

# There's nobodies that don't agree\*

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## 1. Introduction

As already Belloni (1991) notes, some Veneto varieties have a plural form of the negative existential quantifier *nobody* besides the standard singular form at their disposal, e.g. the plural form *nisuni* exists besides the singular form *nisun* in Venice. Indeed, a dive into the *Atlante Sintattico dell'Italia* (ASIt) shows that at least 50 Northern Italian dialects (NID), not only in Veneto, but also in Friuli, Trentino, Lombardy and Piedmont, exhibit such a pluralized form of *nobody*. While the pluralization of negative quantifiers is not as rare as one might intuitively expect (Plank 1994), the NID plural negative quantifier is quite unique since it is exclusively used as pronoun. Furthermore, from a semantic point of view, this element raises the issue how to interpret a pluralization of *nobody*. However, despite its peculiarity, to the best of my knowledge, it has not been treated in great depth in the literature. Cinque (1997) and Poletto (2020) shortly comment on its existence in Veneto dialects and hint at a (partitive) specific reading of the plural form. But not only the question of *nisuni*'s semantic nature deserves a further treatment. As the data presented here (gathered through the ASIt as well as through own fieldwork) suggest, *nisuni* is also peculiar in its morphosyntactic properties, more specifically its ability to control agreement: It consistently controls plural agreement on verbs and subjects clitics when it is selected as external argument, irrespective of its pre- or postverbal position.

### (1) *Gazzolo (Verona, Veneto)*

La torta,	no	i	la	ga	magna	nisuni.
The cake	not	SCL.3.M.PL	OCL.3.F.SG	has	eaten	nobody.M.PL

“As for the cake, nobody has eaten it.”

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\* This paper is an homage to Cecilia on her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, whose magnetic force was what pulled me into linguistics. Her seemingly infinite energy and (effectively) infinite source of ideas will never cease to inspire me. Infinite, on my part, is my gratitude for her strong and continuous support.

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(2) *Aldeno (Trento, Trentino Alto Adige)*

Nesuni	i	è	arivadi	en temp.
Nobody	SCL.M.PL	be.3	arrived.M.PL	in time

“Nobody arrived in time.”

However, in certain dialects, it never controls agreement when it is selected as the internal argument of unaccusative verbs and in passive constructions and occupies a postverbal position. Agreement control by *nisuni* seems to be unacceptable in these latter contexts. Thereby, it seems to group with the postverbal pivot in Italo-Romance Existential Sentences, which has been claimed to be the “worst candidate for agreement control” by Bentley, Ciconte & Cruschina (2015: 128).

The present paper aims to offer a more in-depth treatment of this sparsely addressed peculiarity of the Northern Italian dialects. It will be structured as follows: Section 2 addresses the morphological forms that are used for the plural negative existential quantifier cross-dialectally as well as its geographical distribution. In Section 3, the intuition by Cinque (1997) and Poletto (2020) on the semantic nature of *nisuni* will be explained and set in the context of *nisuni*’s etymology and the seemingly equivalent *nadies* which exists in some Spanish varieties. Section 4 offers a selection of data, gathered through the ASIIt and own fieldwork, that illustrate *nisuni*’s ability to control agreement in certain structures as well as its inability to control agreement in other structures. Section 5 offers a tentative integration of the presented findings on *nisuni* in the panorama of Italo-Romance agreement variations in VS structures and addresses questions that remain for future work. Section 6 concludes.

## 2. Morphological forms and geographical distribution

As a quest into the depths of the ASIIt reveals, 51 Northern Italian dialects<sup>1</sup> have a form of the negative existential quantifier at their disposal that can control plural agreement. Such forms can not only be found in Veneto, but also in other Northern Italian regions. The ASIIt also documents dialects from Friuli, Trentino, Lombardy and Piedmont, in which an equivalent to *nisuni* exists. However, no instances were found in the ASIIt data from Liguria, Emilia Romagna, nor of other Italian regions<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, at least within Italy, I consider the existence

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<sup>1</sup> While the majority of the dialects was identified on the basis of the ASIIt databank, three Veneto dialects were identified by own fieldwork.

<sup>2</sup> However, Cinque (1997: 188) mentions that in the Romagnol dialect of Rimini (Emilia Romagna) the negative quantifier always controls plural agreement, as shown by Sancisi & Bellosi (1995: 30).

of the pronominal plural negative quantifier to be a phenomenon of Northern Italian dialects (NID).

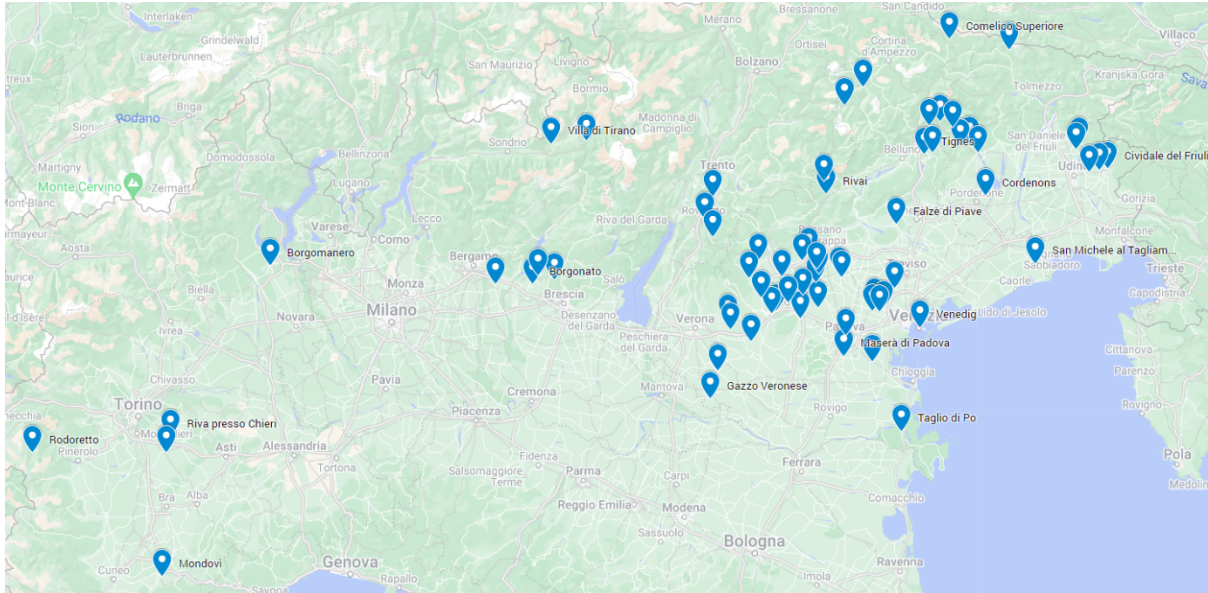


Figure 1: Northern Italian dialects in which a pronominal plural negative existential quantifier is present<sup>3</sup>

The dialects differ with respect to the morphological form: While in some dialects two forms of the negative existential quantifier are present, which are easily distinguishable on morphological grounds, e.g. in the dialect of Venice where the singular form *nisun* exists besides the plural form *nisuni*, marked by the inflectional affix *-i*, in other dialects only one form of the quantifier is present. Within the latter group, we can further distinguish between dialects in which the morphological form is seemingly marked for singular, e.g. *nessun* in the dialect of Arsiè (Belluno, Veneto), or marked for plural, e.g. *nisuni* in Illasi (Verona, Veneto). In other (mostly Lombard) dialects in turn, the single existing form is morphologically more opaque, such that it cannot be easily identified as a singular or plural form, e.g. *nyhy* in Borgonato (Brescia), *nugu* in Monno (Brescia), *nihu* in Calcinante (Bergamo). However, irrespective of its morphological form, it is evident that the negative quantifier can control plural agreement, as will be shown in Section 4 after some notes on *nisuni*'s<sup>4</sup> semantic nature.

