-thing to n-person} \]  
\[ \text{‘He didn’t say anything to anyone’} \]  

Notice that the application of the feature-copying mechanism that Watanabe proposes results in two negative features being copied onto the Probe. The negative marker, therefore, would contain three interpretable negative features. It has been assumed that two [iNeg] features can cancel each other out if copied onto a head without any internal order. However, it is not clear what happens when the number of negative features is odd: in principle, if no extra machinery is postulated, the sentential negative marker would remain semantically negative. A further problem is what happens with the negative features that n-words retain after feature-copying. Again, the fact that the negative features of *res* ‘n-thing’ and *ningú* ‘n-person’ are not erased would induce a Double Negation reading, which is not the case.

Watanabe (2004) does not address cases such as the one in (22). Neither does he account for negative spread (i.e. the co-occurrence of a pre-verbal n-word with one or more post-verbal n-words) in terms of feature-copying. He only claims that negative spread must be treated differently from negative doubling, as it is not clear how two interpretable negative features can be deleted in cases such as the example in (23).
(23) Ningú ha dit res.
not has said n-thing
‘Nobody said anything’

De Swart and Sag (2002) account for NC in French and, to a lesser extent, other Romance languages within a polyadic framework. When n-words, which are assumed to be negative quantifiers, occur in a sequence, they can be interpreted as an iteration of quantifiers, thus yielding a DN reading, or via resumption, which results in a polyadic negative quantifier that is interpreted as NC.

De Swart and Sag discuss examples from French such as (24), which are argued to be ambiguous between DN and NC. The first reading is achieved by function application, which results in n-words being scopally ordered and interpreted as cancelling each other out. The second reading, by contrast, obtains when two quantifiers form a resumptive polyadic quantifier. The two structures are illustrated in (24a) and (24b) respectively.

(24) Personne (n’)a rien fait. (French)

n-body ne has n-thing done

a. No one has done nothing (i.e., everyone did something). [DN]
\[ \neg \exists x \forall y \text{Do}(x, y) \]

b. No one has done anything. [NC]
\[ \neg \exists x \exists y \text{Do}(x, y) \]

These authors further argue that both strategies are possible across languages. The fact that French favours an NC-reading for (24) whereas Standard English would prefer the DN-reading for the equivalent example is just a matter of preference related to the use of language, according to de Swart and Sag.

Unlike other accounts of NC, sentential negation does not play a role in the creation of a resumptive negative quantifier. The negative marker is assumed to be anti-additive, a property which is shared by n-words and certain prepositions like sans ‘without’. Moreover, de Swart and Sag also assume that the negative marker does not bind any variables; therefore, it does not interfere with the creation of a polyadic quantifier in an NC context, where it is actually claimed to be semantically empty.

The immediate consequence of the semantic emptiness of the sentential negative marker is that languages can freely include it or exclude it in their system of NC. The contrast between Strict and Non-Strict NC is, thus, irrelevant in de Swart and Sag’s account.
Zeijlstra (2004) discusses de Swart and Sag’s analysis and points out some problems. First, he claims that assuming that NC results from resumptive quantification instead of quantification iteration is weakly motivated. His main criticism concerning this issue is that, contrary to what is assumed in de Swart and Sag, it is possible to reduce negative resumptive quantification to an iteration of monadic quantifiers.

Zeijlstra also shows that de Swart and Sag’s argument that NC readings can be modified by *except* phrases, which is generally taken to be a test for resumptive quantification, is not suitable for some allegedly polyadic constructions. This is shown in (25).

(25) *Personne ne veut parler à personne, sauf Jean au diable.*

‘Nobody wants to talk to anybody, except John to the devil’ (French)

(Zeijlstra 2004: 205)

In the example in (25), the second *personne* ‘n-person’ has scoped over the modal verb *veut* ‘want’. Hence, the resumptive quantifier in the main clause refers to pairs of variables with a *de re* reading: ‘there is no pair <x, y> such that x wants to talk to y’. The *sauf*-phrase is therefore interpreted as ‘but there is a pair <x, y>, where x is Jean and y le diable, such that x wants to talk to y’. As noted in Zeijlstra (2004: 205), this interpretation presupposes the existence of the devil. The example in (25), however, is fine with a *de dicto* interpretation.

To support the claim that NC can be analysed as resumptive quantification, de Swart and Sag also argue that other instances of polyadic constructions that cannot be reduced to iteration of monadic quantifiers can be translated into first-order logic. Zeijlstra, however, questions that the example de Swart and Sag consider is a proper example of resumptive quantification since, as shown in (27), it does not allow *except*-modification.

(26) *Every boy likes himself.*

\[\forall x \text{ [like (x, x)]}\]

(27) *Every boy likes himself, (*except John himself)*

(Zeijlstra 2004: 205)
A second criticism to de Swart and Sag’s account is related to the fact that it does not provide an explanation for the observed clause-boundedness of NC in all contexts. In addition, it does not account for the well-known pre- / post-verbal asymmetry of n-words with respect to the occurrence of the negative marker. In other words, why the presence of the sentential negative marker yields DN with pre-verbal n-words in languages such as Italian or West Flemish is left unexplained.

A final concern is found in the assumption that both the DN and the NC readings are theoretically available in every language, the choice resulting from the preferences imposed by language use. As discussed in Zeijlstra (2004), this is clearly an overgeneralisation. For languages such as Swedish and Norwegian, which totally disallow NC readings, it would have to be assumed that NC, though unavailable, is a possibility.

In addition, Zeijlstra also highlights that DN / NC ambiguities are not a universal property of languages, though they might be usual in Standard English and French because these languages are unstable in the Jespersen’s Cycle. In fact, the link that de Swart and Sag (2002) establish between the preference for DN or NC and the Jespersen’s Cycle is also dubious. Accounting for the fact that DN-prone languages might start favouring NC readings because NPIs are re-interpreted as negative quantifiers is not empirically correct. As pointed out in Zeijlstra (2004), in many languages, n-words resulted from a sequence containing the negative marker and a negative expression rather than from non-negative indefinites.

