Polarity items, n-words, and minimizers in Catalan and Spanish*

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Abstract

Catalan minimizers (expressions denoting some minimal quantity or extent) contain an overt negative marker. When subject to a number of diagnostic tests, their behavior is totally opposite to that of (negative) polarity items. Generally, minimizers behave like n-words, except in nonnegative polarity-licensing contexts, where n-words behave like polarity items and minimizers do not. This article argues that Catalan minimizers, rather than n-words, instantiate the true behavior of negative-concord terms. The fact the n-words may appear in nonnegative polar contexts should not be taken as typical of negative-concord terms but rather as an exceptional phenomenon. As for Spanish, it possesses two classes of minimizers. One class is identical to the Catalan type. The other displays the behavior of true polarity items. The facts argue against identifying negative-concord terms with true polarity items, and, therefore, against subsuming negative concord under polarity licensing.

1 Introduction

Despite much recent discussion, the semantic nature of Romance N-WORDS like Cat. *cap* and Sp. *ninguno* 'any/none' is still a matter of controversy. As the English gloss 'any/none' suggests, n-words exhibit both properties that are typical of inherently negative elements like *none* and other negative quantifiers and properties that are typical of POLARITY ITEMS like *any*. The dilemma is whether n-words are inherently negative elements of some type or, rather, true polarity items bare of any inherent negative value (Sections 2.1 and 2.2 describe n-words and polarity items in more detail).

This article presents fresh evidence from the formal characteristics and distribution of MINIMIZERS like *ni paraula*, *(ni) palabra* 'a word' in Catalan and Spanish. Minimizers are

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expressions denoting some minimal quantity or extent, such as English *an inch* in the sentence *Joan did not budge an inch* (see Section 2.3). In Standard English minimizers behave like polarity items, so their categorization as such has generally deserved little thought. However, they do not always display polar behavior. When subject to a number of diagnostic tests, some Spanish minimizers, $-ni$ minimizers, do behave like polarity items, but others, $+ni$ minimizers, behave like inherently negative elements instead. In Catalan all minimizers are $+ni$ minimizers and act as inherently negative: they cannot, for instance, occur in nonnegative polar contexts (e.g. *yes/no* questions). Thus, the distinction between $+ni$ minimizers and polarity item needs to be maintained to account for their distinct patterns of behavior within Spanish and between this language and Catalan.

N-words and $+ni$ minimizers generally behave alike. As will be shown below, the only environment in which they do not is precisely in nonnegative polar contexts, where n-words may licitly appear, thus siding with polarity items. The data presented here indicates that what is exceptional is not the general parallelism between n-words and $+ni$ minimizers, but rather the fact that n-words may appear in nonnegative polar contexts. This conclusion is at odds with any analysis that views n-words as mere polarity items, while supporting the idea that n-words have a default negative property of some sort.

The fact remains, though, that $+ni$ minimizers and n-words appear alongside sentential negation in clauses that are interpreted as semantically negated. This is the phenomenon known as NEGATIVE CONCORD: a single semantic negation is realized (at least) twice in a clause (e.g. negation and n-word). Negative concord, for instance, is found in many English dialects, although not in Standard English:

(1) a. I didn't see *anybody*.
b. I didn't see *nobody*.

In negative-concord dialects of English (1b) has the same meaning as Standard English (1a): two structural negative elements correspond to one single semantic negation. Of course, if n-words (and $+ni$ minimizers) in Catalan and Spanish were polarity items, negative concord in these languages would be nothing but a mirage. But if, as argued here, radically stripping n-words of a negative value is mistaken, then negative concord is a real phenomenon that any analysis of the syntax-semantics interface needs to contend with. In this sense, this article is a defense of the reality of negative concord.

The article is structured as follows. Section 2 introduces some notions and terminology. Section 3 introduces the four diagnostic tests that will be used to compare the behavior of minimizers, n-words, and polarity items in Catalan and Spanish. This behavior is examined in Sections 4 and 5, respectively. Finally, Section 6 discusses the relevance of these findings for the two conflicting analyses of n-words in Romance.

2 Background

2.1 Polarity items

The term 'polarity item' denotes an expression that is syntactically licensed by an element of a specific semantic type.[1] Ladusaw (1979) argues that the relevant semantic property of the

[1]The term 'polarity item' is used as a short form for the more traditional 'negative polarity item' (NPI). In this paper no reference is made to the distribution and properties of positive polarity items like *some* (see e.g.

licenser is downward entailingness, whereas for Progovac (1992) this property is non-upward entailingness. The contexts in which polarity items are licensed are negative, *yes/no* interrogative, and *if* clauses, complement clauses of adversative predicates (e.g. *doubt*, *hesitate*, *deny*), *without* and *before* phrases, *too* constructions, restrictor clauses of universal quantifiers, and a few others. Polarity items are generally analyzed as existential expressions. Ladusaw 1992 analyzes them as indefinite expressions that must be semantically roofed by an operator of the appropriate sort (cf. the treatment of indefinites in Heim (1982)).[2]

Any, and the expressions in which it appears (*anyone*, *anything*...), and *ever* are typical English polarity items. As a polarity item, *any* must be (a) overtly c-commanded by a syntactic licenser and (b) must appear in a, say, non-upward entailing context. In (2a) narrow-scope *anyone* appears in a downward-entailing context, but the syntactic realization of the operator (negation) fails to c-command it and the sentence is rendered ungrammatical:

(2) * Anyone didn't go.

In Catalan, only one item appears to behave like English *any*: *gaire* 'much, many/any'. In Spanish, there is a whole class of phrases that behave like the English polarity items. These phrases are characterized by having a postnominal existential determiner, i.e. they are of the form *N alguno/a* (*duda alguna* 'any doubt', *rencor alguno* 'any resentment'). The behavior of Catalan and Spanish polarity items will be illustrated in Sections 4 and 5.

2.2 N-words

As noted, n-words display a characteristic hybrid behavior. On the one hand, they behave like inherently negative elements. For instance, unlike polarity items like *any*, they can have negative value in isolation:

(3) a. Cat. Quants en vas veure? Cap.
    b. Sp. ¿Cuantos viste? Ninguno.
    c. Eng. How many did you see? *Any.

On the other hand, they appear in contexts where Standard English would use *any*. The particular polar contexts in which n-words are allowed vary from language to language (see below), but they are always licit in negative contexts like (4), a typical negative-concord structure:

(4) a. Cat. No en vaig veure *cap*.
    no prtve 1s-past-see none
    'I didn't see *any*.'
    b. Sp. No vi *ninguno*.
    no 1s-past-see none
    'I didn't see *any*.'

Progovac 1992). The term 'polarity item' here must be understood as excluding such items, i.e. as concerning only (negative) polarity items licensed by the contexts listed below. For further discussion of polarity see Linebarger (1980), Rizzi (1982), Hoeksema (1983), Krifka (1989), and Kadmon and Landman (1993).

[2] As an anonymous *Probus* reviewer points out, many polarity items are not indefinite NPs, but belong to other categories, e.g. adverbs like *all that* (*Fred is *(not) all that keen on smoked eel*) and *either* (*You're *(not) funny either*) or verbs like auxiliary *need* (*Practitioners of tagmemics need *(not) apply for that position*). The examples are the reviewer's.

Among the list of Catalan n-words we find *ningú* 'noone', *res* 'nothing', *cap* 'no..., none', *gens* 'none (mass)', *enlloc* 'nowhere', *mai* 'never', and *tampoc* 'neither'. Their Spanish equivalents are *nadie* 'noone', *nada* 'nothing, none (mass)', *ningún, ninguno/a* 'no..., none', *en ninguna parte* 'nowhere', *nunca* 'never', and *tampoc* 'neither'. None of these items appear to contain a distinct negative morpheme (although the *n-* in Cat. *ningú* and Sp. *ningún* does etymologically derive from a negative element). In this respect they differ from English negative quantifiers like *noone*, *nothing*, or *never*.