<sup>3</sup> This map was created with maps.google.com.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this article, I will use the Veneto representative *nisuni* to refer to all equivalents of the plural negative existential quantifier.

### 3. Some notes on the semantic nature of *nisuni*

Irrespective of the morphological form, the ability to trigger plural agreement hints at the inherent plurality of *nisuni*. However, at first sight, plurality seems incompatible with the negative existential quantifier. How to pluralize a non-existent entity? Indeed, as turns out, the pluralization of negative indefinites is not as rare as initially assumed. Plank (1994) offers a cross-linguistic survey of instances of the pluralization of indefinites which are based on the numeral ‘one’. Interestingly, according to him, there are several facilitating factors for the pluralization of ‘one’, among which “being negative” is listed, exemplified with the German *kein/keine* (no.SG/no.PL) (Plank 1994: 6). However, these pluralized indefinites can only exist in a local configuration with an NP (possibly elided), on whose plural specification it depends. *Nisuni*, on the contrary, can only appear pronominally and never as adjective, as the examples below show. Thus, it seems that *nisuni* is indeed special, since it is inherently plural, as its ability to control agreement already suggested.

#### (3) *Padua (Veneto)*

Nisuni	dei	miei	amisi
Nobody	of.the.M.PL	my.PL	friends
“none of my friends”			

#### (4) *Mestre (Venice, Veneto)*

a.	*nisuni	student
	nobody	student.SG
b.	*nisuni	studenti
	nobody	student.PL
c.	nisun	student
	no.M.SG	student.SG
d.	nisuna	vogia
	no.F.SG	will

To my knowledge, *nisuni* has not been thoroughly treated in the literature. Cinque (1997) and Poletto (2020) offer two rather short notes on *nisuni*. As for the semantic interpretation of *nisuni*, both authors suggest that the difference in the two forms is one of specificity, in the sense of partitivity as proposed by Enç (1991), referring to nobody out of a specific, known set

of people. It is important to note that both Cinque and Poletto only refer to those dialects (or “certain registers of Ven.”, Cinque 1997: 133) which have two distinct forms of the negative quantifier at their disposal, distinguished by number. Poletto (2020: 6) explicitly attributes the specific reading to those instances of *nisuni* which can be interpreted as morphologically plural due to the inflectional affix *-i*: “It might be the case that the distinction is one of specificity with the plural form, with the /i/ ending being the specific one [...]”.

Cinque (1997: 188) claims that not only a morphologically unambiguous plural form of the quantifier itself but also the plural agreement of the verb indicates specificity: “When plural is indicated (whether on the verb or on the quantifier itself) the quantifier seems to refer to a known set of objects.” By explicitly mentioning the plural agreement of the verb, Cinque seems to include all the dialects in which the negative quantifier triggers plural agreement on the verb, irrespective of the morphological form of the negative quantifier, may it be morphologically singular, plural or opaque. I consider this explicit distinction of the plural form of the quantifier on the one hand and plural agreement of the verb on the other hand to be misleading, since at least for the Italian varieties in which only one form of the negative existential quantifier exists, may it be morphologically singular, plural or opaque with respect to its number specification, which however controls plural agreement, I consider it to be questionable that this one form always receives a specific reading. Furthermore, it contradicts Cinque’s explicit statement to refer to those dialects in which two distinct forms are present. It seems plausible that a specific reading only can be attributed to one form of the negative quantifier, when there is another form which represents the default interpretation of *nobody*.

Indeed, there are only very few dialects documented in the ASIIt for which the existence of two morphologically distinct forms of the negative quantifier can be attested, as e.g. the by Cinque and Poletto mentioned dialect of Venice. On the contrary, most dialects seem to have only one form at their disposal that irrespective of its morphological form can trigger plural agreement. Furthermore, it has been suggested by a native speaker of the Paduan dialect that *nisuni* is the only existing form in his dialect and that the singular form *nisun* (or *nisuno*, which, however, is not documented in the ASIIt) is in fact a transposition from Standard Italian. Even if it is not a transposition of Standard Italian and the Paduan dialect indeed has two distinct forms of the negative existential quantifier at its disposal, a specific reading of *nisuni* seems implausible as the following datum from the ASIIt shows where the emphasis by *proprio* (*really*) renders a specific, i.e., partitive, reading of *nisuni* paradoxical, thus, quite improbable.

(5) Padua (Veneto)

Qua no ghe ze proprio nessuni.  
here not Expl<sub>loc</sub> be.3 really nobody.PL  
“There’s really nobody here.”

Hence, it is clear that the claim of *nisuni*’s (partitive) specificity has to be further corroborated by more elaborate data, as also Poletto (2020: 6) acknowledges: “[...] one further investigation is necessary to clarify this”.

However, Cinque’s (1997) and Poletto’s (2020) claim of the specificity of *nisuni* is interesting for several reasons. First of all, *nisuni* is diachronically based on the Latin *ne ipse unus* (lit.: *not even one*) and is, thus, essentially based on the numeral *one*. A pluralization of *one*, the Old Italian *uni*, was productive in former stages of Italian, but has vanished from modern language use, with the exception of the remnant fixed expression *gli uni e gli altri* (lit.: *the ones and the others*). However, a closely related language has a still productive pluralized form of *one* at its disposal, namely the Spanish *unos*, which is the basis for the (substandard) negative indefinite *ningunos*. Although *ninguno(s)* has a slightly different etymological root (lat. *nec unus*; lit.: *not even one*) than *nisuni*, it is still interesting since its base *unos* has been claimed to be truly indefinite: according to Gutiérrez-Rexach (2010: 683), it can never “be linked or associated with an already available discourse referent through an identity or inclusion relation”. Thus, the semantic import of the Spanish plural of *one* is antagonal to Cinque’s and Poletto’s claim about the specificity of the plural form *nisuni*. However, it is clear that a comparison between *nisuni* and *ningunos* is problematic: As already shown above, *nisuni* is a true pronoun while *ningunos* is an indefinite determiner that rejects pronominal use<sup>5</sup>. *Nisuni*, on the contrary, can only be used pronominally and can appear in partitive constructions, as shown above in (3). It never appears as adjective. In case of an adjectival negation of existence, the singular form is used, compare (4).