All these arguments show that an analysis of n-words as negative quantifiers that can be assigned a DN reading by means of iteration or an NC one via resumptive quantification is problematic. Besides, although de Swart and Sag’s analysis simplifies the accounts in Zanuttini (1991) and Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991) in that only a semantic mechanism is necessary to allegedly account for NC across languages, it also adds new problems that are left unresolved.

1.2.1.2 N-words as non-negative universal quantifiers

One of the latest updatings of the analysis of n-words as universal quantifiers is found in Giannakidou (2000). She claims that Greek n-words are polarity sensitive universal quantifiers that need to be licensed by negation, but which must raise –by means of Quantifier Raising– above negation to result in the universal quantifier scoping over negation. Since n-words are assumed to be non-negative, negative meaning is contributed only by sentential negation and the account is, therefore, fully compositional.
According to Giannakidou (1997, 1998, 1999), NC is a subcase of negative polarity and can be accounted for within a general theory of polarity sensitivity, which is a form of semantic dependency between polarity items and context. Polarity items are sensitive expressions in the sense that they depend on some property of the context to be properly interpreted. Polarity items can be defined as in (28).

\begin{enumerate}
\item The distribution of \( \alpha \) is limited by sensitivity to some semantic property \( \beta \) of the context of appearance; \textit{and}
\item \( \beta \) is (non)veridicality.
\end{enumerate}

(Giannakidou 2000: 464)

In Greek there are two paradigms of n-words, namely emphatic and non-emphatic n-words, which are taken to be lexically distinct. Both sets of words can be licensed by negation, but only non-emphatics are allowed to occur in non-negative contexts. This is illustrated in (29), with emphatics being represented in capitals.

\textbf{Negation}

(29) a. I Theodora *(dhen) enekrine kanena/KANENA sxedhio
\textit{the Theodora not approved.3SG n- plan}
\begin{quote}
‘Theodora didn’t approve any plan’
\end{quote}

\textbf{Interrogative}

b. Pijes pote/*POTE sto Parisi?
\textit{went.2SG n-ever in-the Paris}
\begin{quote}
‘Have you ever been to Paris?’
\end{quote}

\textbf{Conditional}

c. An dhis tin Elena puthena/*PUTHENA, na tis milisis
\textit{if see.2SG the Elena n-where SUBJ her talk-2SG}
\begin{quote}
‘If you see Elena anywhere, talk to her’
\end{quote}

(Giannakidou 2000: 467)
In the light of these distributional differences, Giannakidou (2000) concludes that while emphatics are NPIs proper, non-emphatics need to be defined as affective polarity items (APIs). Definitions of both types of polarity items are given in (30).

(30) a. **Definition of API**

   A polarity item $\alpha$ is affective iff it is licensed by nonveridical operators.

b. **Definition of NPI**

   An affective polarity item $\alpha$ is a negative polarity item iff it is licensed by antiveridical operators.

Non-veridical operators do not entail the truth of the proposition they embed, while antiveridical operators, which are a subset of the non-veridical ones, entail the falsity of the proposition they embed and are, in this sense, negative. Modal verbs, negative sentences, questions, imperatives, exclamatives, conditionals and the restriction of universal quantifiers are, among others, non-veridical operators, while negation, negative quantifiers and the preposition *without* are antiveridical operators.

There are syntactic differences between emphatics and non-emphatics in Greek, as well. While the licensing of emphatic n-words is clause-bounded, i.e. emphatic n-words have to be in a local relation with negation, the licensing of non-emphatics is unbounded and quite unconstrained. Such a locality contrast has led Giannakidou (2000) to claim that the locality involved in emphatics NC is the one involved in quantifier scope, which is achieved via a locally restricted movement known as Quantifier Raising (QR). Semantically, unlike non-emphatics, which behave as existential quantifiers, Greek emphatic n-words display the properties of strong quantificational elements\(^\text{19}\), which provides further evidence for the claim that emphatic n-words are universal quantifiers in Greek.

This account easily accommodates not only data from Greek but also from other languages such as Slavic, Hungarian and some Strict NC Romance, where the negative marker is obligatory in all negative contexts. However, accounting for

\(^\text{19}\) According to Giannakidou (2000), Greek emphatics can be modified by *almost/absolutely*, like universals, and cannot be modified by the modifier of existential quantifiers $ke$, a test originally due to Quer (1993). In addition, emphatics do not license donkey anaphora, which is something that universal quantifiers do not do, either. Finally, like universals, emphatics cannot be used as predicate nominals. The four diagnostic tests, therefore, are taken as evidence for Greek emphatic n-words to be universal quantifiers. Further evidence is drawn from the parallelisms that exist between the scope of n-words and that of universal quantifiers as well as from the availability of existence inferences under negation that can be observed both in n-words and universal quantifiers.
Non-Strict NC languages such as Italian and Spanish, where the sentential negative marker must be absent when n-words occur pre-verbally is problematic for Giannakidou’s (2000) analysis. In fact, on the basis of this observation and the fact that Double Negation readings are sometimes available with n-words in Non-Strict NC Romance languages, she suggests that an analysis where n-words are ambiguous between a negative and a non-negative reading is probably more accurate for these languages. Such a conclusion fits in her view of NC as a non-uniform phenomenon across languages which, in her words, “makes us expect that the mechanisms that are employed in deriving the interpretation of NC may be equally diverse” (Giannakidou 2000: 516-517).