There are basically three competing analyses of n-words. Let us call them HYPOTHESIS A, HYPOTHESIS B, and HYBRID HYPOTHESIS. According to Hypothesis A n-words are inherently negative. Zanuttini (1991), for instance, argues they are negative universal quantifiers ($\forall\neg$) (alternatively, just like other negative quantifiers, they could be seen as existential ($\neg\exists$)). Hypothesis B states that n-words are nonnegative polarity items in all contexts. This hypothesis is defended by Bosque (1980) and Laka (1990, 1993). Finally, the Hybrid Hypothesis suggests that n-words are nonnegative indefinites, but that their mere presence licenses the constructional expression of negation nonetheless (Ladusaw 1992).[3]

Hypothesis A accentuates the empirical differences between polarity items and n-words and requires an independent account for when the behavior of n-words is polarlike. In contrast, Hypothesis B accentuates the similarities and requires an independent account for when the behavior of n-words is not polarlike. Take Hypothesis A. Hypothesis A predicts that n-words should be capable of expressing sentential negation by themselves in all contexts. However, contrary to prediction, in (4a) the presence of the negative element *no* is required and Zanuttini (1991) needs to argue that this is *no* is due to independent syntactic requirements. Similarly for Hypothesis B. Hypothesis B predicts that n-words cannot express sentential negation by themselves. However, in the short answer in (3a) the n-word *cap* appears to express negation. Laka (1991) needs to argue that in this example negation is expressed not through *cap* but rather through a null negative element.

Section 6 will compare these three hypotheses in light of the considerations that emerge from a proper analysis of the behavior and distribution of minimizers.

2.3 Minimizers

Minimizers are elements which denote a minimal quantity or extent. According to Horn (1989: 400), when these elements 'occur in negative contexts, the negation denotes the absence of a minimal quantity, and hence the presence of no quantity at all'. Thus, in negative contexts, minimizers are used as a means of negative reinforcement. This effect is shown in

[3]There is a second type of hybrid hypothesis, about which not much will be said, proposed in Longobardi (1987). Longobardi argues that n-words have a dual nature: they are polarity items in contexts like (4a) and negative universals in contexts like (3a) and in preverbal position. Both Laka (1990) and Zanuttini (1991) argue against this approach.

The analysis of negative concord in van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993) falls somewhere between Hypothesis A and the Hybrid Hypothesis. Like Hypothesis A, van der Wouden and Zwarts argue that n-words, and negative-concord terms in general, are negative universals. However, in cases of 'negative spread' (when they occur in the scope of another negative universal) these negative-concord terms turn into nonnegative existentials. This type of context-sensitive semantic process is reminiscent of the constructional process in the Hybrid Hypothesis. However, given that this approach shares the basic belief that negative-concord terms are inherently negative, they will be classified under Hypothesis A.

the equivalences in (5). *A red cent*, *a word*, and *a clue* are core examples of minimizers:

(5) a. She didn't say a word. = She didn't say anything (at all).
b. I don't have a red cent. = I don't have any money (at all).
c. He doesn't have a clue. = He doesn't have any idea.

English minimizers are always polarity items. Bolinger (1972: 121) defines them as 'partially stereotyped equivalents of *any*'. However, as will be shown, in Catalan and Spanish this is not the case. Catalan minimizers differ from their Spanish counterparts in one small formal detail, which has nevertheless important repercussions. Whereas Catalan minimizers must be headed by the particle *ni*, in Spanish the presence of the particle is optional:

(6) a. Cat. No va dir *(*ni*) *una paraula.*
no 3s-past-say word
b. Sp. No dijo (*ni*) *una palabra.*
no 3s-past-say word.
'S/he didn't say *a word*.'

Let us refer to those minimizers headed by *ni* as +*ni* minimizers and to those without *ni* as −*ni* minimizers.

But what exactly is *ni*? *Ni* is generally thought to mean 'neither' or 'nor', as in (7), but judging by its distribution it also means '(not) even', as in (8):

(7) a. Cat. Ni tu ni jo.
neither you nor I
'Neither you nor I.'
b. Cat. Ni plou ni fa sol.
neither 3s-rain nor 3s-do sun
'It neither rains nor shines.'

(8) Cat. No vaig trobar ni ton oncle.
no 1s-past-find not-even your uncle
'I didn't even find your uncle.'

This second use of *ni* seems to be most related to the use of *ni* in minimizers. In fact, Horn (1989) mentions that a tacit *(not) even* has been argued to underlie the diachronic origin of polar minimizers in languages like English. For a synchronic analysis of *ni* in Spanish, see Bosque (1992).

The data in Sections 4 and 5 show that (Spanish) −*ni* minimizers display the behavior and distribution of English polarity items (including, of course English minimizers), Catalan polarity item *gaire*, and Spanish polarity items of the form *N alguno/a*. They also show that, in contrast, (Catalan and Spanish) +*ni* minimizers do not share this polar behavior.

2.3.1 Catalan examples

The following are further examples of Catalan minimizers. As indicated in the examples, suppressing the particle *ni* yields ungrammatical strings, i.e. Catalan minimizers are necessarily

$+ni$ minimizers.[4]

(9) No va moure *(ni) un dit.
no 3s-past move a finger
'S/he didn't lift a finger.'

(10) No se sentia *(ni) una mosca.
no imprsnl-pssv 3s-impf-hear a fly
'One couldn't hear the slightest sound.'

(11) No passava *(ni) un bri d'aire.
no 3s-impf-pass a bit of air
'There wasn't a breath of air coming through.'

(12) No hi havia *(ni) una ànima.
no 3s-impf-loc/exist a soul
'There wasn't a soul.'

(13) No li vaig tocar *(ni) un pèl.
no iobj 1s-past-touch a hair
'I didn't touch him/her at all.'

2.3.2 Spanish examples

The following are some examples of Spanish minimizers. As noted, in Spanish the presence of *ni* is optional, i.e. Spanish has both $+ni$ minimizers and $-ni$ minimizers. In some cases, like in (14) and (15), a determinerless version of the minimizer is also available.

(14) No queda (ni) (una) gota de vino.
no 3s-remain a drop of wine
'There isn't a drop of wine left.'

(15) No tiene (ni) (una) pizca de gracia.
no 3s-have a pinch of grace
'It isn't a bit funny.'

(16) No tiene (ni) idea.
no 3s-have idea
'S/he doesn't have a clue.'

(17) No le toqué (ni) un pelo.
no iobj 1s-past-touch a hair
'I didn't touch him/her at all.'

(18) No tengo (ni) un duro.
no 1s-have a duro
'I don't have a red cent.'

[4] It must be noted that some Catalan dialects, e.g. Xava Catalan, behave like Spanish in allowing the optionality of *ni*. This gives rise to some amount of variation in dialects that are in contact with Xava.

3 Diagnostics

The presence or absence of *ni* in Catalan and Spanish minimizers is not a mere morphological quirk. Rather, it is clear that $+ni$ minimizers and $-ni$ minimizers behave in different ways when subject to the following four diagnostic tests:

(19) 1. Ability to occur in isolation.
2. Ability to be modified by *almost* or *absolutely*.
3. Grammaticality in preverbal position.
4. Ability to appear in *yes/no* and *if* contexts with a nonnegative value.

These tests are extracted from the literature on n-words and polarity, where they are used to argue for or against the identity of these two categories. This section examines the nature of the four tests and Sections 4 and 5 analyze the behavior of $+ni$ minimizers and $-ni$ minimizers as brought out by these diagnostic tests and compares them to the behavior of n-words and polarity items.