A more appropriate analogy to Italian *nisuni* can be found in some varieties of Spanish of the Anden region, in Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador<sup>6</sup>. These varieties exhibit a pluralized form of the pronoun *nadie*, i.e., *nadies* (Pato 2014). Interestingly, *nadie* is etymologically plural since it stems from Latin *nati* (lit.: *the born one*), but behaves as grammatical singular

<sup>5</sup> As a side note, *ningunos* patterns with its French equivalent the pluralized negative indefinite determiner *aucuns*.

<sup>6</sup> I thank Eduardo Dominicini for the interesting discussion on *ningunos* as well as for pointing out the existence of *nadies* to me and furnishing me with a first reference.

masculine pronoun in Standard Spanish and most varieties of Spanish. Similar to *nisuni* and its equivalents, the singular and the plural form in Modern Spanish varieties (as well as the Old Spanish form *nadi*) can trigger plural verb agreement. Despite their different etymology, *nadies* and *nisuni* share some important properties other than triggering plural verb agreement: they are negative existential pronouns that can be used for human entities only; they can appear bare and in partitive constructions, but never as adjectives.

Now, assuming that *nadies* is the correct equivalent to *nisuni*, the interpretation of *nadies* might hint at the appropriate interpretation of *nisuni*. According to the *Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Español* (NGLE, 2009: 3632) and Pato (2014), there are the following possibilities for *nadies*: First, *nadies* is the only existing form of the negative existential quantifier in a given variety and, thus, receives the same interpretation as the singular *nadie* in another dialect. Second, if a given variety exhibits the opposition of *nadie* and *nadies*, it has a semantic import and distinguishes number: *nadie*, as the pronominal equivalent of ‘*ninguna persona*’ (lit.: no.SG person.SG) denotes a unitary collective, while *nadies*, as the pronominal equivalent of ‘*ningunas personas*’ (lit.: no.PL person.PL), denotes the sum of the individuals of the collective (Pato 2014: 413). Thus, *nadie* refers to a collective reading, while *nadies* refers to a distributive reading (which might remind the reader of Cinque’s and Poletto claim of *nisuni*’s specificity). The NGLE (2009) further proposes that *nadies* is used as emphasis, thus, expressing *nobody at all* or *absolutely nobody*. Pato (2014: 411), however, rejects the latter proposal since both the singular as well as the plural form can appear with the adverbials *en absolute* and *absolutamente* (absolutely), rendering a potential emphatic use of *nadies* redundant and therefore improbable. While the latter proposal of the NGLE goes contra the intuition for *nisuni* formulated by Cinque (1997) and Poletto (2020), the distinction of *nadie* and *nadies* as collective and distributive interpretation respectively goes along similar lines as their claim of a specific reading of *nisuni*. In order to be able to identify individuals within a set, one has to have more specific knowledge of the set and its contained entities. Having said this, the described morphosyntactic parallels between *nadies* and *nisuni*, does not mean that they necessarily behave similarly at the semantic level. Due to the lack of more elaborate data, for the time being, one can only speculate on the semantic parallels of these two elements.

In conclusion, as said above, a further investigation of *nisuni* is necessary to clarify its semantic import, especially in varieties in which two opposed forms of the quantifier are present, distinguished by number inflection. However, contrary to *nisuni*’s semantic nature, one can indeed make definite statements about its morphosyntactic behaviour, as shown in the next section.

#### 4. How *nisuni* behaves morphosyntactically

Before taking a closer look at the data, some preliminary comments are due, first, as to what we can expect from the ASIIt as source for data on *nisuni* (and what we cannot expect), and secondly and more importantly, as to how some morphosyntactic peculiarities of the Northern Italian dialects complicate the unambiguous identification of full or defective verbal agreement.

As for the ASIIt, although it offers a great amount of data from many different dialects and regions, it has, as every corpus, its limitations. The data was acquired on the basis of questionnaires that were designed with respect to specific research questions. As one might already assume, agreement in VS constructions was not one of the explicitly investigated phenomena. Furthermore, not all of the 7 questionnaires were conducted in every dialect (or at least in all the dialects that will prove to be important for the present endeavour). Thus, some dialect paradigms remain incomplete with regard to the agreement properties in SV and VS with certain verb classes, thus, rendering perfect minimal pairs seldom. For example, the translation of the SV and VS sentences with the unergative verb *telefonare* (to call) is often lacking and instances of SV sentences with unaccusative verbs are rare, which, however, could also be expected since unaccusative subjects are most naturally uttered in a postverbal position. Furthermore, data that stem from a corpus that is based on the translation of informants must always be interpreted with caution. The absence of a form in a given dialect in the corpus might not unambiguously imply the ungrammaticality of the respective form. The informant might just have given one translation (possibly the preferred one in a specific context) without mentioning that another option is also possible.

As for the inflectional morphology of Northern Italian dialects, there are in particular two morphosyntactic properties that render the identification of full or defective verbal agreement difficult: the syncretism of the third person singular and plural of the finite verb form and the truncation of regular participles, thus, infinite verb forms.

Many dialects (especially in Veneto but also in many Lombard dialects) exhibit a syncretism of the 3rd person singular and plural of the finite verb form:



(6) *Padua (Veneto)*

- a. (lui) parla  
he speak.<sup>37</sup>
- b. (lori) parla  
they speak.<sup>3</sup>

(7) *Padua (Veneto)*

- a. (lui) ze  
he be.<sup>3</sup>
- b. (lori) ze  
they be.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, in order to unambiguously interpret the inflectional morphology, one has to fall back on infinite verb forms, i.e. the participle. However, there we meet the second mentioned restriction: many of these dialects truncate regular participle forms, thus, rendering its inflectional values invisible, as exemplified in Table 1 for Gazzolo d'Arcole.

Table 1: Regular and irregular past participle forms in the dialect of Gazzolo d'Arcole

	SG		PL	
	m	f	m	f
<b><i>rivar</i> (to arrive)</b>	<i>rivà</i>	<i>rivà</i>	<i>rivà</i>	<i>rivà</i>
<b><i>venir</i> (to come)</b>	<i>vegnù</i>	<i>vegnù</i>	<i>vegnù</i>	<i>vegnù</i>

It is dialect specific whether only the masculine form is truncated or also the feminine and plural forms. Thus, in some dialects also regular, weak participles display visible inflectional endings in the feminine and plural forms, as exemplified for Mestre in Table 2.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout this article, forms that are known to be syncretic are glossed as in these examples, omitting a specification of the number value.

Table 2: Regular past participle forms in the dialect of Mestre

	SG		PL	
	<b>m</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>m</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>rivar (to arrive)</b>	<i>rivà</i>	<i>rivada</i>	<i>rivai</i>	<i>rivade</i>
<b>venir (to come)</b>	<i>vegnù</i>	<i>vegnua</i>	<i>vegnui</i>	<i>vegnue</i>

Irregular, strong participles, on the other hand, show inflectional endings in all the dialects, below exemplified for a rural dialect of Padua (Montegrotto Terme).

