

# Negative Concord in North Italo-Romance: why neither Déprez nor Zeijlstra can quite be right

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## 1. Introduction

The debate on Negative Concord (NC) revolves around two mutual exclusion patterns: the incompatibility of preverbal negative-marked items and negation in non-strict NC languages such as Italian in (1a) and the incompatibility of adverbial negation and negative-items (n-items) in languages such as French in (1b).

- (1) a. Nessuno (\*non) dorme (It.)  
b. Personne ne dort (\*pas) (Fr.)<sup>1</sup>  
'Nobody sleeps'

Current analyses of NC provide no unified account of (1a) and (1b), which are therefore regarded as independent phenomena. Evidence from Northern Italian varieties, however, shows that there is a considerable amount of variation that cannot be adequately described by treating the two phenomena as separate. This provides both a descriptive and a theoretical challenge for existing theories.

North Italian varieties are familiar from the theoretical literature on negation, but play hardly any role in the debate on NC, to which other Romance varieties contribute prominent examples. Thus, Déprez (2000, 2011), Déprez and Henri (2018) crucially compare the behavior of *pas/pa* under NC in Standard French and in French Creoles. The key parameter of Zeijlstra (2004, 2008, 2012) between Strict and Non-Strict NC is also illustrated by Romance languages (say Spanish/Italian vs. Romanian/French). Our first aim here is to show that North Italo-Romance data should not be neglected, since they in fact are problematic for both Déprez's and Zeijlstra's theories.

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<sup>1</sup> An anonymous reviewer points out that in colloquial French the preverbal negative marker *ne* can be omitted. Following Palasis 2013, we do not treat the omission of *ne* as an optional feature of French since *ne* is left out in certain registers, whereas it must always occur in Normed French, from which we exemplify.

Previous literature on North Italo-Romance varieties contains much groundwork for a proper understanding of their NC structures. Zanuttini (1997) focuses on the cartographic representation of negative positions, associated with specialized functional categories Neg, especially in relation to the adverbial hierarchy of Cinque (1999). Manzini and Savoia (2005) in addressing the cartographic analysis, reject the rigid adverbial hierarchies of the Cinque-Zanuttini analysis on the basis of additional and more detailed data (Manzini and Savoia 2011). In fact, they reject the functional category Neg itself, arguing that so-called Neg adverbs are either quantificational adverbs or bare Ns (minimizers) (Manzini and Savoia 2002, 2011, 2012). Garzonio and Poletto (2012, 2018) refine the analysis of negative arguments and adverbs in a diachronic perspective introducing a distinction between negations restricted by a nominal content and pure functional negations – to which different positions are also associated in the sentential tree (argument position vs. edge position).

When it comes to NC, Poletto (2017), rather like Zanuttini (1997), focusses on negative doubling, i.e. on the possible combinations between sentential negation adverbs and quantifiers for which she advocates an analysis along the lines of clitic doubling (i.e. a ‘big NegP’ formalization). Manzini and Savoia (2005) provide data and discussion both for the parameter concerning the possible combinations of sentential negation adverbs and negative arguments (Manzini and Savoia 2005, III: 258-285) and for the Strict/Non-Strict Concord parameter (Manzini and Savoia 2005, III: 313-320). Manzini and Savoia (2011) explicitly propose that all visible *n*-morphology, including *pas*-type adverbial negators, are NPIs. They further envisage mutual exclusion between negative arguments and sentential negations as the result of locality constraint (specifically local anti-identity, akin to a morphosyntactic OCP). However their discussion does not contain an explicit comparison with mainstream theories, nor any mention of non-NC languages.

In short, it is fair to say that the literature on Italo-Romance in pursuing its own theoretical questions such as the proper categorization, internal structure and positioning of sentential negation has perhaps not paid as much attention to NC as the topic would have required. Nevertheless, more recent literature has been quite explicit on the relevance of North Italian varieties to the NC debate – see notably Garzonio (2021). The point we want to make here is that conversely, the literature on NC needs to take stock of a number of data of North Italo-Romance which in our view potentially undermine the various general approaches that have been proposed.

In this contribution, we first review the approach by Déprez and that of Zeijlstra in view of North Italian data. We conclude that both theories, as they now stand, present problematic

aspects. We also briefly show that more recent alternatives to Zeijlstra’s analyses within a general Agree-based view of NC fail to address the specific issues we pose, including approaches by Szabolcsi (2018), Garzonio (2021). In the final section, we briefly reiterate the positions of NC already expressed by Manzini and Savoia (2011), Garzonio (2021).

## 2. Déprez (2000, 2011) vs. Zeijlstra (2004, 2008, 2012)

In this section, we outline the main tenets of both the Déprez and Zeijlstra analyses of NC. As we will see, from the point of view of the predicted variation, the two analyses are somewhat complementary: Déprez, studying French and French Creoles, mainly considers variation involving sentential negation adverbs (e.g. French *pas*). Vice versa, Zeijlstra crucially studies the Strict vs. Non-Strict NC parameter – focusing more on sentential negation clitics (or affixes).