Diagnostic 1 is the ability to occur in isolation. Polarity items, as shown in (3c), cannot stand in isolation, i.e. they cannot constitute a fragment utterance. N-words, in contrast, can occur in isolation without any difficulty. This fact is exploited by Zanuttini (1991) to argue that n-words are negative universal quantifiers, which are known to appear in isolation crosslinguistically. Laka (1990), as will be discussed below, counters this argument by proposing that the licenser in these fragments is a phonologically null element.

Diagnostic 2 is used by Horn (1972), Hoeksema (1983), Zanuttini (1987, 1991), and Quer (1993). The assumption behind the use of this diagnostic is ususally that *almost* can modify universals but cannot modify existentials. Polarity items, as a rule, do not accept modification by *almost*, presumably because polarity items are not universal quantifiers or 'absolute' expressions of the kind that would permit such modification. In contrast, n-words happily permit it. This fact is used by Zanuttini to argue for the universal nature of n-words. With Quer, they use modification by *almost* and *absolutely* to tease apart the use of n-words in negative contexts from their use in nonnegative contexts. Surprisingly, while the former accept it, the latter do not. With this evidence in hand, they argue that the licensing of n-words is, in fact, not the result of a unique mechanism in negative and in elsewhere contexts. As shown below, our conclusions are very much in agreement with the findings in Zanuttini (1987) and Quer (1993).

Diagnostic 3, in principle, distinguishes n-words from polarity items as well. Polarity items need to be overtly c-commanded by a licenser, as example (2a) above showed. In this example the presence of negation, a clearly suitable semantic licenser, is not enough to warrant the use of a polarity item. In contrast, n-words in negative sentences need not be subject to the surface c-command requirement: their occurrence in preverbal position is perfectly licit. N-words, then, appear both in preverbal position as sole overt expressors of negation and in postverbal position as negative-concord (or polarity) elements. As in the context of Diagnostic 1, Laka (1990) argues that preverbal n-words necessarily cooccur with a phonologically null negative licenser, which syntactically licenses the use of the n-word—in fact, a mere polarity item—and which is the actual expressor of sentential negation.

The last diagnostic, Diagnostic 4, is used by Laka (1990, 1993) to argue in favor of the polar status of n-words in the following way. If n-words were inherently negative, one would expect them to appear only in negative contexts. In contrast, polarity items are licensed in a number of non-upward entailing contexts and negation is just one of them. N-words may occur in many of the non-upward entailing contexts, other than negative environments, in which polarity items occur. In Catalan, for instance, n-words appear in *yes/no* interrogatives and in *if* clauses with a nonnegative value, as do polarity items. Zanuttini (1991) counters, roughly, that in these contexts the licensing operator absorbs the negative value of the n-word.

4 Catalan

This section illustrates the behavior of Catalan (+*ni*) minimizers, n-words, and the polarity item *gaire* in relation to Diagnostics 1-4.

4.1 Diagnostic 1

While n-words and (+*ni*) minimizers can occur in isolation, as shown in (20) and (21) respectively, polarity item *gaire* cannot (22):

(20) a. Qui has vist? Ningú.
who 2s-perf-see noone
'Who'd you see? Noone'
b. On vas? Enlloc.
where 2s-go nowhere
'Where are you going? Nowhere.'

(21) a. Qui hi havia? Ni una ànima.
who 3s-impf-loc/exist *ni* a soul
'Who was there? Not a soul.'
b. I què en va dir, d'allò? Ni una paraula.
& what 3s-past-say of.that *ni* word
'And what did he say about that? Not a word.'

(22) a. Que queda sucre? * Gaire.
Q 3s-remain sugar much
'Is there (any) sugar left? Much.'
b. Què funciona? * Gaires coses.
what 3s-work many things
'What's working? Many things.'

The contrast between n-words and *gaire* was expected, given the precedents in the literature. Minimizers align themselves with n-words here.

4.2 Diagnostic 2

Both n-words and minimizers are amenable to modification by *almost* and *absolutely*, as examples (23) and (24) respectively show. Example (25) shows that, in contrast, polarity items do not accept modification by these elements.[5]

(23) a. Qui has vist? Gairebé ningú.
who 2s-perf-see almost noone
'Who'd you see? Almost noone'
b. On en venen, de faves? Absolutament enlloc.
where prtve 3s-sell broad-beans absolutely nowhere
'Where are broad beans sold? Absolutely nowhere.'

(24) a. Qui hi havia? Gairebé ni una ànima.
who 3s-impf-loc/exist almost *ni* a soul
'Who was there? Almost not a soul.'
b. No em mouré absolutament ni un pam.
no 3s-past-say absolutely not an inch
'I won't move at all.'

(25) a. Que queda sucre? * Gairebé gaire.
Q 3s-remain sugar almost much
'Is there (any) sugar left? Almost much.'
b. Què funciona? * Absolutament gaires coses.
what 3s-work absolutely many things
'What's working? Absolutely many things.'

4.3 Diagnostic 3

As extensively noted in the literature, n-words can licitly appear in preverbal position without an overt syntactic licenser (see (26b) and (26d)), whereas classic polar elements cannot (see (28b)). Catalan minimizers side with n-words and their presence in preverbal position is licit,

[5] In Section 6 this statement will be qualified, since in nonnegative contexts the behavior of n-words in relation to Diagnostic 2 changes (they align themselves with polarity items).

Regarding modifiability of n-words by *almost*-type elements, van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993) notice the following contrast (their examples (28b) and (31b), respectively):

(i) Je n'ai pratiquement rien vu.
'I have seen practically nothing.'
(ii) * Personne n'a pratiquement rien dit.
'Nobody has said practically nothing.'

Apparently, in French n-words in negative-concord contexts satisfy Diagnostic 2 only in cases of 'negative doubling' (sequences of sentential negation and n-word), but not in cases of 'negative spread' (when the n-word occurs in the scope of another negative universal). This is important evidence in support of van der Wouden and Zwarts' analysis, since they argue that the n-word is a negative universal in cases of doubling, but a (negative universal turned into a) nonnegative existential in cases of spread. Unfortunately, the Catalan equivalents of both (i) and (ii) are fully grammatical.

as illustrated in (27).[6]

(26) a. No funciona res.
no 3s-work nothing
'Nothing works.'
b. Res (no) funciona.
c. No funciona mai.
no 3s-work never
'It never works.'
d. Mai (no) funciona.

(27) a. A la cerimònia no hi va comparèixer ni una ànima.
at the function no loc 3s-past-appear *ni* a soul
'There didn't appear a soul at the function.'
b. Ni una ànima (no) va comparèixer a la cerimònia.
c. Per aquella cambra no hi passava ni un bri d'aire.
by that room no loc 3s-impf-pass *ni* a bit of air
'There wasn't a breath of air going through that room.'
d. Ni un bri d'aire (no) passava per aquella cambra.

(28) a. No funcionen gaires coses.
no 3p-work many things
'There aren't many things working.'
b. *Gaires coses (no) funcionen.
c. No gaires coses funcionen.
'Not many things are working.'

Again, n-words and minimizers agree and, in turn, they contrast with *gaire*. Notice that in (28c), where an overt negative element c-commands and, therefore, syntactically licenses the polarity item, *gaire* may appear preverbally.

4.4 Diagnostic 4

The close parallelism displayed by Catalan minimizers and n-words so far breaks down when Diagnostic 4 is taken into account. As shown in (29), (30), and (31), n-words and polarity items may appear in *yes/no* questions and in *if* clauses. Examples (32), (33), and (34) show that Catalan minimizers may not.

(29) a. Que vol res ningú?
Q 3s-want nothing noone
'Does anyone want anything?'
b. Si vol res ningú, aviseu-me.
if 3s-want nothing noone 2p-imp-warn.me
'If anyone wants anything, let me know.'