Table 3: Strong past participle forms in the dialect of Padua

	SG		PL	
	<b>m</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>m</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>morir (to die)</b>	<i>morto</i>	<i>morta</i>	<i>morti</i>	<i>morte</i>
<b>nasser (to be born)</b>	<i>nato</i>	<i>nata</i>	<i>nati</i>	<i>nate</i>

In conclusion, inflectional morphology in these dialects is somewhat opaque; it is often hard to tell whether a verb shows agreement or not.

However, there is an additional cue for agreement: subject clitic doubling. Irrespective of their much debated morphosyntactic status, it is uncontroversial that subject clitics mirror the  $\phi$ -features of the subject.

(8) *Florence*, taken from Brandi & Cordin (1989)

La Maria      la                  parla.  
The Maria      SCL.F.SG      speaks  
“Maria speaks.”

Therefore, subject clitics (if present, and sometimes even their absence) can tell us something about whether a certain DO can control agreement or not.

Manzini & Savoia (2005) claim that agreeing subject clitics can appear with non-agreeing auxiliaries and participles. However, this claim cannot be verified on the basis of the data that has been collected in the four North-Eastern Italian dialects Ballò, Gazzolo d'Arcole, Padua and Chioggia. As exemplified in (9) b., a fully agreeing subject clitic can never appear with a defectively agreeing participle. The opposite, however, is not true: an agreeing participle can very well appear in the complete absence of a subject clitic as, (9) d. shows.

(9) *Gazzolo d'Arcole (Veneto)*

a.	La	ze	nata	ela
	SCL.F.SG	be.3.SG	born.F.SG	she
b.	*La	ze	nato	ela
	SCL.F.SG	be.3.SG	born.M.SG	she
c.	Ze	nata	ela	
	be.3.SG	born.F.SG	she	
d.	Ze	nato	ela	
	be.3.SG	born.M.SG	she	

However, NID differ in their SCL systems. Some dialects contrast the presence of an inflected SCL with the presence of an uninflected SCL (or an expletive clitic). Other dialects contrast an inflected SCL with the complete absence of a SCL. In some dialects, we can even observe a tripartite distinction: while in some configurations fully inflected SCL are obligatory, they are defectively inflected in other configurations or their complete absence is obligatory. For the sake of simplicity, as from now, with agreement, I intend agreement on the verb as well as on the SCL, unless mentioned otherwise.

#### 4.1 *Nobodies agree*

Irrespective of the dialect-specific morphological form and its semantic nature, in (most of) the dialects, *nisuni* can control plural agreement on other elements, namely on finite and infinite verb forms, on subjects clitics as well as on predicatively used adjectives. As for verbal agreement, consider the following examples where either the finite or infinite verb form<sup>8</sup> or the

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<sup>8</sup> As will be described later in detail, many Veneto and some Lombard dialects display a syncretism of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular and plural of the finite verb form (in the following glossed as *verb.3*) and truncate the infinite participle form (in the following, truncated participles are glossed without number and gender values). Thus, the

subject clitic indicate that *nisuni* controls masculine plural agreement (agreeing elements are marked in bold).

(10) *Andreis (Pordenone, Friuli)*

- a. Nisun    **i**                    n'    **an**                    mangiat            la miniestra  
 Nobody   SCL.M.PL   not    have.3.PL    eaten            the soup  
 “Nobody ate the soup.”
- b. **I**                    no    m'    **an**                    jodut    nisun  
 SCL.M.PL    not    me    have.3.PL    seen    nobody  
 “Nobody saw me.”

(11) *Aldeno (Trento, Trentino Alto Adige)*

- a. Nesuni            **i**                    ha    magnà la minestra.  
 Nobody            SCL.PL            have.3 eaten    the soup  
 “Nobody ate the soup.”
- b. El                    m'    ha    dit    che    nessuni            **i**  
 SCL.M.SG    me    have.3 said    that    nobody            SCL.M.PL  
 ha    telefonà            a casa tua.  
 have.3 called            at your home  
 “He told me that nobody called you.”
- c. Bisogna            che    nesuni            **i**                    parla.  
 need.3.SG    that    nobody            SCL.M.PL    speak.3  
 “It is necessary that nobody talks.”
- d. Nesuni            **i**                    è    **arivadi**            en temp.  
 Nobody            SCL.M.PL    be.3    arrived.M.PL    in time  
 “Nobody arrived in time.”

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respective phi-feature values (number in finite verbs and number and gender in infinite forms) remain underspecified.

(12) *Villa di Tirano, spoken in Stazzona (Como, Lombardy)*

- a. Négügn      i                      ma                      vedüü  
 Nobody      SCL.PL              me.have.3              seen  
 “Nobody saw me.”
- b. I                      m'      à              vedüü negügn  
 SCL.PL              me      have.3 seen      nobody  
 “Nobody has seen me.”

In addition, we can even observe plural number agreement even in adjective agreement, as shown below for the dialect of Padua where the adjective is predicatively used and inflects for masculine and plural<sup>9</sup>.

(13) *Padua (Veneto)*

- Nissuni      ze      **boni**              da      far      gnente  
 Nobody      be.3      good.M.PL      of      make      nothing  
 “Nobody is able to do nothing.”

In conclusion, the negative quantifier in these dialects seems to be not only morphologically but also grammatically plural and active.

#### 4.2 Some nobodies *don't agree in inversion*

However, among the 51 dialects in which a plural existential quantifier is present, a number of dialects display an agreement asymmetry with *nissuni* in VS structures. It is already well known that some Italo-Romance dialects display an agreement asymmetry à la Trentino and Fiorentino (Brandi & Cordin 1989), i.e. where preverbal subjects obligatorily control agreement, while postverbal subjects, irrespective of the verb class, never do so.<sup>10</sup> However, the dialects presented in this section, display a further split within VS structures: the collected data suggests that agreement control by *nissuni* is strongly dependent on the verb by which *nissuni* is selected

<sup>9</sup> I thank Enrico Castro (p.c.) for this datum as well as for much more data and judgements I extorted from him in course of the last years.

<sup>10</sup> On the basis of the gathered ASIt data, Aldeno in Trento is such a dialect. In order to be sure that no such dialect is in the below showed data set, it is important that there is at least one VS sentence in the data for the respective dialect which shows full agreement.

and more particularly, on the verb class. The relevant dialects can be found in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto and Lombardy.<sup>11</sup>

As already shown in the previous section, all the dialects exhibit obligatory full agreement with preverbal subjects, irrespective of the verb class, below exemplified for the dialect of Illasi.

(14) *Illasi (Verona, Veneto)*

- a. Nisuni            i                    a            magnà la minestra  
       Nobody        SCL.M.PL    have.3 eaten    the soup  
       “Nobody ate the soup.”
- b. Nisuni            i                    a            telefonà  
       Nobody        SCL.M.PL    have.3 called  
       “Nobody called.”
- c. Son        convinto    ke        nisuni i                    rivarà            in tempo  
       be.1.SG convinced    that    nobody SCL.M.PL    will.arrive    in time  
       “I am convinced that nobody will arrive in time.”