Let us begin with the distinction between NC and non-NC languages. In non-NC languages two negative words within the sentential domain necessarily create a double logical negation reading, as in English (2a). In NC languages any combination of negative-marked words normally produces a single semantic negation reading, as in Italian (2b).<sup>2</sup>

- (2) a. I didn’t accomplish nothing. (I accomplished something)  
 b. Non ho fatto niente. (It.)  
 not I.have done n-thing  
 ‘I did nothing/I didn’t do anything’

There are a limited number of ways to go about accounting for (2) and for the considerable number of parameters that characterize NC languages, concerning negative-marked words that can and cannot combine. One of these, associated especially with the work of Déprez (2000, 2011), focusses on the nature of the negative-marked arguments, assuming that sentential negations (or at least sentential negation adverbs) are stable externalizations of the logical negation. The key NC languages for Déprez are French and Haitian Creole. As is well-known, French has a double sentential negation *ne...pas*, as in (3a) though *ne* can be omitted in informal speech (see fn. 1). Two negative items can easily combine as in (3d), however not even a single negative item can combine with *pas*, as in (3b-d).

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<sup>2</sup> Since either *nothing* or *anything* are appropriate English translations for Italian *niente* and similar items in NC languages, we will adopt the convention of glossing *niente* as ‘n-thing’, *nessuno* as ‘n-one’ or ‘n-body’ and so on.

- (3) a. Jean n' est pas allé au marché  
 Jean NEG is NEG gone to the market  
 'Jean hasn't gone to the market'
- b. Il ne voit (\*pas) personne  
 he NEG sees NEG n-body  
 'He doesn't see anybody'
- c. Personne ne le verra (\*pas)  
 n-body NEG him will.see NEG  
 'Nobody will see him'
- d. Personne ne verra (\*pas) rien  
 n-body NEG will.see NEG n-thing  
 'Nobody will see anything'

The facts of Haitian Creole are provided in (4) (from Homer 2013). The sentential negation is *pa*, positioned before the finite verb as in (4a) and before the various TAM markers as in (4b). This sentential negation can and in fact must combine with negative-marked arguments including *pèsonn* 'nobody/anybody' and *anyen* 'nothing/anything', as in (4c)-(4e).

- (4) a. Li pa ri  
 he NEG laughs  
 'He does not laugh'
- b. Jan pa t- av- ale nan mache  
 Jan NEG ANT IRR go in market  
 'Jan would not have gone to the market'
- c. Pèsonn \*(pa) vini  
 n-body NEG come  
 'Nobody came'
- d. Li \*(pa) wè pèsonn  
 he NEG see n-body  
 'He saw nobody.'
- e. Pèsonn \*(pa) wè anyen  
 n-body NEG see n-thing  
 'Nobody saw anything'

For Déprez (2000, 2011), *pa/pas* is the logical negation operator in both French and in Haitian Creole while the negative-marked arguments in fact differ in the two languages, along the lines of (5) (Déprez 2011: 232). Both French *personne* and Haitian Creole *pèsonn* originate from the reanalysis of the bare noun *personne/pèsonn*. Whereas the Haitian Creole *pèsonn* ends up occupying a low position in the DP, cf. (5a), French *personne* is forced to climb to D, as in (5b), since French forbids bare nouns. As a consequence, Haitian Creole *pèsonn* still behaves like a bare noun that is interpreted as a Negative Polarity Item, i.e. a free variable (with a lexical restrictor) bound by existential closure, precisely in the scope of the negation and of other relevant operators. By contrast, French *personne* is a determiner with quantificational force. On the basis of (5a), Haitian Creole is predicted to freely combine the exponent of the logical negation *pa* with any NPI, and in fact with two or more such elements. By contrast, in French NC amounts to quantifier absorption. For instance, in (3d) the two Negative Concord Items (NCI) both contain a quantifier; these two are turned into a diadic quantifier binding two variables. Mutual exclusion with *pas* is then to be imputed to restrictions on resumptive quantification. Languages like English are easily accounted for as languages with quantificational negative items and no resumptive quantification.

- (5) a. [DP D        [NP pèsonn ]]        Haitian Creole  
       b. [DP personne [NP N ]]        Contemporary French

Before we consider how this model fares with respect to North Italian data, we turn to the other main syntactic model of NC, namely the modelling of NC by Agree proposed by Zeijlstra (2004, 2008, 2011). The key parameter considered by Zeijlstra is that between Strict and Non-Strict NC languages. Following Zeijlstra (2008), in (6) we illustrate Strict NC with Czech. In (6a) the *ne* clitic obligatorily cooccurs with the postverbal n-item; in (6b) the same is true of the *ne* clitic and an n-item preceding it. This contrasts with Non-Strict NC in Italian, which like Czech has a sentential negation clitic. The latter obligatorily cooccurs with a postverbal n-item, while it is mutually exclusive with a preverbal n-item, as in (7).

- (6) a. Milan    \*(ne)vidi    nikoho        Czech  
       Milan    NEG-sees    n-body  
       ‘Milan doesn’t see anybody’

- b. Dnes nikdo \*(ne)volá  
 today n-body NEG-calls  
 'Today nobody is calling'
- (7) a. Gianni \*(non) ha visto nessuno Italian  
 Gianni NEG has seen n-body  
 'Gianni hasn't seen anybody'
- b. Nessuno (\*non) ha chiamato oggi  
 n-body NEG has called today  
 'Nobody has called today'

The account proposed by Zeijlstra (2008) for the contrast in (6)-(7) provides a good introduction to his general model and to some of the means he has at his disposal to account for variation. The basic idea of Zeijlstra is that NC is a purely syntactic phenomenon of agreement – and as such it is adequately modelled by Chomsky's (2000, 2001) rule of Agree. For Chomsky, Agree is Minimal Search and Match, triggered by the non-interpretable nature of phi-feature sets (on C, on v). These need to be matched by interpretable sets, accessible to phase head probes under Minimality. Something of this sort is involved in NC – with one notable difference. In NC, interpretable Neg features [iNeg] c-command [uNeg]. Much of Zeijlstra's theoretical work (e.g., Zeijlstra 2012) is devoted to clarifying and justifying this move away from standard minimalist Agree; here we do not discuss it further, having noted the potential issues it raises.