According to Zeijlstra (2004), Giannakidou’s analysis suffers from a number of flaws that stem from the assumption that, though being universal quantifiers, Greek emphatic n-words are polarity items. First of all, it is not clear why emphatics cannot be licensed in a construction of the type ‘It is not true that \( p \)’, where the emphatic n-word is contained in \( p \). NPIs can be licensed outside their clause; Greek emphatics, conversely, can only be licensed in antiveridical contexts. Giannakidou (2000) argues that emphatics are subject to QR, which is clause-bound, by virtue of being universal quantifiers. However, Zeijlstra (2004) points out that such an assumption does not explain why an emphatic in a sentence such as (31) cannot receive a non-negative universal interpretation equivalent to ‘It is not true that everybody came’.

\[
(31) \quad \text{*Dhen alithévi pu irte KANENAS} \\
\text{not true that came n-person} \\
\text{‘It is not true that everybody came’} \\
\text{(Zeijlstra 2004: 219)}
\]

The ungrammaticality of (31) is related to the second problem that Zeijlstra (2004) comments on, which is why Greek emphatics fail to be interpreted as universal quantifiers in the absence of the sentential negative marker. In other words, if emphatics are non-negative universals that undergo QR, the sentence in (32) should not be ungrammatical. The argument that (32) cannot be grammatical because emphatics are NPIs and need to be licensed by an antiveridical operator is, according to Zeijlstra, circular and only descriptively adequate.

\[
(32) \quad \text{*Irte KANENAS} \\
\text{came n-person} \\
\text{‘Everybody came’} \\
\text{(Zeijlstra 2004: 220)}
\]

If emphatics are NPIs, a third problem arises when having to explain how it is possible that they occur as subjects outscoping negation: as is well-known, NPIs
must be c-commanded by the negative marker, a configuration that does not obtain if the emphatic is in the subject position. Giannakidou (2000) accounts for this possibility by assuming that emphatics are subject to QR; however, as Zeijlstra (2004) points out, it is problematic that, being NPIs, emphatics can occur in a position that is banned to other kinds of NPI.

Finally, the fact that only emphatics can be used as fragment answers remains unexplained. Giannakidou assumes that fragment answers are the result of ellipsis, as shown in (33), where the negative meaning that speakers interpret in the answer comes from the elided negative marker.

(33)  a. \[NegP Dhen [IP idha TIPOTA]\]  
\[
\text{[NegP TIPOTA, dhen [IP idha t]]}
\]
\[
\text{[NegP TIPOTA, dhen [IP idha ti]]}
\]

(Zeijlstra 2004: 222)

Recall that non-emphatics can also occur in negative contexts. Zeijlstra’s (2004) objection is, then, that nothing should prevent non-emphatics from occurring as fragment answers if ellipsis applies. Giannakidou (2000) counterargues that the negative marker needs to be stressed when occurring with non-emphatics, which prevents its deletion via ellipsis.

### 1.2.2 N-words as polarity items

Focussing on data from Romance languages, Bosque (1980) and Laka (1990) claim that n-words are NPIs, though it must be clarified that the term ‘negative polarity item’ does not indicate that these elements carry any negative import. Rather, the label ‘NPI’ has been traditionally used to refer to existential expressions that can be licensed by negation, among other operators. Under this approach, then, n-words are seen as variables bound by an operator, but not necessarily a negative one. In fact, the negative marker licenses n-words only in negative contexts, while other types of operators do so in non-negative contexts such as yes-no questions, comparatives and conditionals.

Progovac (1994) holds a similar view for n-words in Serbian/Croatian, and proposes an analysis in terms of Binding Theory: n-words are NPIs that, like anaphors, are
subject to Principle A of Binding Theory\(^{20}\), since they need to be bound by negation within their governing category. Concerning non-negative contexts, Progovac (1994) postulates an empty polarity operator which, being a clitic in nature, attaches to the C(omplementiser) position from where it can bind the n-word.

Laka (1990) also needs to resort to the existence of a null negative operator in cases where the n-word occurs in isolation in fragment answers, for instance. In example (34), the n-word *ningú* ‘n-person’ is interpreted as negative by the speakers. However, this is unexpected in an analysis that assumes n-words to be intrinsically non-negative.

(34) **Speaker A:** Qui ha trucat?  
(‘Who called?’)  
**Speaker B:** *Ningú.*  
(‘Nobody’)

Laka’s (1990) proposal explains the pre-verbal occurrences of n-words in Romance languages in terms of *SigmaP* (ΣP), a functional projection. It is assumed that the sentential negative marker occupies the head of ΣP when n-words appear post-verbally; the head of ΣP is phonologically null when n-words occur pre-verbally and occupy the specifier position of ΣP. Postulating a silent negative operator in constructions containing a pre-verbal n-word allows Laka to treat pre-verbal n-words as NPIs, which must necessarily enter in an operator-chain to be licensed. In other words, since there is no visible operator in short answers such as the one in (34), it is necessary to argue for the existence of a null negative operator that binds the n-word thus satisfying the requirement that it be part of an operator-variable chain. In addition, Laka also claims that the covert negative operator contributes sentential negation, hence preserving the view that n-words are non-negative in all contexts.

This view, however, has been under attack for a number of reasons. First of all, as Herburger (2001: 310) points out,

---

\(^{20}\) Binding Theory is concerned with the distribution and interpretation of anaphors such as herself, pronouns such as her and referring expressions like Peter or the house with respect to their antecedents. The requirements on the distribution of anaphors are captured in Principle A, which can initially be formulated as in (1).

(1) **Principle A**  
An anaphor must be bound in the minimal domain containing it, its case marker and an accessible subject/SUBJECT.
'the silent negation has to be restricted to the particular instances where it is needed or nothing would keep us from wrongly predicting that Juan ama a María means ‘John doesn’t love Mary’, when it really means the opposite’.

(Herburger 2001: 310)

In addition, such an account does not provide any explanation for the fact that negation can in fact be overtly realised in cases where the n-word is pre-verbal, which yields a Double Negation reading.

