

# Negative indefinites: data for 40 languages from Appendix A in Haspelmath (1997)

## General information

The data reported here were used to index the indefinite pronouns from the 40 languages from Appendix A in Haspelmath (1997) according to whether they can be interpreted as negated existentials. The data were collected for the purposes of the project *Indefinite pronouns optimize the simplicity/informativeness trade-off* by Milica Denić, Shane Steinert-Threlkeld and Jakub Szymanik.

## Method

Indefinite pronouns in 40 languages were indexed in Haspelmath (1997) according to whether they can take the ‘direct negation’ function (among others). The ‘direct negation’ function collapses items such as English *nobody* that can be interpreted as negated existentials (i.e. negative indefinites) in the absence of other negative elements, and other kinds of indefinites, such as English *anybody*, that can be interpreted as existentials in the direct scope of negation. We collected data that allows us to establish for each indefinite pronoun series in each of the 40 languages from Appendix A in Haspelmath (1997) which can take the ‘direct negation’ function whether they can be interpreted as negative indefinites in the absence of other negative elements. We report these data here.

In the majority of cases, we indexed an indefinite pronoun as having a negative indefinite use if it can appear in elliptical negative fragment answers (e.g. ‘Who did you see? Nobody.’, cf. Bernini and Ramat 2012) or if it can be interpreted as a negated existential without there being another negative element in the sentence. When relevant examples were found in the existing scientific literature, those examples are reproduced in this document and the original source of the example is cited. Occasionally, we refer to claims made in the literature that were not accompanied by linguistic examples. When no source is cited, linguistic judgments reported have been verified directly with competent (native or near-native) speakers of languages in question. For three languages, none of the above was feasible (Quechua, Yakut, Kannada): in those three cases, we referred to dictionary entries for the relevant items and drew suggestive conclusions from there.

Note that the unacceptability judgment (\*) should be interpreted as signaling that the indefinite pronoun is unacceptable under the intended (negated existential) interpretation: it may or may not be acceptable under other interpretations.

## 1 German

***N-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (1) Wer ist da? Niemand.  
Who is there? Nobody.  
'Who is there? Nobody.'

## 2 Dutch

***Niets-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (2) Wie is daar? Niemand.  
Who is there? Nobody.  
'Who is there? Nobody.'

## 3 English

***No-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (3) Who is there? Nobody.

***Any-series*** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (4) Who is there? \*Anybody. (intended: Nobody.)

***Ever*** *Ever* cannot be interpreted as a negated existential, as evidenced by its interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (5) When did you go there? \*Ever. (intended: Never.)

## 4 Swedish

***Ingen-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (6) Vem är där? Ingen.  
 Who is there? Nobody.  
 ‘Who is there? Nobody.’

***Någon-series*** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (7) Vem är där? \*Någon.  
 Who is there? Somebody.  
 ‘intended: Who is there? Nobody.’

## 5 Icelandic

***Enginn-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (8) Hver er þar? Enginn.  
 Who is there? Nobody.  
 ‘Who is there? Nobody.’

***Neinn-series*** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>1</sup>

- (9) Hver er er við dyrnar? \*Neinn.  
 Who is there at door:the? Anybody.  
 ‘intended: Who is there? Nobody.’

## 6 Latin

***N-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>2</sup>

- (10) Quis est ibi? Nemo.  
 Who is there? Nobody.  
 ‘Who is there? Nobody.’

## 7 Portuguese

***N-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (11) Quem está aí? Ninguém.  
 Who is there? Nobody.  
 ‘Who is there? Nobody.’

---

<sup>1</sup>(9) corresponds to the example (425c) in Haspelmath 1997.

<sup>2</sup>Vukašin Miljković, Latin language professor, p.c.

**Qualquer-series** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (12) Quem está aí? \*Qualquer pessoa.  
Who is there? \*Anybody.  
'intended: Who is there? Nobody.'

## 8 Catalan

**Cap-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (13) Qui hi ha? Ningú.  
Who there is? Nobody.  
'Who is there? Nobody.'

## 9 French

**Personne-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (14) Qui est là? Personne.  
Who is there? Nobody.  
'Who is there? Nobody.'

**Que ce soit-series** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (15) Qui est là? \*Qui que ce soit.  
Who is there? Anybody.  
'intended: Who is there? Nobody.'

## 10 Italian

**Ni-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (16) Chi è là? Nessuno.  
Who is there? Nobody.  
'Who is there? Nobody.'

## 11 Romanian

***Ni-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>3</sup>

- (17) Cine a venit? Nimeni.  
Who has come? Nobody.  
'Who came? Nobody.'

## 12 Modern Greek

***Típota-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>4</sup>

- (18) Tí tis ípes? Típota.  
What her you:told? Nothing.  
'What did you tell her? Nothing.'

## 13 Bulgarian

***Ni-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (19) Koj e tam? Nikoj.  
Who is there? Nobody.  
'Who is there? Nobody.'

## 14 Serbian/Croatian

***Ni-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (20) Ko je tamo? Niko.  
Who is there? Nobody.  
'Who is there? Nobody.'