In all NC languages, therefore both in Italian and in Czech, NC-items are syntactically modelled as [uNeg] items. What varies is the sentential negation, which is sometimes [iNeg] and sometimes [uNeg]. In general, then, while for Déprez it is n-items that account for variation, for Zeijlstra it is sentential negations. In his terms, Italian *non* is [iNeg]; it is a negative operator that checks the [uNeg] features in its scope, thus licencing (7a). However, in (7b) the subject n-item cannot agree with *non* since it is not in the c-command domain of the latter, cf. (8a) corresponding to (7b). In that case the subject agrees with a covert [iNeg] operator in C, cf. (8b).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It is not entirely clear why covert [iNeg] operator in C cannot license postverbal n-items in the same way in which overt operators such as *senza* 'without' in (i) do.

(i) Ha parlato due ore senza (\*non) dire niente.  
 He.has spoken two hours without not say n-thing  
 'He spoke two hours without saying anything.'

- (8) a. \*[TP Nessuno<sub>[uNEG]</sub> [T' non<sub>[iNEG]</sub> ha [VP chiamato]]]  
 b. [CP Op<sub>[iNEG]</sub> [TP nessuno<sub>[uNEG]</sub> [T' ha [VP chiamato]]]]

Strict NC languages like Czech are simply languages where the schema in (8b) is generalized. In Czech, the Neg clitic is [uNeg] exactly like all n-items, pointing to the presence of an abstract [iNeg] operator licensing all negative elements, along the lines of (9).

- (9) [CP Op<sub>[iNEG]</sub> [TP nikdo<sub>[uNEG]</sub> [T' ne<sub>[uNEG]</sub> volá ...

At this point, remembering the data of Déprez, we may inquire how Zeijlstra's analysis applies in languages with adverbial negations (eventually doubled by a clitic). Penka (2011) extends the Agree account of NC to French. Evidently, *pas* cannot be [uNeg] because in that case we would expect that it should cooccur with any n-item, as *ne* or the Czech clitic. Therefore French *pas* must be [iNeg], which still does not explain why it should be mutually exclusive with n-items in its scope (and why it can co-occur with *ne* in formal registers). The answer provided by Penka (2011) is essentially stipulative – namely that French n-items must agree with a covert [iNeg] in CP.

Zeijlstra 2022: 98-100 provides an alternative analysis of French that resorts to a purely semantic explanation. Neither *ne* nor *pas* carries the feature [NEG]. The former, *ne*, is syntactically and semantically non-negative, i.e. a NPI. In fact, *ne* cannot negate a sentence by itself and can occur in certain DE environments. N-items do not agree with *ne*, but with a covert operator:

- (10) Op<sub>[iNEG]</sub> je ne mange rien<sub>[uNEG]</sub>  
           I NEG eat n-thing  
           'I eat nothing'

*Pas* is semantically negative, although it carries no [NEG] formal feature. Since *pas* is semantically negative, it can occur with *ne*, but it cannot co-occur with n-items without triggering a DN reading. The DN reading results from the co-occurrence of the covert operator that agrees with n-items and *pas*:

- (11) Op<sup>¬</sup><sub>[iNEG]</sub> *Personne*<sub>[uNEG]</sub> (*ne*) mange *pas* *rien*<sub>[uNEG]</sub>  
 n-body NEG eats NEG n-thing  
 ‘Nobody doesn’t eat anything’

As previously mentioned, the DN reading in (11) and, hence, the ungrammaticality of NC, receives a semantic explanation. The lack of NC between *pas* and other n-items does not follow from the agree mechanism, i.e. from the syntactic distribution of [iNEG] and [uNEG]. This is a rather unwelcome result for a theory that aims at a syntactic account of NC. French therefore provides us with a first glimpse into the issues that *clitic...adverb* discontinuous negations raise for the Agree theory of NC – namely, raising the need for more or less additional statements about observed variation.

Vice versa, the question arises how Déprez accounts for the Strict/Non-Strict NC facts. In her terms (Déprez 2017), Strict NC, as observed in Haitian Creole, is a result of the subject NPI reconstructing in the scope of the Neg operator (*pa* in Haitian Creole). Therefore, besides the parameter concerning the quantification or free variable status of NPIs/NCIs her system requires a second independent parameter concerning reconstruction.

On the other hand, no problem arises for elements like French *ne* “which acts as a doubling negative marker of the French NCI, but never has a negative import of its own, since it is unable to negate a simple declarative proposition”, see for instance (12). Indeed, “the doubling negation marker has no semantic import and, consequently, is a mere morphological marker or an expletive negation that must be licensed essentially along the same lines as the NCI themselves” (Déprez 2017:104). But as we will see, in North Italian *clitic...adverb* negation systems, the negation is not necessarily inert as in French, raising doubts about the possibility of generalizing the simple treatment proposed for French. In other words, complex negation systems do not appear to be any easier to handle for Déprez than for Zeijlstra.