Furthermore, almost all of the dialects in the data set require full verbal agreement in transitive VS, exemplified below with a cliticized object.

(15) *Rocca Pietore (Belluno, Veneto)*

- No    i                    m'    à        vedù    negugn  
       Not    SCL.M.PL    me    have.3 seen    nobody  
       “Nobody has seen me.”

(16) *Andreis (Pordenone, Friuli Venezia Giulia)*

- I                    no        m'    an                    jodut    nisun

<sup>11</sup> Ordered by region and alphabetically: *Friuli Venezia Giulia*: Andreis; *Trentino Alto Adige*: Valmorbia; *Veneto*: Ballò, Gazzolo d'Arcole, Illasi, Padova, Rivai di Arsìe, Rocca Pietore, Tignes di Pieve d'Alpago; *Lombardy*: Borgonato, Brione, Calcinate, Iseo, Villa di Tirano, Monno. As mentioned above, 3 of the Veneto dialects have been identified by own fieldwork exclusively, the dialects of Ballò, Mestre and the rural dialects of Padova (Montegrotto Terme). A further dialect in Trentino Alto Adige, the dialect of Valmorbia, might also display an agreement asymmetry between unergative and unaccusative VS, but cannot be listed here unquestionably, since the data in the ASI is insufficient to conclusively state whether the asymmetry regards unergative and unaccusative VS or a preverbal/postverbal asymmetry à la Fiorentino and Trentino.

SCL.M.PL    not    me    have.3.PL    seen    nobody

“Nobody saw me.”

An apparent exception to this pattern is presented below in (17) and (18) from the dialects of Iseo and Borgonato. While in the sentences in a. the plural SCL agrees with the postverbal plural quantifier<sup>12</sup>, the sentence in b. differs in the complete absence of the SCL. However, this cannot be used as evidence that agreement in transitive VS is optional, since the presence of object clitics (in this case the first person object clitic) can suppress the presence of the subject clitic. Thus, the sentence in b. does not necessarily show a case of defective agreement, but a case of subject clitic suppression due to the object clitic.

(17) *Iseo (Brescia, Lombardy)*

- a. I                    m'    ha    est    nüsü.  
      SCL.M.PL    me    have.3 seen    nobody.PL
- b. M'    ha    est    nysy  
      me    have.3 seen    nobody.PL  
      “Nobody saw me.”

(18) *Borgonato, spoken in Corte Franca (Brescia, Lombardy)*

- a. I                    m'    ha    est    nysy.  
      SCL.M.PL    me    have.3 seen    nobody
- b. M'    ha    mia    est    nyhy.<sup>13</sup>  
      me    have.3 mica    seen    nobody  
      “Nobody saw me.”

As for unergative VS, the dialects seem to differ as to where the threshold of the agreement asymmetry with *nisuni* lies. While most dialects show full verbal agreement in unergative VS, some dialects, on the other hand, show defective agreement<sup>14</sup>. The ASIIt data suggests that some

<sup>12</sup> The different graphic representation of the plural negative quantifier indicates that the data stem from different field workers and informants.

<sup>13</sup> The alternation of *s* and *h* in the negative existential quantifier is apparently due to a sound alternation typical for dialects in the area of Brescia.

<sup>14</sup> To be more precise, this means that within the ASIIt data set, there was no instance with full agreement found for the respective dialect. This, however, does not necessarily mean that full agreement in unergative VS is ungrammatical in this dialect, since we cannot deduce a given form's ungrammaticality from its absence in a data set based on translation tasks, as already argued above.

dialects, in turn, might allow optional agreement in unergative VS, i.e., both the agreeing and the defective option can be found in the ASIIt<sup>15</sup>, see below the datum from the dialect of Brione.

(19) *Brione (Brescia, Lombardy)*

- |    |         |      |    |          |                  |
|----|---------|------|----|----------|------------------|
| a. | Bisogna | c    | a  | parla    | nesun            |
|    | Needs   | that | CL | talk.3   | nobody.PL        |
| b. | Bisogna | c    | a  | i        | parla nesun      |
|    | Needs   | that | CL | SCL.M.PL | talk.3 nobody.PL |
- “It is necessary that nobody talks.”

However, all the dialects display an unambiguously visible agreement asymmetry if we consider unaccusative VS and Existentials: In these constructions, none of the dialects of the three groups seem to allow full agreement with the postverbal *nisuni*. In order to illustrate the agreement asymmetry, the whole paradigm (as complete as possible) will be presented below. Thus, in some cases, already presented examples (e.g., of transitive and unergative VS) will be repeated. Due to space limitations, only the data of one dialect per region will be reported.

Among the dialects reported in the present paper, the ASIIt data bank offers the most complete paradigm (regarding agreement in SV and VS with the different verb classes) for the dialect of Illasi in Veneto. As shown in (20), preverbal *nisuni* always trigger full agreement, with transitive (a.), unergative (b.) and unaccusative verbs (c.). Due to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person syncretism and participle truncation, full agreement with *nisuni* is only identifiable on the basis of the masculine plural subject clitic *i*. While the same can be observed for VS with the unergative verb in d., *nisuni* in unaccusative VS (in e.) and Existential sentences (in f.) does not control agreement, as is evident from the absence of a SCL. The lack of agreement control in this case is identifiable only in comparison with the agreeing sentences, thus, contrasting the presence of an inflected SCL with the absence of a SCL. Furthermore, non-agreement in the Existential is corroborated with the obligatory presence of an expletive, the locative expletive *ghe*.

(20) *Illasi (Verona, Veneto)*

- |    |        |        |        |       |         |
|----|--------|--------|--------|-------|---------|
| a. | Nisuni | i      | a      | visto | gnente  |
|    | Nobody | SCL.PL | have.3 | seen  | nothing |

<sup>15</sup> On the basis of the corpus data of the ASIIt, it is impossible to tell for sure whether the co-existing instances of a fully and a defectively agreeing verb in a given dialect are due to real optionality or different individual grammars (i.e., data of different informants). However, in order to ensure the maximal degree of validity, instances of seemingly optional agreement (e.g., with transitive or unergative verbs) are mentioned and contrasted with seemingly obligatorily defective agreement with unaccusative verbs.



“Nobody saw nothing.”

- b. Nisuni i a telefonà  
 Nobody SCL.PL have.3 called

“Nobody called.”

- c. Son convinto ke nisuni i rivarà in tempo  
 Be.1.SG convinced.M that nobody SCL.PL will.arrive.3 in time

- d. No i a telefonà (tSamà) nisuni  
 Not SCL.PL have.3 called nobody

“Nobody called.”

- e. No e rivà nisuni  
 Not be.3 arrived nobody

“Nobody arrived.”

- f. No gh' e nisuni qua  
 Not Expl<sub>loc</sub> be.3 nobody here

“There’s nobody here.”