A third problem with this analysis is related to the fact that if a silent operator is assumed to license pre-verbal n-words, it would be expected that it can license other NPIs in pre-verbal position as well (Herburger 2001: 311). Such a criticism could be overcome by stating that n-words do not have the same licensing requirements as other NPIs. However, as Zeijlstra (2004: 211) notes, if n-words are treated as NPIs, but they do not behave like most NPIs in crucial respects, extra machinery is needed to account for the differences between the two.

1.2.3 N-words as indefinites

Indefinites are expressions with descriptive content but no quantificational force on their own (Kamp 1981; Heim 1982). A property of indefinites, nonetheless, is that they can acquire quantificational features from other elements in the sentence. Indefinites contribute a free variable, which needs to be bound by an appropriate operator, and a predicative restriction on that variable.

Since n-words display quantificational variability (i.e. they seem to be quantifiers in some contexts, but NPIs in some others) some scholars such as Acquaviva (1993, 1997), Ladusaw (1992, 1994), Giannakidou and Quer (1997) and Zeijlstra (2004), among others, have applied Kamp’s (1981) and Heim’s (1982) concept to the study of n-words and their contradictory behaviour, which has resulted in the analysis of n-words as indefinites. A caveat is in order, though: n-words are claimed not to be regular indefinites. Rather, they require to be bound –roofed in Ladusaw’s (1992) terms– by an antiveridical or a non-veridical operator at some point in the interpretation. As in previous accounts, the scholars who defend the indefinite approach are also divided with respect to the negativity of n-words.
1.2.3.1 N-words as non-negative indefinites

Ladusaw (1992, 1994), who contributed one of the first proposals of n-words as indefinites, distinguishes between the strong and the weak licensing of n-words, which roughly correspond to the quantificational and the existential reading that n-words have in different contexts. In the former, the indefinite, i.e. the n-word, is interpreted within the restriction of the negative operator, while in the latter, the indefinite is interpreted in the scope of the negative operator. In both cases, the existence of an abstract negative operator with implicit quantificational force is assumed. In the case of strong licensing, the abstract negative operator undergoes QR, thus yielding the universal interpretation of the n-word. In the weak licensing of n-words, by contrast, the abstract negative operator binds the n-word and has scope over it. Sentential negation is contributed by the abstract negative operator rather than the n-word itself, which is non-negative.

Zeijlstra (2004) is one of the most recent accounts of NC in Minimalist terms (Chomsky 1995, 1998, 2000, 2001; see chapter 2). Like Ladusaw, he also assumes n-words to be indefinites. Moreover, he distinguishes between semantic and syntactic negation, which are two different ways UG allows negation to be expressed. In semantic negation, which is the one Double Negation languages use, there is a one-to-one correspondence between negative elements and negative operators. Conversely, in syntactic negation, negative elements do not necessarily correspond to negative operators. Rather, negative elements merely mark the presence of a negative operator, which can be either overt or covert. Zeijlstra (2004) further argues that NC languages instantiate syntactic negation.

Under Zeijlstra’s (2004) analysis, n-words are non-negative indefinites that bear an uninterpretable negative feature [uNeg]. That is, n-words are syntactically marked for negation, but not semantically negative. Moreover, the difference between Strict and Non-Strict NC languages is accounted for in terms of the feature-interpretability of the sentential negative marker.

It is assumed that in Strict NC languages, the sentential negative marker bears a [uNeg] feature, which triggers the presence of an abstract negative operator (Op¬). Op¬ checks the [uNeg] feature of both the negative marker and the n-words by means of Multiple Agree (see chapter 2). This is illustrated in (35) with data from Czech, a Strict NC language.

(35) a. *Nikdo nevolá.* (Czech)
    n-person neg-calls
In Non-Strict NC languages, on the contrary, the sentential negative marker carries an [iNeg] feature which can itself check the [uNeg] feature of post-verbal n-words, as seen in (36). For pre-verbal n-words, however, the analysis is similar to the one in (35): since there is no overt sentential negative marker, an operator is triggered by the [uNeg] feature of n-words in the left periphery of the clause.

(36) a. *Non ha telefonato nessuno* (Italian)
   ‘Nobody called’

   b. \[ NegP \langle Neg\rangle [vP ha telefonato nessuno [uNeg]] ]

   (Zeijlstra 2004: 258)

(37) a. *Nessuno ha telefonato a nessuno* (Italian)
   ‘Nobody called anybody’

   b. \[ NegP Neg\langle Neg\rangle [vP ha telefonato a nessuno [uNeg]] ]

   (Zeijlstra 2004: 259)

As will be seen in chapter 5, for a language like Catalan, where the sentential negative marker is optional when n-words occur in pre-verbal position, Zeijlstra (2004) assumes that two dialects exist: one which corresponds to a Strict NC variety, and another which implements Non-Strict NC. However, it is the case that for a number of speakers both the Strict and Non-Strict NC construals for pre-verbal n-words are acceptable and, to a certain extent, interchangeably used in their linguistic productions. Therefore, assuming that the difference between Strict and Non-Strict NC is found in the sentential negative marker bearing [iNeg] or [uNeg] respectively, amounts to saying that, for a number of Catalan speakers, two separate negative markers exist in the Lexicon—one with an interpretable negative feature and another one with its uninterpretable counterpart.

Alternatively, it could be argued that there is just one negative marker which is underspecified with respect to the interpretability of its negative feature. Both assumptions are compatible with the use of the negative marker in Expletive
Negation (EN) constructions, where the sentential negative marker does not make any (negative) semantic contribution\textsuperscript{21}.

EN is defined as ‘a Neg syntactic constituent which appears in certain syntactic environments but makes no effective contribution to the interpretation of the whole string containing this constituent’ (Espinal 1992: 333). Espinal argues that the negative meaning of the negative marker is absorbed at LF, which is similar to what some scholars propose for n-words in NC constructions (Zanuttini 1991; Haegeman and Zanuttini 1991; see section 1.2.1.1).