- (12) \*Jean ne mange une pomme  
 John NEG eats an apple  
 ‘John doesn’t eat an apple’

### 3. Discontinuous negation and NC: new challenges

As is well-known from Zanuttini (1997), North Italian varieties have sentential negations comparable to those of French, sometimes doubled by a sentential negation clitic and sometimes



negating alone.<sup>4</sup> In other words, we have a considerable sample of languages where various combinations of sentential negation adverbs and sentential negation clitics with n-marked arguments are in principle possible. In this section and in the next one we will review patterns that prove problematic for either account reviewed so far.

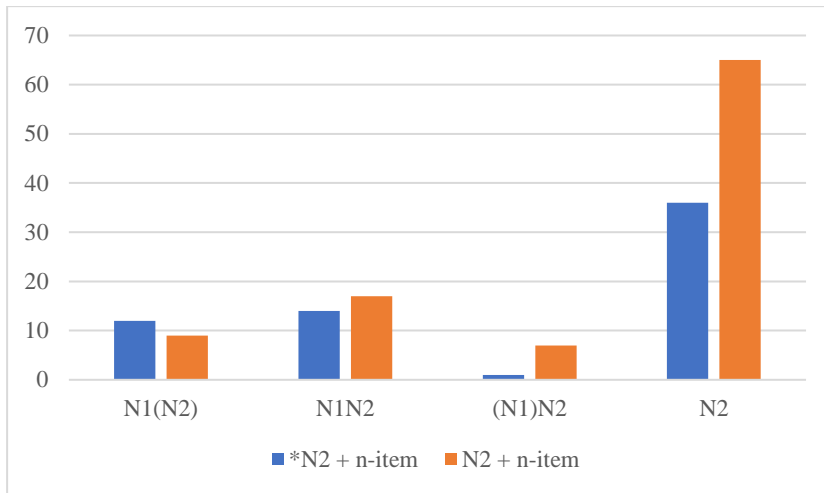
North Italian varieties that interest us in relation to the analysis of Déprez are those that have a sentential negation system including both a clitic and an adverb. Out of 171 varieties surveyed in Manzini and Savoia (2005, III: 259-272), 60 varieties present, to various extent, the co-occurrence of negative clitics (N1) and adverbial negators (N2). For several varieties, we have data concerning the combination or mutual exclusion of n-items with sentential negation adverbs (Manzini and Savoia 2005, III: 259-272) and with sentential negation clitics (Manzini and Savoia 2005, III: 313-320).<sup>5</sup> More than half of the varieties exhibiting both N1 and N2, corresponding to lines 1-3 of table 1, allow the adverbial negator N2 to co-occur with n-items. The data reported in table 1 are plotted in Fig. 1.

**Table 1.** Number of languages per negation system (N1, N2) allowing/disallowing the co-occurrence of N2 with negative-marked arguments. Sample: 171 northern Italian varieties surveyed by Manzini and Savoia 2005, III: 259-272.

	<b>*N2 + n-items</b>	<b>N2 + n-items</b>
<b>N1(N2)</b>	12	9
<b>N1N2</b>	14	17
<b>(N1)N2</b>	1	7
<b>N2</b>	36	65
<b>total</b>	63	98

<sup>4</sup> The North Italian label is used here in a broad fashion encompassing varieties generally spoken within the political boundaries of Italy, but belonging to different dialectological groupings in situations of microcontact (especially Occitan and Franco-Provencal of Western Piedmont).

<sup>5</sup> Data for the cooccurrence or mutual exclusion of sentential negations and n-items are reported separately (Manzini and Savoia 2005, I: 62-69).



**Fig. 1.** Number of languages per negation system (N1, N2) allowing (orange) or disallowing (blue) the co-occurrence of N2 with negative-marked arguments. Sample: 171 northern Italian varieties surveyed by Manzini and Savoia 2005, III: 259-272.

The interesting varieties from our point of view are those where the clausal negation adverb excludes n-items. A relevant set of examples is in (13)-(14). The examples in (13) illustrate the adverbial negation [*'briza*] obligatorily occurring in the absence of n-items. Those in (14) illustrate the mutual exclusion of [*'briza*] and n-items.<sup>6</sup>

(13) Finale Emilia (Emilia)

- a. i n 'dɔram \*('briza)  
 they=NEG sleep NEG  
 'They don't sleep'
- b. i nn a \*('briza) ma'ja  
 they=NEG have NEG eaten  
 'They haven't eaten'
- c. a m be:v \*('briza) viŋ  
 I= NEG drink NEG wine  
 'I don't drink wine'

<sup>6</sup> Several varieties have a second sentential adverb often characterized as 'presuppositional' (Zanuttini 1997) – and that generally cooccurs with n-marked arguments. This is the case for Finale Emilia, where the relevant form is *minga*. In fact in a small subset of varieties where the (ordinary) sentential negation adverb cooccurs with other n-items (see section 4), the two adverbs (ordinary and presuppositional) can combine (Manzini and Savoia 2005). Dagnac and Burnett (2016) illustrate similar facts in Picard. Incidentally, the very limited extent to which North Italian data have entered the NC debate is attested by the fact that Tortora and Blanchette (2020), while commenting on the data of Picard, do not draw any parallel with North Italian. The whole matter is orthogonal to present concerns.