The Friuli dialect of Andreis marks (non-)agreement not only with (the presence or absence of) subject clitics but also exhibits a distinction between the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular and plural verb form, as can be corroborated with data from the ASIt: The 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular form of the dialectal HAVE is ‘a’ (as can be seen in the sentence ‘*Ce al fat?*’, What did he do?, where the SCL is enclitic to the auxiliary); the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural form of the dialectal BE is *son* (compare the sentence found in the ASIT ‘*Li femen es chi neta li sciales i son zudes via*’, The women who clean the stairs are gone.).

(21) *Andreis (Pordenone, Friuli)*

- a. Nisun i n' an mangiat la miniestra  
 Nobody SCL.PL not have.3.PL eaten the soup

“Nobody ate the soup.”

- b. I no m' an jodut nisun  
 SCL.PL not me have.3.PL seen nobody

“Nobody saw me.”

- c. A      nol                      è                      rivà      nisun  
      Cl      not.CL<sub>aux</sub>      be.3.SG      arrived nobody  
      “Nobody arrived.”

In the Lombard dialect of Monno, exemplified in (22), again, we observe the 3<sup>rd</sup> persons syncretism, but can rely on the presence of a plural or a singular clitic. While the preverbal *nugu* controls agreement in transitive SV (a.) and transitive VS (b.), it does not in unaccusative VS (c.), passive VS (d.) and Existentials (e.)<sup>16</sup>. It is not surprising that passive VS patterns with unaccusative VS. It is well known that unaccusative and passive verbs share certain properties, most prominently that their argument DPs are both said to be generated in the object position (in traditional terms) and exhibit certain semantic and syntactic similarities to objects (see Perlmutter 1978; Burzio 1986; among others).

(22) *Monno (Brescia, Lombardy)*

- a. Nugu              i                      me      capis  
      Nobody      SCL.PL      me      understand.3  
      “Nobody understands me.”
- b. I                      m'      ha      vist      nugu  
      SCL.PL      me      have.3 seen      nobody  
      “Nobody saw me.”
- c. L'      è      ruà                      nugu  
      CL<sub>aux</sub> be.3      arrived              nobody  
      “Nobody arrived.”
- d. I                      dis      che      l'                      è      sta      vist      nugu  
      SCL.PL      say.3      that      CL<sub>aux</sub> be.3      been      seen      nobody  
      “They say that nobody has been seen.”
- e. 'L      gè                      nugu                      chilò  
      CL<sub>aux</sub> Expl<sub>loc</sub>.be.3      nobody                      here  
      “There’s nobody here.”

At this point, a comment is due with respect to the nature of the (apparently singular) clitic *l'* that is present in unaccusative and passive VS as well as in the Existential: it is probable that

<sup>16</sup> This has also been (at least) partly mentioned by Benincà (1997: 26), however, without a further exploration.

*l'* is in fact not a subject clitic but an auxiliary clitic. Auxiliary clitics appear in front of monosyllabic auxiliary forms or auxiliaries that begin with a vowel (Poletto 1993; Benincà 2007; Garzonio & Poletto 2011; Tortora 2014). Without further data, this question is hard to settle. In my view, a strong argument for *l'* being an auxiliary clitic is the co-occurrence of *l'* and the locative expletive *ghe* in the Existential in e. However, irrespectively of the question whether the element *l'* is to be classified as an auxiliary clitic or not, defective agreement in unaccusative VS can still be contrasted with full agreement in transitive VS, where a plural inflected SCL appears, as seen in a. and b.

A further interesting paradigm is exemplified with another Lombard dialect, namely the dialect of Calcinatone. Again, transitive SV and transitive VS allow the agreement control of *nihu* (a. and b. respectively), marked by the presence of an inflected SCL. In unaccusative VS (c.) and Existentials (d.), *nihu* does not control agreement, marked by the absence of SCL. Interestingly, both the unaccusative and the Existential involve the locative clitic *ghe*. This matter will be further addressed in the next section.

(23) *Calcinatone (Bergamo, Lombardy)*

- |    |                           |           |        |        |             |
|----|---------------------------|-----------|--------|--------|-------------|
| a. | Nihu                      | i         | a      | maiat  | la minestra |
|    | Nobody                    | SCL.PL    | have.3 | eaten  | the soup    |
|    | “Nobody ate the soup.”    |           |        |        |             |
| b. | I                         | ma        | eht    | nihu   |             |
|    | SCL.PL                    | me.have.3 | seen   | nobody |             |
|    | “Nobody saw me.”          |           |        |        |             |
| c. | Ghe                       | riat      | nihu   |        |             |
|    | Expl <sub>loc</sub> .be.3 | arrived   | nobody |        |             |
|    | “Nobody arrived.”         |           |        |        |             |
| d. | Ghe                       | nihu      | che    |        |             |
|    | Expl <sub>loc</sub> .be.3 | nobody    | here   |        |             |
|    | “There’s nobody here.”    |           |        |        |             |

On the basis of these findings, I conclude that agreement control by *nisuni* is more vulnerable if it is selected as the (sole) internal argument of unaccusative and passive verbs than if it is selected as the external argument of transitive and unergative verbs. The dialects differ with respect to the question where the exact threshold between the ability or non-ability to control

agreement is situated. This can be summarized as follows: The collected ASIt data on agreement control by *nisuni* in VS with complex predicates suggest that we can categorize the dialects in three groups.<sup>17</sup> These dialect groups differ with respect to the question where the threshold for agreement control by the postverbal argument can be located: while in all of the mentioned dialects *nisuni* obligatorily controls agreement in transitive VS, it never does so in unaccusative VS and in Existential sentences.

Table 4: Agreement control of the plural negative quantifier in the dialects documented in the ASIt

Dialect group	transitive, unergative, unaccusative SV	transitive VS	unergative VS	unaccusative VS	Existential
Group 1	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Group 2	✓	✓	optional	✗	✗
Group 3	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗

Interestingly, however, among those dialects that show the asymmetry between unaccusative VS and Existentials on the one hand, and unergative and transitive VS on the other hand, i.e. Group 1 and 2 in the above table, there is a handful of dialects for which the agreement control threshold can be pushed even further within the unaccusative verb class. More specifically, the ASIt data suggests that agreement control depends on the nature of the postverbal DP, such that postverbal DPs other than *nisuni* are able (or even necessitate) to control agreement, while *nisuni* rejects agreement control.

One of those dialects that can be identified on the basis of the ASIt is the dialect from Calcinate (Bergamo, Lombardy), that has already been mentioned above. For ease of exposition, the relevant data will be repeated below. As we can see in (24) a. and b., *nihu*, which triggers the presence of an inflected subject clitic in transitive SVO, as shown above, does not trigger the presence of a subject clitic in the Existential sentence as well as in unaccusative VS. However, other DPs than *nihu* are able to control agreement in unaccusative VS, as is shown in c. by the occurrence of the inflected subject clitic. Beyond that we note that

<sup>17</sup> The focus of the present paper lies on the agreement asymmetry found within VS constructions with verbal predicates, i.e. excluding Existential sentences. As has been shown by Bentley, Ciconte and Cruschina (2015), there is (at least) a fourth group of dialects, in which only Existentials allow (or require) defective verbal (i.e. copula) agreement.

the locative expletive clitic *ghe* appears in the Existential as well as in unaccusative VS with *nihu*, but not with the other DP *i foje* (the leaves).