In Minimalist terms, however, the fact that EN has no semantic effects could be taken as an indication that the negative marker in contexts where it is expletively interpreted contains [uNeg] features. This would reduce Strict NC to an instance of EN, though such an analysis would have to explain why [uNeg] triggers the presence of an Op¬ that supplies the negative meaning of the sentence only in NC structures but not in EN, where the interpretation of the clause is non-negative.

1.2.3.2 N-words as negative indefinites

Suñer (1995) also claims that n-words are indefinites. However, unlike the scholars in the previous section, she argues that n-words contain a [NEG] feature which triggers movement of the n-word to Spec, NegP for feature-checking purposes. Since such movement is assumed to be regulated by the NEG Criterion, the present account only differs from the one outlined in section 1.2.1.1 in that n-words are no longer treated as quantifiers, which made it difficult to explain their quantificational variability.

Suñer’s (1995) analysis for Spanish n-words consists in arguing that NC always obtains, even in cases where the negative marker is not overt. This is achieved by postulating the existence of a null operator. In the case of post-verbal n-words, the null operator is in Spec, NegP, from where it c-commands the n-word. For pre-verbal n-words, by contrast, the [NEG] feature that the n-word bears attracts the operator to AgrP, which is a position from which the null operator can c-command both the n-word and the negative head.

\textsuperscript{21} Van der Wouden (1994) proposes that it is the sentential negative marker, and not n-words, what is ambiguous. He suggests that n-words in post-verbal position in Spanish and Italian, and pre-verbal n-words in Standard French trigger a phenomenon known as ‘Negative Doubling’, which consists in having a negative-looking element inserted in the structure. Languages differ on the form of such an element: while in Spanish and Italian this semantically vacuous element is homophonous with the sentential negation marker, in Standard French it is a different lexical item, i.e. \textit{ne}. As Herburger (2001) observes, this approach leaves structures with a pre-verbal n-word licensing a post-verbal n-word without an overt negative marker unexplained.
Rowlett’s (1998) account is similar to Suñer’s (1995) in that a \([\text{NEG}]\) feature is also postulated for n-words. He also claims that NC languages differ from non-NC languages in a crucial respect: while in the former, the negative marker contains a \([\text{NEG}]\) feature, it is Spec, NegP that hosts such a feature in the latter. In addition, a covert expletive operator, which A-bar binds the semantically negative n-words, is merged in Spec, NegP to satisfy the NEG Criterion in NC languages. The trees in (38) and (39) illustrate Rowlett’s (1998: 121 and 123) assumptions for NC and non-NC languages respectively.

In Rowlett’s (1998) approach, NC languages do not display Double Negation because the elements that participate in NC are of a different bar-level: while one of the \([\text{NEG}]\) elements is a head, the other is a maximal projection. By contrast, he argues that in non-NC languages, Double Negation is observed as a consequence of the syntactic interaction of Spec, NegP, which bears a \([\text{NEG}]\) feature, with another expression containing the same negative feature.

To conclude this section, let us very briefly outline yet another version of n-words as negative indefinites with a novelty in the semantic characterisation of n-words: Espinal (2000 and in press) treats Catalan and Spanish n-words as indefinites that
are incorporated into a numeral meaning $\langle 0 \rangle$\(^{22}\). Such a variant of the indefinite approach is in line with Déprez’s (1997) proposals for French and Haitian creole n-words, though both accounts take opposite directions concerning the negativity of n-words. While in Espinal (2000) n-words bear a positively specified [NEG] feature and are underspecified for quantificational force, they are non-negative in Déprez’s (1997) analysis.

### 1.2.3.3 Some problems with the indefinite approach

Giannakidou (2000) claims that the indefinite approach suffers from a number of problems\(^{23}\). First of all, not all n-words exhibit quantificational variability, which is one of the alleged properties of n-words that this account tries to accommodate. She bases her observation on the behaviour of Greek emphatics, which can only be licensed by negation and antiveridical operators and never receive an existential interpretation, which is reserved to non-emphatics. Slavic and Hungarian n-words are reported not to exhibit quantificational variability, either. The indefinite approach, therefore, cannot account for the facts in Greek, Slavic and Hungarian, though, as Giannakidou acknowledges, it might be suitable as a theory of NC for Romance languages.

Giannakidou (2000) also claims that the indefinite perspective cannot account for the locality constraints imposed by NC in Greek, Slavic and in most Romance languages. She argues that if n-words are indefinites, they should be licensed unboundedly as long as they are in the scope of their licensing operator. While this has been shown to be the case with non-emphatics, it does not hold for Greek, Slavic and most Romance n-words.

A third criticism of the indefinite analysis concerns a question which Giannakidou (2000) raises with respect to the quantificational force of n-words: if n-words are indefinites, where does the universal quantificational force come from when n-words are pre-verbal? Being indefinites, n-words acquire their quantificational force from the operator that binds them; however, negation alone is assumed to be unable to provide universal quantification.

An answer to Giannakidou’s (2000) question is found in Isac (2002), who puts forward an analysis of n-words as negative indefinites that can act as quantifiers thanks to their interaction with Focus, which is quantificational (Rizzi 1997). Since

\(^{22}\)Espinal’s analysis is presented with more detail in section 5.2.2.

\(^{23}\)Only three of the four problems Giannakidou (2000) points out have been addressed in this subsection. A fourth criticism to the indefinite approach is mainly an attack to Richter and Sailer’s (1998) conclusions.
n-words behave like negative quantifiers when they occur pre-verbally. Isac (2002) defends the view that they are in a Focus position and, by virtue of being indefinites, can inherit the quantificational feature of Focus.