- d. i nn a \*('briza) ma'na i bis'kɔt  
 they=NEG have NEG eaten the biscuits  
 'They haven't eaten the biscuits'
- (14) a. a n vjen (\*'briza) ni'euŋ  
 It=NEG comes NEG n-body  
 'Nobody comes'
- b. i n 'maŋa (\*'briza) ŋent  
 they=NEG eat NEG n-thing  
 'They don't eat anything'
- c. i n 'tʃama mai ni'euŋ  
 they=NEG call n-ever n-body  
 'They never call anybody'
- d. a n 'maŋa 'ŋenta ni'euŋ  
 it=NEG eats n-thing n-body  
 'Nobody eats anything'
- e. i nn a ma'na ŋe:nt  
 they=NEG have eaten n-thing  
 'They haven't eaten anything'

Data like those in (13)-(14) are unremarkably similar to those of French. Nevertheless, the Finale Emilia variety differs from (Normed) French in that the presence of a preverbal n-marked subject forces the absence of the sentential negation clitic as well, as in (15).

- (15) ni'euŋ a (\*n) 'maŋa  
 n-body he= NEG eats  
 'Nobody eats'

Describing the language of Finale in (13)-(15) in the terms of Déprez becomes very difficult. On the one hand, exactly as in French (12) the clitic of Finale cannot negate by itself, see the examples in (13). Therefore it ought to be a mere morphological marker devoid of any role in the negation system of the language, as Déprez (2017) claims for French *ne*. Yet it is evident that in (15) the sentential negation clitic is mutually exclusive with the prenominal n-subject – though it combines with any postnominal n-item, including the postverbal subject in (14d). This is the pattern that we expect from a Non-Strict NC language like Italian. But if so, the

explanation presupposes that the clitic is the negation operator. This is in contradiction with the necessity for the adverb to be the logical operator, in order to predict its mutual exclusion with any n-item.

Perhaps more fundamentally, the data in (13)-(15) are at odds with Déprez's (2000, 2011) hypothesis that NC (or the lack thereof) hinges on the distinction between NPIs and (strong) negative quantifiers. Recall that in her terms negative operators corresponding to sentential negations cooccur with NPIs (Haitian Creole), but are mutually exclusive with n-items bearing quantificational force, though the latter cooccur with one another due to quantifier absorption. North Italian clitic-adverb sentential negations point to the different conclusion that cooccurrence or mutual exclusion of sentential negations with n-items does not depend on the different semantics of the latter, but rather on the properties of the sentential negations themselves.

This then could lead us towards the analysis of Zeijlstra (2004) where NC parameters are imputed to the feature properties of sentential negations. In reality, it seems to us that Agree approaches are equally at pain to describe Finale-type languages even if one resort to a semantic explanation like Zeijlstra (2022) does for French. The non-strict NC pattern in (15) shows that neither the clitic nor the adverbial negator are ruled out because of semantic factors: if the former were a NPI (as Zeijlstra suggests for French), it would always co-occur with n-items, contra (15). Analogously, if the adverbial negator were semantically negative (as Zeijlstra suggests for French), it would never co-occur with the covert negative operator, contra (14).

Rather than trying to work out existing theories for this particular issue, in the next section we will present an independent case study which further undermines the accounts of both Déprez and Zeijlstra.

#### **4. Simple verb vs. auxiliary-participle contexts**

In section 3 we considered a variety where there is mutual exclusion between the sentential negation adverb and n-items. However, in other varieties sentential negation adverbs systematically cooccur with n-items. The evidence relevant for the present discussion has to do with a certain number of varieties where mutual exclusion of the sentential negation adverb and n-items is determined by the syntactic context. Specifically, mutual exclusion of the sentential negation adverb (n-adv) is found with simple inflected verbs only if the same restriction is observed in auxiliary-participle constructions ( $p < 0.00001$ ), as shown in Table 2. Both the data

and the analyses go back to Manzini and Savoia (2005, 2011), though here we make their relevance explicit for the Agree model of NC.

**Table 2.** Number of languages allowing the co-occurrence of n-adv with n-items in simple vs compound tenses.

		<b>compound tenses</b>	
		*n-adv	n-adv
<b>Simple</b>	*n-adv	82	26
	<b>tenses</b>	2	59

An example of uniform cooccurrence of the sentential negation adverb with n-items is provided by the variety of Fontane in (16), which allows the sentential negation adverb to cooccur with n-items both in object and in subject position, both in simple and in compound tenses.<sup>7</sup> Data like (16) are reminiscent of those of Haitian Creole and can be treated both by Déprez and by Zeijlstra.

(16) Fontane (Piedmont)

- a.  $\text{ɲy}\eta$      $i$              $'\text{dr}\theta\text{mu}$   $\text{ɲent}$   
n-body there= sleep NEG  
‘Nobody sleeps’
- b.  $\text{ɲy}\eta$      $i$              $\text{a}\eta$      $\text{ɲent}$   $\text{dry}'\text{mi}$   
n-body there= have NEG slept  
‘Nobody sleeps’
- c.  $\text{ui}$          $\text{v}\eta\eta$      $\text{ɲent}$   $'\text{ɲy}\eta\theta$   
there= comes NEG n-body  
‘There comes nobody’
- d.  $\text{uj}$      $a$          $\text{ɲent}$   $\text{v}\eta\eta'$   $\text{gy}$   $\text{ɲy}\eta\theta$   
there=has NEG come n-body  
‘There has come nobody’

The relevant data for present purposes are in (17) vs. (18) for the variety of Cantoira (Western Piedmont, technically a Franco-Provencal variety) – where the sentential negation adverb is

<sup>7</sup> Fontane has Occitan characters, from a dialectological point of view.

mutually exclusive with n-items in simple tenses (17), but not in compound tenses (18). More data, glossed and translated into English, can be found in Manzini and Savoia (2011).