(24) *Calcinate (Bergamo, Lombardy)*

- a. Ghe            nihu            che  
Expl<sub>loc</sub>.be.3   nobody        here  
“There’s nobody here.”
- b. Ghe            riat    nihu  
Expl<sub>loc</sub>.be.3   arrived nobody  
“Nobody arrived.”
- c. I                borea    zo        i foje.  
SCL.M.PL    fall.3   down   the leaves.M  
“The leaves fall down.”

Similar facts can be stated for the dialects of Iseo (Brescia, Lombardy) in (25) and Villa di Tirano (Como, Lombardy) in (26).

(25) *Iseo (Brescia, Lombardy)*

- a. G’        è        nüsü            ché  
Expl<sub>loc</sub>.be.3   nobody        here  
“There’s nobody here.”
- b. G’        è        riat                nüsü.  
CL    be.3   arrived        nobody  
“Nobody arrived.”
- c. Le                burla    zo’        le foje  
SCL.F.PL    fall.3   down   the leaves.F  
“The leaves fall.”

(26) *Villa di Tirano (Como, Lombardy)*

- a. Al    gh’    è        négügn        chilò  
CL    Expl<sub>loc</sub>.be.3   nobody        here  
“There’s nobody here.”
- b. L’        è        rüvää            nügügn  
CL    be.3   arrived        nobody

“Nobody arrived.”

- c. Aríss                      vulü                      ca                      i  
 have.1.SG.Cond              want.PRT              that              SCL.M.PL  
 vigníss    i mée amiss  
 come.3.Congiuntivo imperfetto              the my friends  
 “I would have wanted my friends to come.”

The crucial impact of the nature of the postverbal DP for agreement control, i.e. the distinction between *nisuni* on the one hand and other lexical DPs on the other hand, that has been concluded on the basis of the ASIIt data, can be corroborated by new data from own fieldwork<sup>18</sup>. The three Veneto dialects, namely the dialect of Ballò (in the municipality of Mirano), of Gazzolo d’Arcole (in the municipality of Verona) and the rural dialect of Montegrotto Terme (in the municipality of Padua) also expose an agreement control threshold within unaccusative VS between lexical DPs and *nisuni*. As below exemplified with a datum from Gazzolo, lexical DPs in unaccusative and passive VS admit both the full and the defective participle agreement pattern<sup>19</sup>:

(27) *Gazzolo (Verona, Veneto)*

*A so proprio contento.* (“I am really happy.”)

- a. Ieri                      ze                      sucese                      do robe                      bele.  
 yesterday              be.3                      happened.F.PL              two thing.F.PL beautiful.F.PL  
 b. Ieri                      ze                      suceso                      do robe                      bele.  
 yesterday              be.3                      happened.M.SG              two thing.F.PL beautiful.F.PL  
 „Two beautiful things happened yesterday.“

While the manipulation of the (morphological) definiteness, specificity and animacy of the postverbal lexical DPs only led to slight gradual differences in the choice of the past participle agreement (PPA) pattern<sup>20</sup>, PPA control was consistently rejected by the informants. None of

<sup>18</sup> The fieldwork was part of a dissertation project and took place in Autumn 2019. Five to six informants per dialect were interviewed, using the method of qualitative semi-structured interviews, guided by a questionnaire, and with the help of linguistic mediators.

<sup>19</sup> Due to the already described Veneto-typical syncretism of the 3rd person singular and plural inflection of the finite verb, the investigation focused on the inflection of (non-truncated) infinite verb forms, i.e. participles.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed description and analysis of the data on lexical DPs, the interested reader is referred to Schaefer (in preparation).

the informants accepted full PPA control by *nisuni* in these dialects, again exemplified with the dialect from Gazzolo.

(28) *Gazzolo (Verona, Veneto)*

- a. \*No    ze    morti    nisuni.  
      Not   be.3   died.M.PL   nobody.M.PL
- b. No    ze    morto    nisuni.  
      Not   be.3   died.M.PL   nobody.M.PL
- “Nobody died.”

However, also in these dialects, *nisuni* is a grammatically active element which obligatorily controls agreement in other configurations, as shown below by virtue of the obligatory presence of an inflected subject clitic.

(29) *Gazzolo (Verona, Veneto)*

- a. La torta,    no    i    la    ga    magna nisuni.  
      The cake   not   SCL.M.PL   OCL.F.SG   has   eaten nobody.M.PL
- b. \*La torta,   no   la    ga    magna nisuni.  
      The cake   not   OCL.F.SG   has   eaten   nobody.M.PL
- “As for the cake, nobody has eaten it.”

Thus, also in these dialects, we can observe that *nisuni* (can) control agreement when it is selected as the external argument (even out of a postverbal position). However, when *nisuni* is selected as the sole (internal) argument of unaccusative verbs, agreement control is not only vulnerable but even unacceptable: *nisuni* only appears with obligatorily defective PPA.

## 5. *Nisuni* in the panorama of Italo-Romance agreement variations in VS

By the data presented above, *nisuni* can complement the panorama of Italo-Romance agreement variation in VS with complex predicates (i.e. VS with transitive, unergative and unaccusative verbs). It is already well-known that in a cross-dialectal panorama, postverbal tonic person pronouns (always of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person and in some dialects also of the 3<sup>rd</sup>

person<sup>21</sup>) obligatorily control agreement, while postverbal lexical DPs may allow defective agreement (compare e.g. Brandi & Cordin 1989; Manzini & Savoia 2005; Zucchi 1996; Bentley 2013, 2018; Bentley, Ciconte & Cruschina 2015 among many others). On the basis of the data presented above, a third group can be added to the already identified two groups. This results in a cross-dialectal threefold distinction:

- i. DPs that obligatorily control agreement (at least tonic 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns and possibly the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun),
- ii. DPs that possibly allow for defective agreement (lexical DPs) and
- iii. DPs that obligatorily reject agreement control (*nisuni*).

Thereby, *nisuni* groups with the postverbal pivot of Existential sentences which has been claimed to be the “worst candidate for agreement control” (Bentley, Ciconte & Cruschina 2015: 128). On the basis of a cross-dialectal survey of agreement in Italo-Romance *there* sentences and in particular of Existential sentences, Bentley, Ciconte & Cruschina find that the Existential pivot is the least probable element to control agreement on the copula. Indeed, as the previous section shows, this claim can be corroborated by the ASIIt data. B&C&C (2015: 129) argue that the pivot’s „poor argumenthood“ is the reason for its inability to control agreement. In their view, the clear-cut contrast in agreement control between existential pivots, on the one hand, and the arguments of unergative and unaccusative verbs<sup>22</sup>, on the other hand, as B&C&C observed it, is due to the distribution of argument properties: while the arguments of unergative and unaccusative verbs possess more argument properties, the existential pivot is interpreted as part of the predicate and, therefore, cannot be identified as a potential argument and agreement controller.