[6] These examples also show that in Catalan the expression of sentential negation in cases where the n-word or the minimizer are placed preverbally is optional. This variation is a matter of register and appears to be tangential to the issues under discussion.

(30) a. Ho havies vist mai enlloc, això?
obj 2s-pastperf-see never nowhere this
'Had you ever seen this anywhere?'
b. Si ho veus mai enlloc, avisa'm.
if obj 2s-see never nowhere 2s-imp-warn.me
'If you ever see it anywhere, let me know.'

(31) a. Que funcionen gaires coses?
Q 3p-work many things
'Are many things working?'
b. Si perds gaires coses més, perdràs el cap.
if 2s-lose many things more 2s-fut-lose the head
'If you lose many more things, you'll lose your head.'

(32) * Que mouries ni un dit, per ell?
Q 2s-cond-move *ni* a finger for him
'Would you lift a finger for him?'

(33) * Que va dir ni paraula?
Q 3s-past-say *ni* word
'Did he say a word?'

(34) * Si li toca ni un pèl, avisa'm.
if iobj 3s-touch *ni* a hair 2s-imp-warn.me
'If s/he touches him/her at all, let me know.'

4.5 Summary table

Table 1 summarizes the state of affairs in Catalan. Columns 1-4 represent Diagnostics 1-4. The items under analysis are in rows 1-3. The behavior of minimizers (necessarily +*ni*) is the exact mirror image of the behavior of polarity item *gaire*. The distribution of n-words is like that of the minimizers for Diagnostics 1-3, but in environment 4, they behave like polarity items instead. In other words, cell 1x4 appears to be the odd one out. But before discussing the relevance of these patterns, let us compare them with the Spanish data.

CATALAN	ALONE 1	ALMOST ABSOL. 2	PRE-V 3	Q & IF 4
1. N-WORDS	Y	Y	Y	Y
2. MINIMIZERS	Y	Y	Y	N
3. GAIRE (PI)	N	N	N	Y

Table 1: Diagnostics 1-4 in Catalan

5 Spanish

This section examines the behavior of n-word, $+ni$ minimizers, and $-ni$ minimizers in Spanish with relation to Diagnostics 1-4. The data in this section are not arranged diagnostic by diagnostic, as in Section 4, but rather by type of item.

5.1 N-words

Spanish n-words behave like their Catalan counterparts as far as Diagnostics 1-3 are concerned, but not when subject to Diagnostic 4. Example (35) illustrates their satisfaction of Diagnostics 1 and 2—n-words can stand in isolation and may be modified by *almost*—and examples (36b) and (36d) show they can appear preverbally (Diagnostic 3). Examples (37) and (38) show that, in contrast to Catalan n-words, Spanish n-words are ungrammatical in *yes/no* and *if* contexts.

(35) ¿A quién has visto? A (casi) nadie.
a who 2s-perf-see *a* almost noone
'Who'd you see? (Almost) noone.'

(36) a. No funciona nada.
no 3s-work nothing
'Nothing works.'
b. Nada funciona.
c. No funciona nunca.
no 3s-work never
'It never works.'
d. Nunca funciona.

(37) a. * ¿Quieres nada?
2s-want nothing
'Do you want anything?'
b. * Si quieres nada, avísame.
if 2s-want nothing 2s-imp-warn.me
'If you want anything, let me know.'

(38) a. * ¿Habías visto nunca esto?
2s-pastperf-see never this
'Had you ever seen this?'
b. * Si lo ves nunca, avísame.
if obj 2s-see never 2s-imp-warn.me
'If you ever see it, let me know.'

Bosque (1980) and Laka (1990) provide examples of n-words in *yes/no* and *if* contexts that are claimed to be grammatical, contradicting the judgments in (37) and (38). They are examples like (39) and (40):

(39) Me preguntaron si nadie sabía la respuesta.
me 3p-past-ask if noone 3s-impf-know the answer
'They asked me whether anyone knew the answer.'

(40) ¿Has estado nunca en Brasil?
 2s-perf-be never in Brazil
 'Have you ever been to Brazil?'

It is worth noting that the judgments assigned to sentences (37) and (38) are shared by all the Spanish speakers consulted and that these speakers find sentences (39) and (40) ungrammatical as well. Let us assume, for the sake of simplicity, that we are dealing with two distinct variants of Spanish, which, although there are no clear social or geographical correlates for them, we may call dialect A and dialect B. In dialect A, sentences (39) and (40) are ungrammatical; in dialect B, the one reported by Bosque and Laka, (39) and (40) are fine. The pattern shown by dialect B, in fact, is identical to the Catalan pattern reflected in Table 1 above. In Section 6, the reason for the behavior of cell 1x4 in Table 1 will be discussed. This discussion will be applicable to the B dialect of Spanish as well.[7]

5.2 Minimizers

Spanish, as noted in Section 2, has both $+ni$ minimizers and $-ni$ minimizers. The behavior of $+ni$ minimizers is the complete opposite of the behavior of $-ni$ minimizers for all four diagnostic tests. $+Ni$ minimizers pattern exactly like their Catalan counterparts. In contrast, $-ni$ minimizers pattern exactly like Catalan *gaire*, i.e. like core polarity items.

Example (41) concerns Diagnostic 1 and shows that $+ni$ minimizers can appear in isolation in fragment answers whereas $-ni$ minimizers cannot. Example (42) illustrates diagnostic 2 and shows that the presence of *ni* renders the otherwise illicit modification of the minimizer by *almost* and *absolutely* acceptable.

(41) a. ¿Queda vino? *(Ni) una gota./ *(Ni) gota.
 3s-remain wine *ni* a drop
 'Is there any wine left? Not a drop.'
 b. ¿Y qué dijo? *(Ni) una palabra.
 and what 3s-say *ni* a word
 'And what did he say? Not a word.'

[7] It is true, though, that most speakers of dialect A, who reject (39) and (40), find sentences like (i) acceptable and equivalent to (ii):

(i) Dudo que venga nadie
 1s-doubt that 3s-sbj-come noone
 'I doubt anyone will come.'
(ii) Dudo que venga alguien
 1s-doubt that 3s-sbj-come someone
 'I doubt anyone will come.'

Here it will be assumed that n-words in polarity contexts licensed by *doubt* are 'relic' n-words of the type discussed in Section 6.3. In addition, as pointed by an anonymous *Probus* reviewer, there is a considerable amount of variation within dialect B in the licensing of n-words in nonnegative polar contexts depending on the choice of n-word and licensing context.

(42) a. No se come casi *(ni) una rosca.
no slf 3s-eat almost *ni* a doughnut
'S/he almost never scores.'
b. No tiene absolutamente *(ni) idea.
no 3s-have absolutely *ni* idea
'He doesn't have (absolutely) a clue.'

As for Diagnostic 3, as shown in (43a) and (43c) $+ni$ minimizers may appear in preverbal position. They do not require a surface c-commanding licenser. The preverbal $-ni$ minimizers in (43b) and (43d), in contrast, render these sentences ungrammatical, since $-ni$ minimizers do require the presence of an appropriate surface licenser.[8]

(43) a. Ni un duro fue a parar a mi bolsillo.
ni a duro 3s-past-go to stop-inf to my pocket
'Not a red cent ended up in my pocket.'
b. * Un duro fue a parar a mi bolsillo.
c. Ni una gota de aire circulaba por esa habitación.
ni a drop of air 3s-impf-move by that room
'There wasn't a breath of air going through that room.'
d. * Una gota de aire circulaba por esa habitación.