(17) Cantoira (Valli di Lanzo)

- a. e 'miŋdza (\*niŋ) ɲyŋ  
 he= eats NEG n-body  
 'Nobody eats'
- b. u 'tʃamunt (\*niŋ) mai ɲyŋ  
 they=call NEG n-ever n-body  
 'They never call anybody'

- (18) a. uj ont niŋ tʃa'ma ɲyŋ  
 they=have NEG called n-body  
 'They haven't called anybody'
- b. uj ont niŋ fət 'njente  
 they have NEG done n-thing  
 'They haven't done anything'

Let us consider how data like (17)-(18) could be accounted for in the framework of Zeijlstra. We may account for mutual exclusion of the sentential negation adverb *niŋ* and n-items in (17), by assuming that *niŋ* is [iNeg] – though only an abstract [iNeg] can licence n-items, as Penka (2011) proposes for French. But consider what happens in (18) under this hypothesis. Needless to say, we keep predicting mutual exclusion, contrary to fact. To be more precise, we may assume that auxiliary-participle sentence have a richer internal structure than simple verb structures. For instance, we may assume that auxiliaries really are lexical verbs selecting a reduced (participial) complement – along the lines of Kayne (1993), Manzini and Savoia (2005, 2011). However even a participial structure endowed with some autonomous functional structure could not be associated with a C layer hosting a covert [iNeg] operator.<sup>8</sup>

Let us then try the opposite strategy. Looking at the data in (18), we may surmise that Cantoira is a language just like Fontane in (16) where the sentential negation adverb carries [uNeg]. But this hypothesis fares no better, since the impossibility of combining sentential negation and n-items in (17) remains unexplained. It is possible that there are other combinations of [uNeg] and [iNeg] that escape us – however it seems to us that, as the theory

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<sup>8</sup> A mixed syntactic/semantic account à la Zeijlstra (2022) does not improve on this conclusion, as far as we can tell.

now stands, data like (17)-(18) inescapably give rise to some internal contradiction. The root of this contradiction is that in the asymmetric definition of Agree of Chomsky (2000, 2001), a given element can only be a probe (uninterpretable) or a goal (interpretable). Suppose then we follow Zeijlstra (2004, 2012) in imputing NC to multiple Inverse Agree (several uninterpretable probes but a single interpretable goal). Any given element, say *nin* in (17)-(18), can either be a probe or a goal – but the theory of Agree is predicated on the idea that the two values cannot be switched around depending on the context of merger.

The problem is compounded by the observation that though the language of Cantoira clearly allows the systematic cooccurrence of the sentential negation adverb with VP-internal n-items, it blocks its cooccurrence with n-marked preverbal subjects even in compound tenses, as shown in (19b). By contrast, postverbal subject cooccur with the sentential negation adverb in compound tenses, as in (19a). The data in (19) fall under the Strict/Non-Strict NC parameter as defined in Zeijlstra’s work and are not problematic for him in themselves. What is problematic is how they may be unified with the asymmetry between simple and compound tenses in (17)-(18).

(19) Cantoira

- a. e jøt nin min'dza nyŋ  
 it=has NEG eaten n-body  
 ‘Nobody has eaten’
- b. nyŋ e jøt (\*nin) min'dza  
 n-body he= has NEG eaten  
 ‘Nobody has eaten’

In short, the Agree model of NC fails to predict North Italian varieties where NC depends on the context of insertion of the elements involved, making it impossible to assign them a fixed [uNeg] or [iNeg] feature. At the same time, the approach of Déprez does not have a better handle on these data than the Agree approach. On the contrary, in her framework, which is heavily dependent on the semantic interface value of n-items, there is even less reason to expect that syntactic locality of the kind described here would play any role.

Besides participial constructions, further variation with respect to NC depends on the relative position of negative adverbs and past participles. The following table show that NC is found more readily in varieties in which the adverbial negation precedes the participle (Table 3; p = .000033) or the adverb *già* ‘already’ (Table 4; p = .0448).

**Table 3.** Number of languages in which adverbial negators (n-adv) co-occur with negative items and precede the past participle.

	<b>n-adv &gt; part</b>	<b>part &gt; n-adv</b>
<b>*n-adv + n-item</b>	35	16
<b>n-adv + n-item</b>	86	4

**Table 4.** Number of languages in which adverbial negators (n-adv) co-occur with negative items and precede the adverb *già* ‘already’.

	<b>n-adv &gt; già</b>	<b>già &gt; n-adv</b>
<b>*n-adv + n-item</b>	12	11
<b>n-adv + n-item</b>	59	18

Neither Zeijlstra nor Déprez’s analyses can account for the data illustrated in Tables 3-4 – involving once again a correlation between positional and NC properties.