The main argument for claiming that pre-verbal n-words are in a Focus position consists in providing evidence for the fact that they pattern with pre-verbal Focus rather than with pre-verbal Topic, which differs from Focus in a number of ways. First, pre-verbal Topic is clitic-doubled, while pre-verbal Focus is not. Second, Focus is quantificational, while Topic is not. This means that while Focus binds a variable, Topic binds a null constant; this results in different behaviour of Focus and Topic in weak crossover (WCO) contexts and parasitic gaps contexts.

Isac (2003: 128) shows that while a Topic never gives rise to WCO effects, Focus does. Concerning parasitic gaps, which need to be licensed by variables, it is shown that Focus licenses them, while Topic does not.

Isac then goes on to show that pre-verbal n-words in a number of NC languages cannot be clitic doubled, thus patterning with Focus. In addition, she notes that pre-verbal n-words display WCO effects and license parasitic gaps, like Focus. Furthermore, she shows that the same behaviour is found in post-verbal n-words when stressed (i.e. when focussed).

As far as the negative feature of n-words is concerned, Isac (2002) argues that what distinguishes n-words from NPIs is the fact that while the former are intrinsically negative, the latter are only interpreted as negative when they are bound by a negative operator. However, as some other authors have pointed out, n-words can occur in non-negative contexts without contributing negative meaning. Moreover, two n-words can also co-occur in the absence of the negative marker without cancelling each other out, which is what would be expected if n-words are assumed to be intrinsically negative. Isac (2002) counterargues these observations by stating that the scope of the [NEG] feature of n-words is restricted to the n-phrase. Only when the [NEG] feature is associated with a quantificational feature (i.e. when the n-word is in a pre-verbal Focus position or under stress) can it raise to a position where it has scope over the whole clause and yield a Double Negation reading.

1.2.4 Lexical ambiguity of n-words

In order to overcome the problems that the other perspectives suffer from, Herburger (2001) proposes an account of the nature of n-words which assumes them to be lexically ambiguous between negative quantifiers and NPIs in a systematic way. She suggests that those languages where n-words display an ambiguous behaviour reflect
an intermediate stage of the Jespersen’s Cycle (Jespersen 1917), which gives conceptual plausibility to this approach.

As Herburger (2001) acknowledges, a theory which does not defend the lexical ambiguity of n-words and gives them a uniform treatment is probably preferred. However, she claims that there are empirical data that show that the ambiguity analysis is tenable.

Herburger (2001) introduces the term negative element (NE) to refer to those expressions that participate in NC, which, as she points out, are not restricted to quantificational elements. Rather, NE is a cover term for negative quantifiers such as nobody or nothing, negative determiners like no and none, sentential and constituent negation not, and negative conjunctions such as neither … nor. All these elements have in common that they create downward entailing contexts and are inherently negative. NPIs are the non-negative counterparts of NEs. Unlike NEs, NPIs have to be licensed in negative contexts. Herburger (2001) assumes NPIs to be existential quantifiers.

Based on data from Spanish, mainly, Herburger (2001) claims that the set of (pre-verbal) NEs and the set of (post-verbal) NPIs are homophonous, which would reduce NC with post-verbal n-words to a case of NPI-licensing. She claims that the ambiguity hypothesis can also account for another kind of NC, namely, the occurrence of a pre-verbal n-word which licenses one or more post-verbal n-words. According to Herburger (2001), the first n-word is a NE that creates a downward entailing context that allows the post-verbal n-words (NPIs) to be licensed.

In order to maintain the lexical ambiguity thesis, she contributes independent evidence that n-words can be NPIs, and that they can also be NEs. In addition, she also discusses ambiguous examples. Evidence for the first claim, namely that n-words can be NPIs, comes from a pool of sentences from Bosque (1980), where n-words occur in downward entailing contexts other than negation. The examples in (40) show that Spanish n-words can occur in adversative predicates, certain emotive predicates and in comparisons, among other contexts.

(40) a. Pedro compró el terreno sin contárselo a nadie.
   Pedro bought the land without telling-CL.CL.to n-person
   ‘Pedro bought the land without telling anybody’

   b. Dudo que vayan a encontrar nada.
      doubt-1SG that will.3SG.SUBJ find n-thing
      ‘I doubt they’ll find anything’

   c. Pedro ha perdido la esperanza de que salga
      Pedro has lost the hope of that leave.3SG.SUBJ
elegido *ninguno de sus amigos.
-elected n- of his friends
‘Pedro has lost hope that any of his friends will be elected’

d. Juan ha llegado más tarde que nunca.
Juan has arrived more late than n-ever
‘Juan has arrived later than ever’

Evidence that n-words can be NEs is found in pre-verbal occurrences of n-words where there is no overt negative marker, as well as in elliptical answers, such as (41). According to Herburger (2001: 300), the resolution of ellipsis in cases such as (41) would be *Vi a nadie ‘I saw n-person’ and not No vi a nadie ‘I didn’t see n-person’ as shown by the fact, she argues, that NPIs are banned from elliptical answers, as illustrated in (42).

(41) **Speaker A:** A quién viste?  
whom saw.2.SG
‘Who did you see?’

**Speaker B:** *A nadie.
*n-person
‘Nobody’

(42) **Speaker A:** A quién viste?  
whom saw.2.SG
‘Who did you see?’

**Speaker B:** *A un alma.
*to a soul
‘A soul’

Further evidence to claim that n-words can be NEs comes from instances of post-verbal non-sentential coordination. These are illustrated in (43) with examples from Herburger (2001: 301).