## 15 Polish

***Ni-series*** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (21) Kto tam? Nikt.  
Who there? Nobody.

---

<sup>3</sup>(17) corresponds to example (4a) in Fălăus and Nicolae 2016.

<sup>4</sup>(18) corresponds to example (424b) in Haspelmath 1997.

‘Who is there? Nobody.’

## 16 Russian

**Ni-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (22) Kto tam? Nikto.  
Who there? Nobody.  
‘Who is there? Nobody.’

## 17 Lithuanian

**Nie-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>5</sup>

- (23) Ko ieškai? Nieko.  
What search:you? Nothing.  
‘What are you looking for? Nothing.’

**Determiner *joks*** cannot be used in negative fragment answers.<sup>6</sup>

## 18 Latvian

**Ne-series** It is classified as a negative concord series in Willis et al. (2013) (cf. the discussion of their example (93)). We thus conclude that items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials (negative concord items are known to be used in negative fragment answers with a negated existential interpretation, cf. Zeijlstra 2004).

## 19 Irish

**Ar bith-series** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>7</sup>

- (24) An bhfaca tú duine ar bith? — Ni flacas, ni flaca mé  
INT saw you person on world — NEG saw NEG saw I  
duine ar bith.  
person on world  
Did you see anyone? No, I didn’t see anyone.

---

<sup>5</sup>(23) corresponds to the example (16) in Kozhanov (2011).

<sup>6</sup>Alexandre Cremers, p.c.

<sup>7</sup>(24) corresponds to the example (22) in Chapter 6 of Bernini and Ramat 2012.

- (25) An bhfaca tú duine ar bith? — \*Duine ar bith.  
 INT saw you person on world — person on world  
 Intended: Did you see anyone? No one.

**Aon-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>8</sup>

- (26) Cén tainm atá or-t? — a dúirt Polaiféamas. Aon duine — a  
 what name is your — REL said Polyphemus no one — REL  
 dúirt Uiliséas.  
 said Ulysses  
 What is your name? — asked Polyphemus. No one — replied Ulysses.

**Dada** *Dada* can be interpreted as a negated existential, as evidenced by its interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>9</sup>

- (27) Céard a fleiceann tú? — a dúirt Sean. Dada — a dúirt  
 What REL see you — REL said John. Nothing — REL said  
 a chomrádaí.  
 his companion  
 What can you see? — asked John. Nothing — replied his companion.

## 20 Ossetic

**Ni-series** Items from *ni*-series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by (28), in which *ni*-pronoun is the only negative element.<sup>10</sup>

- (28) Aez uym nikoej uydton.  
 I there nobody saw  
 I didn't see anybody there.

**Ma-series** Items from *ni*-series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by (29), in which *ma*-pronoun is the only negative element.<sup>11</sup>

- (29) Makoedam acu.  
 Nowhere go  
 Don't go anywhere.

---

<sup>8</sup>(26) corresponds to the example (24) in Chapter 6 of Bernini and Ramat 2012.

<sup>9</sup>(27) corresponds to the example (25) in Chapter 6 of Bernini and Ramat 2012.

<sup>10</sup>(28) corresponds to the example (A159a) in Haspelmath (1997).

<sup>11</sup>(29) corresponds to the example (A159b) in Haspelmath (1997).

## 21 Persian

**Hič-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (30) Ki unja-st? Hič-kas.  
Who there is? Nobody.  
‘Who is there? Nobody.’

**I-series** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (31) Ki unja-st? \*Kasi.  
Who there is? Anybody.  
‘Intended: Who is there? Nobody.’

## 22 Hindi/Urdu

**Bhii-series** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>12</sup>

- (32) Aaj kaun aayaa? \*Koi bhii.  
today who came someone  
‘Intended: Who came today? Nobody.’

**Koi-series** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (33) Aaj kaun aayaa? \*Koi.  
today who came someone  
‘Intended: Who came today? Nobody.’

## 23 Turkish

**Bir-series** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>13</sup>

- (34) Ne duydun? \*Bir sey.  
what heard-you? One thing.  
‘Intended: What did you hear? Nothing.’

**Hic-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>(32) corresponds to (417b) in Haspelmath 1997.

<sup>13</sup>(34) corresponds to (417a) in Haspelmath (1997).

<sup>14</sup>(35) corresponds to (420b) in Haspelmath (1997).



- (35) Kim geldi? Hic kimse.  
 who came nobody  
 ‘Who came? Nobody.’

***Herhangi-series*** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (36) Kim geldi? \*Herhangi biri.  
 who came anybody  
 ‘Intended: Who came? Nobody.’

## 24 Kazakh

***Eş-series*** This series is classified as a negative concord series by Werle (2002). We thus conclude that items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials.

## 25 Yakut

***Da-series*** An entry from the Glosbe English-Yakut dictionary on ‘nothing’ is ‘tuox da’.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that *da-series* on its own can be interpreted as a negated existential.

## 26 Hungarian

***Sem-series*** This series is classified as a negative concord series by Surányi (2006) and Szabolcsi (2018). We thus conclude that items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials.