We are not the first to point out difficulties with the Agree approach, which by and large has become the standard approach to NC in minimalism. Indeed, some scholars present counterarguments based on the same general schema developed for North Italian in this section, namely that the same items can enter different NC patterns depending on their syntactic context of occurrence. For instance, Szabolcsi (2018) shows that the Hungarian negation *nem* cannot be characterized as [iNeg] or [uNeg] unambiguously since it may yield both Strict and Non-Strict NC depending on certain other syntactic factors.

Nevertheless, solutions proposed in the literature generally limit themselves to enriching Zeijlstra’s approach. Thus, Szabolcsi, following Chierchia (2013), postulates both an abstract negation operator  $\neg$  and a NEG functional projection, which either hosts  $\neg$  or triggers it – essentially encoding NC as a part of a functional hierarchy along cartographic lines. Longobardi (2017) enriches the featural repertory of Zeijlstra postulating two features, namely [ $\pm$ NOT], i.e. the negative quantifier property, and [ $\pm$ ANY], i.e. the NPI property, where the two positive values crucially combine in Romance n-items. In this way, he accounts for a considerable repertory of Romance facts, including basic patterns of Occitan and North Italo-Romance, but not for the contextual effects discussed in this section for Cantoira, as far as we can tell.

Though providing a systematic account of NC is beyond the scope of the present contribution, we conclude it by outlining some desiderata for such an account in the next



section. In so doing we presuppose a conclusion that complex featural or cartographic systems of the type just briefly reviewed do not represent a viable prospect.

## 5. Desiderata for a theory of NC and ways forward

Like other scholars already quoted, Garzonio (2021), working on contemporary and historical Venetan varieties, spots the problem that “negative indefinites, negative adverbs and the negation marker can have different feature specifications in the same language”. He resolves the issue that besets Zeijlstra as to why a [uNeg] element would be at all needed if the logical negation [iNeg] is covertly instantiated by proposing that on the contrary, “the pre-T negation marker [is] a type of repair strategy element which satisfies the visibility condition of *Op* being specified as [uNeg]. This condition must be satisfied at the edge of TP in languages with preverbal negation, like those I am considering here, but the proposal could be extended to systems with postverbal negation, assuming that languages can vary according to the locus where the visibility of the negative *Op* must be satisfied (e.g. vP)”. For Garzonio, Non-Strict Concord languages are languages where “a negative indefinite in a spec–head relation with the inflected verb is sufficient to make the disembodied negative *Op* visible”.<sup>9</sup>

The formalization provided, however, is not systematic enough to make point by point comparison with standard Agree models easily possible. While we leave this work for future research, in what follows we sketch general guidelines for it, based on the assumption that locality domains are crucial when discussing cooccurrence and mutual exclusion patterns. This means in particular that reference to phases is necessary – though as the previous discussion shows, phases are not prominent in theories of NC.<sup>10</sup>

Before coming back briefly to the data in sections 3-4, let us consider a simpler parameter of Romance: some languages like Italian only have a clitic sentential negation *non*; other languages like Cantoira in (17)-(18) only have an adverbial sentence negation. Finally French combines the two possibilities. This hints at a phasal organization along the lines in (20).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Similarly, for Manzini and Savoia (2011), also quoted by Garzonio, argumental NPIs can “subsume” the sentential negation, specifically when they are in a local (i.e. head-Spec) configuration; if none is present, the sentential negation must be inserted (the ‘repair’ mentioned by Garzonio). In unpublished work, Homer (2013), Homer and Thommen (2013) hint at similar conclusions at least for Strict NC languages like Haitian Creole.

<sup>10</sup> In the original definition of Agree by Chomsky (2000: 122) only Minimality (“closest c-command”) is defined as a locality condition on Agree.

<sup>11</sup> A reviewer points out that both adverbial and clitic negation are in the edge of the phase and therefore within the Workspace when the next phase head is merged. What is relevant for the classification in (20) is the fact that the adverb is merged as a modifier of the v head, namely <Adv, v> if modification is modelled by Pair Merge – and similarly the clitic is merged with the I head (Manzini and Pescarini 2022).

(20) Sentential negations

- a. C phase: *non* (Italian)
- b. v phase: *jin/jent* (Piedmontese)
- c. C and v phases: *ne...pas* (French)

The next step is to recognize that conditions requiring or excluding sentential negations apply at the phase level. Fontane in (16) is a language where a negative adverb is always merged in the *v* phase independently of the presence or absence of n-items. In Cantoira in (17)-(18), on the contrary, the negative item is present only if n-items are missing – Garzonio (2021) calls this a ‘repair’, cf. (21a). From this perspective, the Strict vs. Non-Strict NC parameter is similar, only applied within the C phase, as in (21b).

(21) a. v phase:

- a1. sentential Neg always (e.g. Fontane)
- a2. sentential Neg only if necessary (e.g. Cantoira)

b. C phase:

- b1. sentential Neg always (e.g. Czech)
- b2. sentential Neg only if necessary (e.g. Italian)

To model the facts in (21) without adopting repairs (hence potential backtracking), we propose that variation results from the way in which languages satisfy essentially two requirements. One is a requirement that a [Neg] feature on the phase head enters Agree with a [Neg] feature within its Search domain. This can be construed as standard minimalist Agree with the phase head being the probe and n-items its goal. If the phase contains no n-item, then a suitable clausal negative marker is merged, i.e. a negative clitic and/or a negative adverb – the availability of either or both depending on external (viz. historical) factors.