$+Ni$ minimizers and $-ni$ minimizers contrast again with respect to Diagnostic 4. The former are not allowed in nonnegative polar contexts but the latter are. Examples (44) and (45) illustrate the contrast:

(44) a. ¿Le tocaste (*ni) un pelo?
iobj 2s-past-touch a hair
'Did you touch her/him at all?'
b. Si le toca (*ni) un pelo, avísame.
if iobj 2s-touch a hair 2s-imp-warn-me
'If s/he touches her/him at all, let me know.'

(45) a. ¿Acaso dijiste (*ni) palabra cuando debías?
perchance 2s-past-say word when 2s-impf-must
'Did you say a word when you should have?'
b. Si dice (*ni) una palabra, avísame.
if 2s-say a word 2s-imp-warn-me
'If he says a word, let me know.'

Although the particular judgments in (44) and (45) were confirmed by all the informants that were consulted, the acceptability of $-ni$ minimizers in these nonnegative polar contexts is subject to a considerable variation. A straightforward sentence like (46a) is frowned upon by many speakers:

(46) ? ¿Dijo palabra?
3s-past-say word
'Did he say a word?'
* ¿Dijo ni palabra?

[8] Sentences (43b) and (43d) are grammatical in a reading where the preverbal indefinites are not interpreted as minimizers, i.e. they are interpreted literally rather than idiomatically and they take wide scope. This reading is tangential to the issues under analysis.

However, the same is true of polar minimizers in English. Judgments concerning minimizers in *yes/no* and *if* contexts are highly idiosynchratic. For instance, the judgments in (47) are from one single speaker of English. For this speaker, the polar minimizer *a brass farthing* is grammatical in an *if* clause like (47e) but not in a *yes/no* interrogative like (47d), whereas *a word* is fine in a *yes/no* context like (47a). Other speakers, in contrast, when presented with (47a) judged it ungrammatical.

(47) a. Did he say a word?
b. Would you lift a finger for him?
c. * Was there a soul at the party?
d. * Does he have a brass farthing?
e. If he has a brass farthing, I'm Dutch.

The reason behind the idiosyncratic behavior of polar minimizers in Spanish and English is yet to be determined, but it is clearly due to independent factors, suggesting that it can safely be ignored. Moreover, despite these idiosyncracies, the contrast between $+ni$ and $-ni$ is preserved: examples like (46a) are marginal, but the use of a $+ni$ minimizer in this context would render the sentence drastically ungrammatical, as shown in (46b).[9]

The class *N alguno/a*, which, as noted in Section 2, displays the polar behavior of English *any*, does of course pattern with $-ni$ minimizers when subject to Diagnostics 1-4. In this respect, the comparison between the n-phrase *ningún/a N* and the polarity item *N alguno/a* is quite interesting. Examples (48), (49), (50), and (51) illustrate Diagnostics 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively, with the (a) sentences reflecting the behavior of the n-phrase *ninguna queja* and the (b) sentences the behavior of polar *queja alguna*:

(48) a. Ninguna queja.
no complaint
b. * Queja alguna.
complaint some
'No complaint.'

(49) a. Absolutamente ninguna queja.
b. * Absolutamente queja alguna.
'Absolutely no complaint.'

(50) a. Ninguna queja debe llegar a la dirección.
no complaint 3s-must reach-inf to the management
b. * Queja alguna debe llegar a la dirección.
'No complaint should reach the management.'

(51) a. * Si tiene ninguna queja, llámeme.
if 3s-have no complaint call-imp.me
b. Si tiene queja alguna, llámeme.
'If you have any complaints, call me.'

[9] An anonymous *Probus* reviewer points out that minimizers in questions get better when the question is more 'rhetorical'. There is a contrast between the illicit (47d) and (i), which is much better:

(i) Do you really think anyone would give a brass farthing for his chances of reelection?

The contrast between the two types of elements is absolute and is identical to the contrast between $+ni$ minimizers and $-ni$ minimizers.

5.3 Summary table

Table 2 summarizes the state of affairs in Spanish. $+Ni$ minimizers and $-ni$ minimizers are the mirror image of each other. The contrast between the two classes is absolute. Also, unlike Catalan, in Spanish the parallelism between $+ni$ minimizers and n-words appears to be total (cell 1x4 is well behaved). Finally, note that the behavior of $-ni$ minimizers is identical to that of polarity items like Cat. *gaire* and Spanish *N alguno/a*.

SPANISH	ALONE 1	ALMOST ABSOL. 2	PRE-V 3	Q & IF 4
1. N-WORDS	Y	Y	Y	N
2. MINIMIZERS (+NI)	Y	Y	Y	N
3. MINIMIZERS (−NI)	N	N	N	Y

Table 2: Diagnostics 1-4 in Spanish

6 Analysis

The facts, then, are as follows. We have, on the one hand, $-ni$ minimizers, Cat. *gaire*, and Sp. *N alguno/a*, which react negatively to Diagnostics 1-3 and positively to Diagnostic 4, and, on the other, $+ni$ minimizers and n-words, which react positively to Diagnostics 1-3 and negatively to Diagnostic 4 (let us, for the time being, abstract away from cell 1x4 in Table 1 and assume Catalan n-words do not differ from $+ni$ minimizers at all). In other words, we have a first group of elements that display a characteristic polar behavior, identical to the behavior of English *any* and a second group of elements that pattern as if they were inherently negative (e.g. require no surface c-commanding licenser and may not occur in nonnegative polar contexts).

6.1 The hypotheses

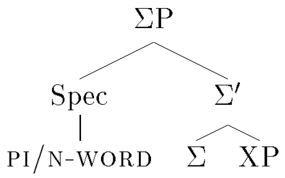
How do the three analyses of n-words discussed in Section 2—Hypothesis A, Hypothesis B, and the Hybrid Hypothesis—fare when confronted with these facts? From the perspective of Hypothesis A, which argues that n-words and polarity items are nonidentical, the fact that two different classes of elements coexist within both Catalan and Spanish is not surprising. In fact, Zanuttini (1991) also notes that for Italian one needs to maintain such a two-way distinction. The distribution of Catalan and Spanish minimizers merely confirms this. However, there are still two phenomena that Hypothesis A needs to contend with. One is the cooccurrence of $+ni$ minimizers (and n-words) and sentential negation. If Hypothesis A is correct, negative concord is real and therefore a specific account of its syntactic and semantic aspects is needed. The other phenomenon has to do precisely with the ill-behaved cell 1x4 in Table 1: why can n-words in Catalan (and Italian) appear in nonnegative polar contexts, if $+ni$ minimizers cannot? More will be said about these two issues below.

The Hybrid Hypothesis maintains a distinction between polarity items and n-words as well. In this sense, the contrasting patterns observed in Tables 1 and 2 are not problematic for this hypothesis either. Unlike Hypothesis A, however, the Hybrid Hypothesis does not analyze n-words (nor presumably $+ni$ minimizers) as inherently negative. Rather, both n-words and true polarity items are nonnegative. The syntactic difference between the two classes of elements lies in the fact that n-words (and $+ni$ minimizers) may license the constructional expression of negation, whereas true polarity items may not. If an n-word c-commands the structural locus of sentential negation, as in (36b), (36d), (43a), and (43c), a negative reading is licensed. True polarity items lack this ability. Nevertheless, the perspective spoused by the Hybrid Hypothesis is not free of problems. On the one hand, as noted by van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993), if both n-words and polarity items are nonnegative indefinites, why do the former, but not the latter, satisfy Diagnostic 2 (modification by *almost* and *absolutely*)? On the other hand, the question arises of how constructional expression of negation emerges in cases where an n-word or a $+ni$ minimizer appear in isolation. Unless one assumes that fragment utterances like (35) and (41) have a full, phonologically null syntactic structure (as, in fact, Hypothesis B does), there is no structural slot which may inherit the [neg] feature from the n-word and, therefore, no constructional expression of negation to license.

