

Expletiveness as a consequence of the head status of negation in the left periphery: the Italian negative system

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In this article I will focus on the system of Modern Italian negative structures showing that most of its negative system is a consequence of a crucial change that occurred in Archaic Latin: the Latin negative morpheme *nōn* (“not”), which initially displayed a maximal projection status (Gianollo, 2016-2017), became a syntactic (negative) head (*Spec-to-head principle / Head Preference Principle*, cfr. van Gelderen, 2004). I will argue that such a change caused the shift from a double negation system (1a) to a negative concord one (1b), which affects the colloquial Latin and many Romance languages (Ledgeway, 2012).

- (1) a. *nemo non videt* (Cic., Laelius de Amicitia 99.6. In Ernout & Thomas, 2001)
nobody not sees
‘Everyone sees’
- b. *Iura te non nociturum esse homini (...) nemini...*
swear.Imp.2nd you.Cl not to.hurt.Fut. to.be human-being.Dat. nobody.Dat.
‘Swear that you won’t harm anyone...’ (Plauto, Miles Gloriosus, 1411. In Ernout & Thomas, 2001)

Moreover, I will also propose that the shifting in the syntactic nature of the morpheme *nōn*, which has been inherited by Italian as well as by many romance languages, also determines the availability of the expletive reading of negation (Bernini and Ramat, 1996). More specifically, I will suggest a new generalization: only languages (and structures) displaying a negative head can allow the expletive interpretation of negation. Consider, for example, Italian, English and French:

- (2) a. *Rimarrò alla festa finché non arriva Gianni*
stay.1stSG.FUT to-the party until neg arrives John
‘I will stay at the party until John arrives’
- b. I will stay at the party until John (*not) arrives
- c. *Je ne nie pas [que je n’ aie ètè bien reçu]* (in Muller 1978)
I NEG deny NEG that I neg have been well receive
‘I do not deny that I was received well.’

As is well known (Merchant 2001, Zeijlstra 2004), Italian *non* (“not”) is the head of a NegP and it allows expletive negation. On the other hand, English *not* is a maximal projection and, therefore, it does not allow expletive negation. French displays both a negative head (*ne*) and a maximal projection (*pas*), both constituting a single instance of negation by being generated in the same NegP (Kayne 1989). Crucially, expletive negation in the subordinate clause *‘je n’ai ètè bien reçu’* only displays the negative head *ne*, excluding the element with the maximal projection status *pas*. To take into consideration the differences between standard and expletive negation I assume a twofold derivation of negation: when the negative marker *not* is merged in the TP-domain, as it is generally assumed (Belletti 1990; Zanuttini 1997; Poletto 2008), it gives the standard negation reading; when it is merged in a higher position, i.e.

the CP-domain (à la Laka 1990), it gives the expletive negation reading since the v*P-phase has already been closed – (phases are underlined):

- (5) a. [CP ... [v*P [X° non] ...]
b. [CP ... [X° non] ... [v*P ...]

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