(43) a. Me caso contigo o con nadie.  
me marry.1.SG with-you or with n-person
‘I marry you or nobody’

b. Compré rosas pero ningún clavel.
bought.1.SG roses but n- carnation
‘I bought roses but no carnations’
Finally, the fact that n-words as NEs can, in certain contexts, occur in a post-verbal position with a NE interpretation is taken to be the main motivation for a lexical ambiguity approach. Herburger (2001: 302) claims that a common feature of the contexts where post-verbal n-words are interpreted as NEs is that n-words are interpreted within the scope of an event quantifier. With respect to the example in (44),

(44) Hemos leído en alguna parte que para los budistas “zen” la meditación no consiste en ‘no pensar en nada’ sino en ‘pensar en nada’.

‘I read somewhere that for Zen Buddhists meditation does not consist of “not thinking of anything” but of “thinking of nothing”.

she argues that

‘the crucial difference between no pensar en nada and pensar en nada is this: In the first case the negation takes wide scope over the event operator and the n-word is interpreted as an NPI, an existential quantifier (…). In the second case, on the other hand, the event quantifier takes wide scope over the n-word, which is interpreted as an NE (…)’.24

(Herburger 2001: 302)

Finally, Herburger (2001) addresses some Spanish data where n-words seem to be really ambiguous between an NPI interpretation and an NE reading. She takes these data to indicate that n-words-as-NPIs and n-words-as-NEs are in complementary distribution only partially. Examples such as the sentence in (45) are claimed to have two different readings, the second one being more marked than the first. Likewise,

24 In order to show that n-words can be negative expressions (NEs in Herburger’s terminology) not only in the sentential domain, but also in the nominal domain, Herburger (2001: 304) discusses data, borrowed from Bosque (1980), where n-words can take narrow scope with respect to the quantifier that binds the variable of the noun in very much the same way as post-verbal n-words in the sentential domain take narrow scope with respect to the event quantifier that binds the event variable of the verb.

(1) El nunca terminado puente de los Remedios ‘The never finished Los Remedios bridge’
examples with more than one pre-verbal n-word, such as (47), are also argued to be ambiguous between the two interpretations in (48).

(45) El bebé no está mirando a nadie
the baby not is looking at n-person

(46) a. The baby is not looking at anybody.
b. The baby is not looking at nobody.

(47) Nadie nunca volvió a Cuba.
n-person n-ever returned to Cuba

(48) a. Nobody ever returned to Cuba.
b. Nobody never returned to Cuba.

(Herburger 2001: 306)

Herburger (2001) seeks independent theoretical support for her proposal in Jespersen’s Cycle (Jespersen 1917), which captures the observation that historical changes in the field of negation display a number of common steps across languages. Diachronically, a language starts by using a pre-verbal negative marker as the sole expressor of negation. In a later stage, this pre-verbal negative marker becomes phonologically weak and is reinforced by an NPI, which is later reinterpreted as being a genuinely negative element and responsible for the negative meaning of the clause. In the final stage, the pre-verbal weakened negative marker ends up being redundant and is eventually dropped.

According to Herburger (2001) the fact that Spanish n-words seem to function both as NPIs and as NEs could be indicating that they are in an intermediate stage. In other words, she suggests that the ambiguity that n-words are claimed to display is due to the fact that they are developing from NPIs to NEs.

In order to explain the nature of such a semantic shift, she argues that n-words start to be used as NEs in those contexts where they cannot be interpreted as NPIs such as, for instance, in elliptical answers and in non-sentential conjunctions. Moreover, n-words would also be interpreted as NEs in pre-verbal subject position, which is an ‘unstable NPI environment’ (Herburger 2001: 325). The last context where n-words used as NEs would be allowed is predicted to be the post-verbal position, since it is the domain where NPIs are most easily licensed. Since post-verbal n-words are scope rigid (i.e. they cannot scope over the event quantifier that binds the event variable of the verb), they can only be interpreted as NEs in very pragmatically restricted contexts. As soon as scope-rigidity is no longer a property of n-words,
ambiguity between an NPI and an NE reading of n-words in post-verbal position is expected to disappear in favour of the NE interpretation of n-words. Herburger (2001: 326) summarises her hypothesis to account for the shift of n-words from NPIs to NEs in five steps, as shown in (49). She claims that while languages like Spanish are in stage (d), languages like Standard English are in step (e).

(49) a. N-words are NPIs.
b. N-words are NPIs and also NEs in contexts where NPIs are not licensed.
c. N-words can be used as NEs in preverbal contexts (unstable NPI context).
d. N-words start to be used in postverbal contexts, but only with narrow scope.
e. N-words start to be used as NEs in postverbal position with wide scope and cease to also be NPIs.

According to Zeijlstra (2004: 234), however, such a shift in meaning is unclear, since it presupposes that there is a phase in Jespersen’s Cycle where n-words are NPIs and cannot be interpreted as NEs. He shows that this assumption is incorrect, as indicated by the fact that in older stages of languages such as Spanish and Italian, which used to be Strict NC languages, n-words could receive both readings, since fragmentary answers and non-sentential coordination with n-words are also observed in Strict NC languages. Zeijlstra summarises the problem as follows:

‘Herburger’s motivation for lexical ambiguity by considering the meaning shift along the line of the Jespersen Cycle is only valid if n-words never occur without an extra negative marker. However, in those cases n-words never introduce a negative context and as a result fall outside the definition for n-words.’

(Zeijlstra 2004: 234)

This problem also extends to the general treatment of Strict NC languages, according to Zeijlstra (2004). In Catalan, for example, the sentential negative marker can optionally surface after a pre-verbal n-word, as seen in (50). Within an analysis along the lines of Herburger (2001), the n-word in (50) can be taken to be an NPI which is licensed by the sentential negation marker. However, as Zeijlstra points out, the fact that sentential negation cannot license a true NPI such as gaires in (51) remains unexplained.