Hypothesis B argues that n-words are polarity items. If this view is correct, there ceases to be an immediate explanation for the two patterns of behavior reflected in Tables 1 and 2. As noted in Section 2, Laka (1990) provides an independent account of why n-words, contrary to expectation, satisfy Diagnostics 1 and 3. But this is not enough: if this independent account works for, say, *cap* 'no...' it should also work for *gaire*, but it does not.

Let us look at Laka's account in more detail. Preverbal n-words—mere polarity items, according to Hypothesis B—appear in the specifier slot of ΣP. ΣP is the projection of a functional category Σ, the members of which are, mainly, sentential negation and affirmation. Unlike postverbal polarity items, which are licensed via a c-command relation, polarity items in the specifier of ΣP are licensed via a spec-head relation with a Σ element:

(52)



This Σ element can be phonologically null. However, null Σ heads are licensed only if the specifier position of ΣP is full. This fact forces polarity items to front whenever Σ is headed by a null element. This is the structure of examples with a preverbal n-word or $+ni$ minimizer like (36b), (36d), (43a), and (43c) above. The structure of sentence fragments like (35) and (41) is the same, except in these cases the XP dominated by Σ' has no phonetic matrix.[10]

Against this background, the issue still is what rules (53a) and (54a) out, when (53b) and (54b) are fine:

(53) Cat. a. * [$_{\Sigma P}$ *gaire* [$_{\Sigma}$ *neg*] ...]
b. [$_{\Sigma P}$ *cap* [$_{\Sigma}$ *neg*] ...]

[10] Given that in Catalan preverbal n-words and overt sentential negation may cooccur, this account does not automatically extend to this language. Some additional mechanism is needed to trigger fronting to ΣP.

(54) Sp. a. * [$_{\Sigma P}$ *un duro* [$_{\Sigma}$ *neg*] ...]
b. [$_{\Sigma P}$ *ni un duro* [$_{\Sigma}$ *neg*] ...]

If both *gaire* and *cap* and both *un duro* and *ni un duro* are polarity items, why can the first item in each pair not appear in the specifier of ΣP? The polar status of *gaire* and *un duro* is beyond doubt: these elements require a surface syntactic licenser and their use is licit in all and only the typical non-upward entailing contexts. Perhaps one could argue that there is some structural or categorial trait that distinguishes between polarity items that are grammatical in structures like (53) and polarity items that are not. It is hard to see, however, what such a trait would be in, for instance, the case of *gaire* and *cap*, where both elements are paradigmatically related quantificational determiners. An obvious solution to this puzzle is to assume that there is some semantic property that *cap* has and *gaire* does not have, like Hypothesis A and the Hybrid Hypothesis do, and the most straightforward candidate is indeed negativity (as inherent-expressor-of or as indirect-inducer-of). Hypothesis B, however, does not allow for making such a distinction between items like *gaire* and items like *cap*.

6.2 Negative concord

As noted, for Hypothesis B negative concord is nothing but a mirage: it is merely an instance of a polarity construct. The symptoms of inherent negativity displayed by n-words and +*ni* minimizers in Diagnostics 1 and 3 are only apparent. This view, however, fails to account for the contrasting patterns uncovered in Tables 1 and 2. In contrast, for Hypothesis A and the Hybrid Hypothesis negative concord is a real phenomenon to contend with: if n-words and +*ni* minimizers are inherently negative or introduce a [neg] feature that licenses constructional expression of negation, why is the presence of an overt negative element required in examples like (4) above? Zanuttini (1991), for whom n-words are inherently negative, forces the presence of an overt negative element by arguing that in negative-concord languages negation must stand in an overt c-command relation to tense and agreement. While fronted n-words satisfy this requirement, VP-internal n-words do not. In Ladusaw's (1992) account, n-words introduce a [neg] feature with which they may license constructional negation by passing it on to a node at which this feature is 'semantically potent'. He stipulates that VP-internal n-words cannot pass their [neg] feature on because they do not stand in the relevant structural relation to the potential receiver, i.e. the category that would make [neg] semantically potent. Thus, [neg] remains inert and the VP-internal n-word is unable to express sentential negation. An independent negative element is needed to express negation.

The conclusion to be drawn from the patterns uncovered in Tables 1 and 2 is that reducing negative concord to unqualified polarity-item licensing is too radical a move. In other words, the data support the view that indeed there are languages, like Catalan or Spanish, with both negative concord and polarity constructs that differ typologically from nonconcordant languages like English, which possess only the latter type.

Although the issue of what exactly characterizes a negative-concord language need not be addressed in depth here, several alternatives may be sketched. Ladusaw (1992) suggests that negative-concord terms (in Catalan and Spanish, n-words and +*ni* minimizers) are, like polarity items, indefinite expressions which need a semantic roof. However, negative-concord terms may impose stricter requirements on the nature of the roof: while polarity items will take any monotone decreasing operator as a roof, n-words require an anti-additive context (e.g. negation). Thus, for Ladusaw the difference between languages with and without negative concord is that concordant languages have a class of 'polarity items' that specifically require an anti-additive roof, whereas nonconcordant languages lack this class (also the elements in this class license the constructional expression of negation). In contrast to Ladusaw, for Zanuttini (1991) the difference is that concordant languages have both a semantic rule of factorization or absorption that allows for cooccurrence of more than one inherently negative element and a syntactic negation-over-tense condition, which requires the presence of negation in negative-concord structures. Or alternatively, one could pursue the approach in van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993), where negative-concord languages are characterized by possessing either a process of negative spread or a process of negative doubling or both. Crucially, nonconcordant languages lack both these processes. This perspective is closer to Zanuttini's in concluding that negative-concord terms are drastically different from polarity items.

Quer (1993) argues also that what is needed is a two-way distinction between negative-concord licensing and nonnegative polar licensing. Quer points out that languages like Serbo-Croatian and Turkish (data from Progovac (1988)), have a class of morpholexical items that are licensed only in negative-concord contexts, while a different class is used in all nonnegative polar contexts. He also notes that the same is true for Nonstandard English, where n-words like *nobody* cannot appear in nonnegative polar contexts, but rather are confined to negative contexts. The patterns unveiled in Tables 1 and 2 show that Catalan and Spanish are not any different from Serbo-Croatian, Turkish, and Nonstandard English in this respect (in fact, one would expect all negative-concord languages to be alike in this respect): while n-words and $+ni$ minimizers are associated with a negative feature in some way and are confined to negative contexts, true polarity items may not license the expression of negation and may appear in any non-upward entailing context. Along with Quer (1993), the conclusions drawn here constitute a defense of the reality of negative concord.

Before moving on to the next section, let us mention that *without* phrases must be considered negative-concord environments rather than nonnegative polar contexts. $+Ni$ minimizers, which lawfully appear in negative-concord contexts like (55a) but cannot appear in nonnegative polar contexts like (55c) (cf. Diagnostic 4), are completely acceptable in *without* phrases, as shown in (55b):

(55) a. No va dir ni paraula.
'S/he didn't say a word.'
b. Va marxar sense dir ni paraula.
'S/he left without saying a word.
c. * Que va dir ni paraula?
'Did s/he say a word?'

Recall, furthermore, that in (dialect A of) Spanish n-words may not appear in nonnegative polar contexts, as shown in (56c). Nevertheless, they are allowed in *without* phrases as unproblematically as they are in clausal negative contexts, as (56a) and (56b) illustrate:

(56) a. No dijo nada.
'S/he didn't say anything.'
b. Se fue sin decir nada.
'S/he left without saying anything.
c. * ¿Dijo nada?
'Did s/he say anything?'