The second parameter is an EPP-like requirement at the edge of each phase (Garzonio’s 2021 visibility condition). Variation depends on how the EPP-like requirement is satisfied when the phase contains an n-item. Fontane-type languages always require a dedicated clausal negation marker in the *v* phase. The same is true of Czech in the C-I phase, whereas in Non-Strict NC languages the presence of an n-item at the edge of the phase (e.g. Spec, IP) suffices.

Assuming the phasal organization of NC in (21), we can also account for the contrast between simple and compound tenses in (17)-(18). Recall that we have already suggested in

section 4 that part of the solution may reside in ideas by Kayne (1993), Manzini and Savoia (2005, 2011) that auxiliary-participle structures contain two lexical verbs, namely the auxiliary and the participle, the latter perhaps reduced to a vP, along the lines of (22). Structures of this type have been proposed before notably for (a subset of) causative constructions (Burzio 1986, Folli and Harley 2007).

(22) [vP [VP have [vP [VP V-ed]]]]

In the Cantoira examples the contrast between the structures in (17) containing a simple verb (non cooccurrence of negative adverb and n-items) and the auxiliary-participle structures in (18) (cooccurrence of any n-item) can be accounted for in phasal terms, along the lines of (23). In order to correctly process the examples, recall that the final position of the finite verb or auxiliary is in I (hence to the left of the adverb). Crucially the sentential negation adverb *nin* is impossible in (23a) because it is unnecessary, being in the same phase as an n-item;<sup>12</sup> this is not true in (23b).

- (23) a. [vP v [AspP \**nin* [vP t[*amunt nin*]]] ] (simple tense – monophasal)  
           ↑*phase 1*
- b. [vP v [AspP *nin* [vP ont [vP v [vP t[*ama nin*]]]]] (compound tense – biphasal)  
           ↑*phase 2*                                 ↑*phase 1*

The explanation of contrasts like (23) shows that the combination of negative elements in (20) with phase-based parameters in (21) is not a notational variant of previous accounts, but has some genuine explanatory potential. As one may expect, it also raises empirical issues of its own. One of them relates to Cantoira’s data in (19). We tentatively propose that n-subjects move like operators through the phase edge, thus satisfying the negative EPP, see (24a). Conversely, n-items that remain in situ (including inverted subjects) do not satisfy the EPP and, consequently, they co-occur with the adverbial clausal negation marker, see (24b).

(24) a. [CP ***nin*** [IP e jøt [vP1 ***nin*** (\****nin***) jøt [vP2 *mijn'dza nin*]]]]

↑

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<sup>12</sup> Non-necessity leading to impossibility is a typical economy effect. A reviewer further points out that “compositionality”, i.e. in general semantic interpretation, certainly does not require negation to be marked in all phases (or here all v phases). In our view, the phasal organization is a hallmark of the purely syntactic nature of NC and of its parameters (as sketched above).

b. [CP [IP e jøt [vP1 \*(**niŋ**) jøt [vP2 miŋ'dʒa **nyŋ**]]]]

Languages with two negations are predicted to be a combination of the simpler languages considered. Take for instance French. This is of course a language where the negation of the v phase (*pas*) is only inserted in the absence of other n-items, rather like Cantoira in (21a).<sup>13</sup> At the same time the negation of the C phase (i.e. the *ne* clitic) is always inserted – so that French is a Strict NC language in the C phase, rather like Czech in (21b).<sup>14</sup> At the present stage of our knowledge, we expect all logically possible combinations ought to be attested, though this needs to be checked.

## 5. Conclusions

In this contribution, we have argued that the best known accounts of NC meet problems with respect to North Italian varieties. The analysis of Déprez (2000, 2011) does not predict that the same n-items in different syntactic positions may or may not trigger Negative Concord, since for Déprez, NC parameters are connected to the quantificational force of NPIs/NCIs. The Agree analysis, first proposed by Zeijlstra (2004, 2008), but accepted by many other scholars, can account for the well-known divide between Strict and Non-Strict NC languages, but it has problems in capturing other syntactic configurations, yielding NC or lack thereof – notably those involving adverbial negation markers. Working towards the solution of those problems, we have sketched parameters requiring (or not) merger of a negative marker – so called “sentential negation” – in the C and/or the v phase depending on other n-items or an EPP-like edge constraint.

<sup>13</sup> Of course, unlike Cantoira, French does not lift the ban on *pas* in auxiliary-participle structures. We have reasons to believe that the relevant parameter may be independent of NC, and be connected rather to the structure of the participle. In Piedmontese varieties, unlike in French, participles can host functional material such as enclitics (Manzini and Savoia 2005, Pescarini 2021). This may point to a heavier functional structure, justifying the phase status attributed to them here. In the absence of this, we expect participial structure to behave like simple verb structures in French.

<sup>14</sup> The well-known observation that that *ne* cannot negate by itself does not imply that *ne* is not a negative marker. Additionally, in normed French *ne* can negate certain predicates, e.g.

- (i) Il **n**'ose (pas) chanter en public.  
he not dares to sing in public
- (ii) Elle **ne** cesse (pas) de penser à la compétition.  
She not ceases to think about competitors
- (iii) Il **ne** sait (pas) quand son frère reviendra.  
He not knows when his brother will come back
- (iv) Lucie était exaspérée de **ne** (pas) pouvoir faire démarrer son ordinateur.  
Lucie was exasperated to not be able to start her computer

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