However, as implied above, the data on *nisuni* contradict this claim by B&C&C of a clear-cut contrast between pivots and the arguments of unergative and unaccusative verbs, since *nisuni* (selected as argument of an unaccusative verb) displays the same agreement behaviour as the existential pivot, i.e. systematically rejecting agreement control. As for agreement control in Italo-Romance VS with verbal predicates (i.e. in particular, unergative and unaccusative VS, excluding Existential sentences), Bentley, Ciconte & Cruschina (2015: 182) consider the “dialect-specific sensitivity to specificity as a property of the controller of

<sup>21</sup> Dialects differ with respect to the question whether all tonic person pronouns (see Manzini & Savoia 2005 for a series of dialects) or only the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person (compare e.g. Zucchi 1996 for the dialect of Piacenza) obligatorily control agreement.

<sup>22</sup> This is a (possibly simplifying) transfer of the macroroles in *Relational Grammar* to the standard view in Generativism that unergative verbs select arguments with the semantic role of an *Agent* (comparable to the *Actor* macrorole) and unaccusative verbs select arguments with the semantic role of a *Patient* (comparable to the *Undergoer* macrorole).



agreement” to be crucial. They propose that agreement control can be linked to the position of a given DP on a Specificity Scale: in a cross-dialectal panorama, the most specific DPs consistently (and obligatorily) control agreement (i.e. 1st and 2nd person pronouns), while agreement control by unspecific DPs is more vulnerable. Indeed, *nisuni* could be understood to represent the lower extreme of such a specificity scale, not only allowing but even necessitating defective agreement, equally to the existential pivot. But apart from specificity, there are further properties that the Existential pivot and *nisuni* share: The pivot is assumed to be necessarily non-presuppositional, not to mention topical and, indeed, Rizzi (1986) states the same for the negative existential quantifier *nobody*: it can never be presuppositional or topical<sup>23</sup>. This parallel can also be explored from another perspective: while Existential sentences express the mere existence of an entity, i.e. the pivot, *nisuni* expresses the mere non-existence of an entity by virtue of its inherent properties. Thus, it seems plausible to assume that *nisuni*’s inherent properties render it similar to the pivot of Existential sentences, as “worst candidate for agreement control” (B&C&C 2015: 128).

Interestingly, the parallel between *nisuni* and the existential pivot can not only be hypothesized on the basis of their semantic properties and their inability to control agreement in (unaccusative) VS, but can also be strengthened by the morphosyntactic environment in which *nisuni* and Existential pivots appear. Recall the ASIt data that was reported in (24) and (25) from the dialects of Calcinante and Iseo, repeated here for the ease of exposure:

- (30) *Calcinante (Bergamo, Lombardy)*
- a. Ghe                    nihu                    che  
      Expl<sub>loc</sub>.be.3    nobody                    here  
      “There’s nobody here.”
  - b. Ghe                    riat    nihu  
      Expl<sub>loc</sub>.be.3    arrived nobody  
      “Nobody arrived.”
  - c. I                        borea    zo            i foje.  
      SCL.M.PL        fall.3    down    the leaves.M  
      “The leaves fall down.”

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<sup>23</sup> However, as Rizzi (1986) states *nobody* can nevertheless be a good subject. This is also corroborated by the ASIt data of *nisuni*, since it consistently controls agreement when it is merged as external argument.

- (31) *Iseo (Brescia, Lombardy)*
- a. G'      è      nüsü      ché  
 Expl<sub>loc</sub>.be.3    nobody      here  
 “There’s nobody here.”
- b. G'      è      riat      nüsü.  
 CL      be.3    arrived      nobody  
 “Nobody arrived.”
- c. Le                      burla    zo'      le foje  
 SCL.F.PL      fall.3    down    the leaves.F  
 “The leaves fall.”

As already noted above, the structures with defective agreement co-occur with different elements than the structures with full agreement: both the unaccusative VS with *nisuni* and the Existential sentence in a. and b. involve the locative clitic *ge/ghe* and can thereby be contrasted with unaccusative VS with the lexical DP ‘the leaves’ in c., which co-occurs with the fully inflected subject clitic.

The data presented in this paper raises a number of issues that justify further research. First of all, it would be interesting to gather more data on *nisuni* and its equivalents, not only with respect to its distribution and morphosyntactic behaviour, but also with respect to its semantic nature. For the time being, the questions remain open as to which specific properties of *nisuni* are decisive for the observed parallel to *nisuni*, and, perhaps even more importantly, whether these properties are crucial to distinguish *nisuni* from other (lexical) DPs in unaccusative inversion. Further, it remains to clarify whether it is these properties that cause (directly or indirectly) the observed different behaviour with respect to agreement control in unaccusative VS. Since agreement is (in Standard Generativism) most commonly assumed to obtain in syntax (or at least be fed by syntax), one might wonder whether the observed agreement asymmetry can be analysed in terms of two different underlying structures for unaccusative VS with *nisuni*, on the one hand, and unaccusative VS with lexical DPs, on the other hand. However, these questions have to be left for future work.

## 6. Conclusion

In the present paper, the peculiar plural form of the negative existential quantifier has been further explored. First, an ASIt database quest revealed that such a plural form is indeed not as infrequent as one might initially assume: over 50 Northern Italian Dialects have some kind of

plural negative existential quantifier at their disposal, that can either be identified by its unambiguous plural form marked by the inflectional affix *-i* or exclusively by its ability to control agreement on other elements, i.e. subject clitics, finite and infinite verbs as well as on adjectives. Secondly, the semantic nature of this element has been further explored by evoking a possible parallel to the Anden Spanish *nadies*. However, a further investigation of its semantic nature is indispensable to draw solid conclusions.

The main focus of the paper, however, was dedicated to the agreement properties that *nisuni* and its cross-dialectal equivalents display: the data offered by the ASIIt data base has shown that *nisuni* always controls agreement when it is selected as the external argument, while it does not necessarily do so when it is the internal argument of unaccusative verbs or in passive configurations and occupies a postverbal position. In particular, I have presented a number of dialects in which most DPs allow both a full and defective (past participle) agreement (with the known exception of tonic 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns), while *nisuni* consistently rejects agreement control when it occupies a postverbal position. Subsequently, these findings have been put in the context of the panorama of Italo-Romance agreement variations in VS, evoking the parallel to the Existential pivot. Furthermore, it has been proposed that the reason for the similarities between *nisuni* and the Existential pivot, or rather the distinction between *nisuni* and other (lexical DPs) in unaccusative and passive VS, lies in *nisuni*'s unique semantic properties and a possibly consequential structural difference between unaccusative VS with *nisuni* and unaccusative VS with other DPs.

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