Nothing will be said here about the semantics of *without*. What is clear, though, is that, in Ladusaw's (1992) terms, negative-concord terms accept both negation and *without* as roofs, while rejecting other non-upward entailing operators.[11]

6.3 A historical relic

In the discussion in Section 6.2, the data on the distribution of n-words in Catalan has been idealized. As noted above, Catalan n-words do not behave like $+ni$ minimizers, but rather like polarity items. Recall the unexpected Y in cell 1x4 in Table 1. The ill behavior of Catalan n-words obscures the neat contrast between negative-concord and nonnegative polar environments on which the argument for negative concord in Section 6.2 rests. In fact, the behavior of n-words in 1x4 is used by Bosque (1980) and Laka (1990) to argue in favor of Hypothesis B, since when this hypothesis is assumed this behavior is expected. From the standpoint of Hypothesis A, in contrast, the pattern in cell 1x4 in Table 1 is problematic.

Italian n-words may also appear in nonnegative polar contexts, but, unlike Catalan, they may occur only in *yes/no* interrogatives. They are unacceptable in *if* clauses. Zanuttini (1991) suggests for Italian that the negative value of n-words in *yes/no* environments is 'absorbed' by the semantic (interrogative) licensor and suggests an account along the same lines for *if* clauses.[12] Whether such a solution can be implemented is unclear and depends on what the semantics of *yes/no* questions and *if* clauses is. What is clear is that from the perspective of Hypothesis A the lawful presence of n-words in a nonnegative polar environment must be seen as an exceptional case. In fact, a quick glance at Tables 1 and 2 confirms the exceptional nature of the Y in cell 1x4 in Table 1. The data compel us to take the behavior of $+ni$ minimizers, rather than that of Catalan n-words, to be the standard one for negative-concord terms. This not only smooths out the sole wrinkle in the neat contrast between negative-concord terms and true polarity items, but also puts Catalan on a par with Spanish and with Nonstandard English (as noted in Section 6.2).

Furthermore, Quer (1993) notices that Catalan n-words pattern differently according to whether they appear in negative-concord contexts or in nonnegative polar environments. As noted in Section 4, n-words and $+ni$ minimizers satisfy Diagnostic 2 in that they are amenable to modification by *almost* and *absolutely*. However, this is true only when n-words appear in negative-concord contexts (and in isolation). When they appear in nonnegative polar environments they react negatively to Diagnostic 2. Compare the pattern in (57) to the behavior of polarity item *gaire*, which satisfies Diagnostic 2 in no contexts, shown in (58).

[11] Laka (1990) makes abundant use of examples with *without* phrases to argue that n-words are fine in nonnegative contexts. If, however, *without* phrases are taken to be true negative-concord environments rather than nonnegative polar ones, the force of the argument fades. Negative concord in *without* phrases is found not only in Romance but in other languages as well (e.g. Modern Greek, Nonstandard English).

[12] An anonymous *Probus* reviewer points out that, while it is true that n-words do not appear in *if* clauses, conditional sentences like (i) are fully grammatical:

(i) Dovesse telefonare nessuno, io sono in cantina.
3s-sbj-must phone-inf noone I 1s-be in canteen
'Should anybody call, I'm in the canteen.'

Further examination of the difference between the Italian conditional constructions would be needed to explore this contrast.

Example (59) shows that *gairebé* 'almost' and the *yes/no* context are not incompatible:

(57) a. No he vist gairebé ningú.
'I have seen almost noone.'
b. * Que has vist gairebé ningú?
'Have you seen almost noone?'

(58) a. * No he vist gairebé gaire gent.
'I have seen almost many people.'
b. * Que has vist gairebé gaire gent?
'Have you seen almost many people?'

(59) Que has vist gairebé tothom?
'Have you seen almost everyone?'

The pattern in (57) confirms the observation that, if n-words like *ningú* have a dual nature, the split is between negative-concord contexts on the one hand and nonnegative polar environments on the other. The behavior of n-words in the *yes/no* context departs from that of $+ni$ minimizers in two ways: not only are they licensed in a nonnegative polar environment (impossible for $+ni$ minimizers), but they also reject modification by *almost* and *absolutely*. In this sense the 'exceptional' character of cell 1x4 is confirmed.

In fact, there is significant evidence in favor of assuming that the presence of Catalan n-words in the environments specified by Diagnostic 4 is best analyzed as a historical relic, which, moreover, appears to be on its way to extinction. Most Catalan n-words—*cap*, *enlloc*, *gens*, *res*—have evolved from Vulgar Latin terms which are obviously nonnegative (this is true for Spanish too, as pointed out in Laka (1990)). It appears that the nonnegative ancestors of these present-day n-words acted as polar ($-ni$) minimizers. For example, *res* comes from the Vulgar Latin for 'thing' and a sentence like *No he sentit res* 'I haven't heard nothing' had meant, at an earlier stage of the language, something along the lines of 'I haven't heard a thing.' Such cases of 'positive reinforcers undergoing [negative] infection by exposure to negation' are, as Horn (1989: 454) points out, quite common in Romance diachrony (cf. e.g. French *personne*, *pas*, and *rien*).

N-words like *res* and *gens*, in fact, still preserve certain fossilized, idiosyncratic traits of their former status as polar minimizers. For instance, as shown in (60a) and (60b), when these two items occur in isolation, they may be redundantly and vacuously accompanied by an overt negation (*res* and *no res* and *gens* and *no gens* mean exactly the same). The lawful presence of negation in this context is clearly a legacy of the former status of *res* and *gens* as polarity items. As (60c) shows, in these environment polarity item *gaire* not only tolerates but rather requires the presence of the negative:

(60) a. Què vols? (No) res.
what 2s-want no nothing
'What do you want? Nothing.'
b. Que tens son? (No) gens.
Q 2s-have sleep no none
'Are you sleepy? Not at all.'

(60) c. Que queda sucre? No gaire /*Gaire
Q 3s-remain sugar no much
'Is there (any) sugar left? Not much.'
d. Quants en tens? (*No) cap.
how many prtve 2s-have no none
'How many do you have? None.'

However, it would be wrong to try to provide a systematic account of the fact that *res* and *gens* may cooccur with *no* in this environment. This behavior is highly idiosyncratic and cannot be generalized to all n-words. Take, for instance, *cap* in (60d). *Cap*, like *res* and *gens* is an n-word evolved from a former polar minimizer. Nevertheless, it does not tolerate the copresence of *no* when it stands in isolation. The contrast between (61) and (62) illustrates another one of these fossilized traits:

(61) Res l'espanta.
nothing obj.3s-scare
'Nothing scares him.'
'The slightest thing scares him.'

(62) Res el fa estornudar
nothing obj 3s-make sneeze
'Nothing makes him sneeze.'

Sentence (61), taken from Picallo (1984: 93), is ambiguous. It has the two meanings detailed in the translation. In one, *res* has the expected n-word meaning and, in Ladusaw's (1992) terms, introduces [neg] into the sentence. In the other, *res* acts as a positive element (as a diminisher, in fact (Bolinger 1972)). Again, it would be counterproductive to give a systematic account of this ambiguity. Sentence (62), for instance, lacks the positive reading entirely. It appears, then, that the availability of the positive reading in (61) is an idiosyncratic fact that can be accounted for if it is viewed as a punctual historical fossil, passed down in a few set formulae from a time in which *res* was indeed nonnegative.