(50) Res no funciona (Catalan)
n-thing not works

‘Nothing works’
1.3 Concluding remarks

In the present chapter, the phenomenon of NC has been defined as involving the co-occurrence of the sentential negative marker and one (or more) n-words, or of a pre-verbal n-word and one (or more) post-verbal n-words. In addition, a difference has been drawn between Strict and Non-Strict NC languages. While in the former a pre-verbal n-word must co-occur with the sentential negation marker, in the latter, the sentential negative marker is obligatory when the n-word is post-verbal, but needs to be absent when the n-word is pre-verbal.

As has been discussed, NC challenges the principle of compositionality, according to which the meaning of a phrase is the result of the combination of the meanings of its components. In the case of NC, it needs to be explained why the co-occurrence of a number of apparently negative elements results in negation being interpreted only once.

There are several answers to this question, each corresponding to a different approach in the literature, which follow from two independent issues that are at the heart of the study of NC: on the one hand, there is controversy over whether n-words are intrinsically negative or not; on the other hand, there are various positions with respect to the quantificational nature of n-words. In terms of quantificational force, n-words have been defined as universal quantifiers, as polarity items, as indefinites with no quantificational force on their own but with the ability of acquiring quantificational properties from other sources and, finally, as items which are lexically ambiguous between negative quantifiers and polarity items.

It has been shown that none of the considered approaches is free from shortcomings. Neither do they explain all the data without resorting to theory-internal technicalities. For example, while the approach that treats n-words as negative universal quantifiers easily accommodates the behaviour of pre-verbal n-words in Non-Strict NC languages, it has to resort to the operation of Neg-Factorisation in order to explain why the sentential negative marker is necessarily present with pre-verbal n-words in Strict NC languages. It is also problematic for this account to explain why n-words seem to behave as existential quantifiers in non-negative contexts, or why they do not express negation when appearing in isolation in non-negative contexts such as conditionals or comparatives.
If n-words are assumed to be universal quantifiers without any negative import, the situation does not improve, either. While this approach partially explains the behaviour of Greek emphatic n-words and some data in other languages, it does not offer any explanation for the fact that in some Romance languages pre-verbal n-words cannot co-occur with the sentential negative marker. Actually, a central claim for this approach is that NC is a non-uniform phenomenon, which would account for the impossibility of covering all the data.

Diametrically opposed to the n-words-as-quantifiers approach is the account that treats n-words as non-negative polarity items. While it is quite straightforward to explain that n-words need to be bound either by negation or by some other kind of operator, thus explaining why it is possible for n-words to occur in non-negative environments, this analysis needs to postulate an abstract negative operator which binds n-words when they occur pre-verbally or in isolation in fragment answers, where they receive a negative interpretation.

An account that seems to overcome some of the problems of the two previously mentioned approaches is the treatment of n-words as indefinites. The fact that indefinites do not have quantificational force on their own can explain the quantificational variability that n-words display in, for example, Romance languages. However, as has been criticised for the approach that treats n-words as non-negative universal quantifiers, the indefinite approach has problems in accounting for the lack of quantificational variability of n-words in a number of languages such as Greek or Hungarian.

The last analysis that has been considered claims that n-words are ambiguous between quantifiers and polarity items, thus reflecting an intermediate stage in Jespersen’s Cycle. Apart from the fact that the data used to support this claim come mainly from Spanish, a Romance language, this approach encounters problems when having to explain the behaviour of n-words in Strict NC languages.

In conclusion, all the approaches presented in this chapter have been criticised and attacked to a different extent. In addition, they all need to overcome the difficulties derived from having to account for a wide range of data by resorting to special mechanisms that need varying degrees of stipulation. In view of the facts, therefore, the choice of one of these approaches as the set of starting assumptions is largely influenced by the kind of data one needs to account for.

In the present dissertation, n-words are claimed to be non-negative indefinites that are syntactically dependent on a negative syntactic terminal. However, in certain languages, this fact is masked by a number of PF operations that are triggered by the need that derivations fulfil certain morphological requirements. This view is extensively defended in subsequent chapters with data coming from Standard English, Non-Standard British English, African American English and Romance.
1.4 Outline of the dissertation

The rest of the dissertation is organised as follows. Chapter 2 presents the main tenets of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1993, 1995, 2000, 2001 and 2005) and the Distributed Morphology model (Halle and Marantz 1993; Embick and Noyer 2007). Special emphasis is placed on the role of the PF level of representation and the assumption that the relation between syntax and morphology is direct. Any mismatches between syntactic structure and morphological representation are attributed to a number of post-syntactic PF operations that repair the syntactic output so it does not violate language-particular constraints.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the system of negation in Standard English. The main claim is that Standard English is ultimately an NC language, though subject to a Filter that prevents two negative features from being morphologically realised as adjacent. To avoid violation of the Filter, two PF operations are triggered. The specific Vocabulary of Standard English and the syntax of n-indefinites also contribute to yielding a complex picture: the sentential negative marker combines with n-indefinites of the any- and the no-type, but in the latter case, the sentential negative marker is never phonologically realised.

In chapter 4, some spontaneous data on NC in Non-Standard English are presented and discussed. The differences that are observed between Standard English and Non-Standard varieties of English are shown to follow from (i) the fact that certain varieties may not be subject to the Filter that conditions the expression of negation in Standard English and (ii) the fact that the syntax of n-indefinites is different in Standard English and Non-Standard varieties of English, thus not necessarily triggering a PF operation in the same context.

While (i) results in certain varieties of Non-Standard English tolerating the co-occurrence of an overt negative marker and n-words, it also predicts that those which are subject to the same constraint as Standard English may express negation similarly. It is shown in chapters 4 and 5 that this is indeed the case not only for some varieties of Non-Standard English, but also for Standard French, a Romance language. Thus, the combination of (i) and (ii) allows us to account for the differences, but also for the similarities of the expression of negation and NC in Standard English, Non-Standard varieties of English and a number of Romance languages, which are discussed in chapter 5. Finally, chapter 6 summarises the main conclusions of the dissertation.