Given that Catalan n-words preserve a number of fossilized, idiosyncratic traits, it may be suggested that, in fact, their appearance in *yes/no* and *if* contexts is merely a further historical relic. N-words were, at an earlier stage of the language, polar minimizers and as such their presence in nonnegative polar contexts was expected. N-words changed (or are changing) into negation-triggering elements, but they have not shed their ability to appear in nonnegative polar contexts entirely. Italian, as noted, accepts n-words in *yes/no* interrogatives but not in *if* clauses. It would appear that in Italian this 'shedding' process is more advanced than in conservative Catalan. That n-words in *yes/no* and *if* contexts are a historical relic receives additional support from the fact that they are in competion with nonnegative existentials precisely—and uniquely—in these contexts (in fact, the use of nonnegative existentials is favored in the speech of younger speakers). In the *yes/no* interrogative in (63) and the *if* clause in (64) the direct object may be expressed by means of both a nonnegative existential, as in (a), and an n-word, as in (b), with no contrast in meaning:

(63) a. Que vols menjar alguna cosa?
Q 2s-want eat-inf something
'Do you want to eat anything?'
b. Que vols menjar res?

(64) a. Si vols menjar alguna cosa, avisa'm.
if 2s-want eat-inf something 2s-imp-warn.me
'If you wan't to eat anything, let me know.'
b. Si vols menjar res, avisa'm.

In negative contexts, as expected, the option of using an existential is not available. Example (65a) is ungrammatical in the intended reading ($\neg\exists$):

(65) a. * No vull menjar alguna cosa.
no 1s-want eat-inf something
b. No vull menjar res.
'I don't want to eat anything.'

If what we are witnessing here is a process of substitution of n-words by existentials in these nonnegative polar contexts, Catalan, in the future, will have rid itself of the unexpected Y in cell 1x4 in Table 1 and the contrast between negative-concord terms and polarity items will be as crips as it is in Spanish now.[13]

The fact that this diachronic connection is exclusive of n-words in precisely nonnegative polar contexts lends support to the idea that their licensing in these contexts is distinct from their licensing in negative-concord contexts. Of course, to say that the existence of polar n-words is a historical relic does not preempt the need for a synchronic analysis of their polar licensing.[14]

The licensing of n-words in nonnegative polar contexts is, in every sense of the word, productive. How, then, should the contrast between negative-concord n-words and these 'relic' polar n-words be captured? One possibility is to say that we are dealing with a real case of lexical ambiguity along the lines of Ladusaw (1992). One set of n-words is negation-triggering and imposes strong restrictions on the semantic nature of its roof: it must be negation (or *without*). A second set, which should not be analyzed as negation-triggering, appears to impose weaker restrictions on the semantic nature of the roof (any non-upward entailing licenser goes). Alternatively, it could be argued that there is no lexical ambiguity. In this second case it can be argued that all that distinguishes concordant n-words from the polar relics is the way in which they are licensed. This is the position found in Quer (1993), who explicitly rules out lexical ambiguity in favor of allowing the same set of n-words be subject to two types of licensing. A third alternative, closer to the stance taken by Hypothesis A, is to say that in the case of relic n-words, the negative value of the n-word is absorbed by the conditional and interrogative environments in some kind of context-sensitive assignment of sematic values to negative universal expressions (although it is unclear how absorption would work in these nonnegative cases, especially in conditional contexts). The answer to this question need not be pursued here. Suffice it to say that there is ample evidence to argue that the appearance of n-words in nonnegative polar contexts in Catalan and Italian (and the

[13]To determine beyond the impressionistic level whether the variation between n-words and existentials in nonnegative polar contexts is indeed the reflection of a language change would require sophisticated quantitative analysis, an enterprise that lies well beyond the scope of this article.

[14]Modern Greek n-words behave exactly like Catalan n-words regarding Diagnostics 1-4. Also, they are in competition with existential forms in nonnegative polar contexts (see Quer (1993: 48)). Nevertheless, according to an anonymous *Probus* reviewer, the 'relic' status of Romance polar n-words is apparently not extendable to Modern Greek. Even if this were the case, there is sufficient evidence to argue, as Quer does, that the licensing of n-words as negative-concord terms is different from the licensing of n-words as polar elements in nonnegative polar contexts.

B dialect of Spanish) cannot be taken as canonical and that it is quite exceptional in nature. This provides further support for Hypothesis A and argues against Hypothesis B. The Hybrid Hypothesis remains neutral, although it has nothing to say about the exceptional status of n-words in nonnegative polar contexts.

7 Conclusion

Careful analysis of the behavior and distribution of minimizers in Catalan and Spanish has provided new insight into the categorization of n-words and polarity items in these languages. While $-ni$ minimizers behave exactly like polarity items, $+ni$ minimizers behave like n-words, except when the latter display polarlike traits. In other words, $+ni$ minimizers and polarity items display behaviors that are the mirror image of each other. N-words have a less clear cut behavior: they share the behavior of $+ni$ minimizers in negative-concord contexts, but can behave like polarity items in some nonnegative polar contexts. This suggests that, in these languages, $+ni$ minimizers, rather than n-words, should be taken as paradigmatic of the behavior of negative-concord terms. The polarlike traits that n-words display variably in different languages should not be taken as typical of negative-concord terms but rather as exceptional. When this is done it becomes clear that an unqualified identification of negative concord and polarity licensing is problematic (this findings are in agreement with the independently motivated proposal in Quer (1993)). In this respect, Hypothesis A and the Hybrid Hypothesis fare much better than Hypothesis B, since the former accept the reality of negative concord and put forward proposals to account for it while the latter subsumes it under polarity licensing.

Table 3 compares the distribution of n-words, negative quantifiers, and existentials in the four langauges listed in rows 1-4 and the five syntactic environments in columns 1-5: 1 = negative contexts without a licenser; 2 = negative contexts with an explicit licenser (negation or *without*; 3 = nonnegative *yes/no* interrogatives (negative *yes/no* interrogatives count as negative contexts); 4 = *if* clauses, and 5 = assertive existential statements. The symbol n stands for both n-words and negative quantifiers like Standard English *nothing* and the symbol α stands for nonnegative elements (polarity items like *any* and existentials):

LANGUAGE	NEG −LCSR 1	NEG* +LCSR 2	YES/NO 3	IF CLAUSE 4	EXIST 5
1. English	n	α	α	α	α
2. Spanish	n	n	α	α	α
3. Italian	n	n	n/α	α	α
4. Catalan	n	n	n/α	n/α	α

*Only with $\neg\exists$ readings

Table 3: Distribution of n and α elements

In negative contexts without an overt licenser all languages use negative or negation-triggering elements. Standard English uses negative quantifiers and Catalan, Italian, and Spanish—let us refer to them as Romance—use n-words and $+ni$ minimizers. Recall that the issue of whether n-words are negative quantifiers was left open. Hypothesis A argues they are. The Hybrid Hypothesis argues they are not, although it grants them the ability to be the introducers of the [neg] feature into the sentence. It was argued in Section 6.2 that negative concord cannot be dispensed with. The contrast between Standard English and Romance in column 2 reflects the fact the latter are negative-concord languages whereas Standard English is not. In this context Standard English uses nonnegative polarity elements, whereas Romance uses negative-concord terms.

In the assertive existential contexts in column 5 all languages in the table use nonnegative terms, as expected. However, when we consider the polar contexts in columns 3 and 4, the neatness of the patterns in the table breaks down. Standard English, unsurprisingly, uses α elements in these contexts, but Romance shows a considerable amount of variation, with Spanish (dialect A, at least) not allowing n elements in either *yes/no* or *if* contexts, Italian allowing them only in *yes/no* contexts, and Catalan allowing them in both. Notice, though, that in both Catalan and Italian n elements are in competition with α elements, both polarity items and existentials). If the arguments presented in Section 6.3 are on the right track, the presence of n elements (exclusively n-words; never $+ni$ minimizers) in columns 3 and 4 is only a historical relic preserved from a time when n-words were not n elements but rather α elements. The distribution observable in Table 3, once more, points towards a separate characterization of negative concord and polarity licensing and toward an analysis of the semantics of n-words where negation, directly or indirectly, plays a role.

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