## 27 Finnish

***Kaan-series*** According to Bernini and Ramat (2012), items from this series can only appear in negative fragment answers if accompanied by a negated auxiliary. This series therefore appears to be neither a negative concord series nor to have negative quantifier uses. We thus conclude that items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials.<sup>16</sup>

- (37) Oletko nähnyt mitään? En mitään.  
 be see anything neg-1SG anything  
 ‘Have you seen anything? I haven’t anything.’

<sup>15</sup>Cf. <https://glosbe.com/en/sah/nothing>.

<sup>16</sup>(37) corresponds to (9b) in Chapter 6 of Bernini and Ramat (2012).

## 28 Nanay

**Daa-series** Items from *daa*-series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by (38), in which *daa*-pronoun is the only negative element.<sup>17</sup>

- (38) Tuj manga püksindu hamačaa-daa aliasini goani.  
thus strong storm anybody bears it  
‘Of course, nobody can bear such a strong storm.’

## 29 Lezgian

**Sa X-ni series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>18</sup>

- (39) Axpа dаxdі wuč luhuda? Zatni.  
then dad what say nothing  
‘What will dad say then? Nothing.’

## 30 Maltese

**Ebda-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>19</sup>

- (40) Rajt xi haga? Le, xejn.  
saw something no nothing  
‘Have you seen something? No, nothing.’

## 31 Hebrew

**Af/šum series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers in colloquial Hebrew.<sup>20</sup>

- (41) Mi ba? Af exad.  
who came nobody  
‘Who came? Nobody.’

**Iš-series** Iš series cannot be interpreted as a negated existential, as evidenced by its interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (42) Mi ba? \*Iš.  
who came somebody

---

<sup>17</sup>(38) corresponds to the example (134) in Haspelmath 1997.

<sup>18</sup>(39) corresponds to the example (468) in Haspelmath 2011.

<sup>19</sup>(40) corresponds to the example (43a) in Chapter 6 of Bernini and Ramat 2012.

<sup>20</sup>(41) corresponds to the example (427) in Haspelmath 1997.

‘Intended: Who came? Nobody.’

## 32 Hausa

***Koo-series*** Zimmermann (2008) notes in Section 3.2 that items from this series can only convey a negated existential interpretation when combined with negation. We thus conclude that items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials.

## 33 Swahili

***Generic nouns and CL-o CL-ote-series*** They do not get a negated existential interpretation: Zerbian and Krifka (2008) observe that Swahili and Northern Soto do not have negative quantifiers in nominal domain, and that negation is always verbal.

## 34 Georgian

***Ara-series*** Items from *ara*-series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by (43), in which *ara*-pronoun is the only negative element.<sup>21</sup>

- (43) Mas aravistis utkvams.  
he nobody has-told  
‘He hasn’t told anybody.’

## 35 Kannada

***Uu-series*** An entry from the Glosbe English-Kannada dictionary on ‘nothing’ is ‘enuu illa’, and not only ‘enuu’ (‘illa’ incorporates negation).<sup>22</sup> This suggests that items from *uu-series* on their own cannot be interpreted as negated existentials.

## 36 Chinese

***Ye/dou-series*** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (44) Shei meiyǒu qù youyǒng? \*Shei ye./\*Shei dou.  
who not-have go swim anyone/anyone  
‘Intended: Who didn’t go swimming? No one.’

---

<sup>21</sup>(43) corresponds to the example (A256b) in Haspelmath (1997).

<sup>22</sup>Cf. <https://en.glosbe.com/en/kn/nothing>.

**Bare QU-series** Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (45) Shei meiyǒu qù youyǒng? \*Shei.  
 who not-have go swim anyone  
 ‘Intended: Who didn’t go swimming? No one.’

**Renhe** *Renhe* cannot be interpreted as a negated existential, as evidenced by its interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (46) Shei meiyǒu qù youyǒng? \*Renhe ren.  
 who not-have go swim anyone  
 ‘Intended: Who didn’t go swimming? No one.’

As a side note, in order to express a negated existential meaning in fragment answers, negation ‘mei’ is needed, as in (47).<sup>23</sup>

- (47) Shei meiyǒu qù youyǒng? Mei(you)ren.  
 who not-have go swim not-have-people  
 ‘Who didn’t go swimming? No one.’

## 37 Ancash Quechua

**Pis-series** An entry from the English-Quechua dictionary on ‘nothing’ is ‘mana imapis’, and not only ‘imapis’ (‘mana’ incorporates negation).<sup>24</sup> This suggests that items from *pis-series* on their own cannot be interpreted as negated existentials.

## 38 Japanese

**Mo-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>25</sup>

- (48) Nanio katta no? Nanimō.  
 what bought Q nothing  
 ‘What did you buy? Nothing.’

## 39 Korean

**To-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>(47) corresponds to the example (9) in Li et al. 2019.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. entry 261 under letter *m* in Mosquera 2012.

<sup>25</sup>(48) corresponds to the example (19) in Nishioka 2017.

<sup>26</sup>(49) corresponds to the example (16) in Cho (2014).

- (49) Nwuka wassni? Amwuto.  
       who came nobody  
       Who came? Nobody.

## 40 Basque

***I-series*** Haspelmath 1997 reports that *i-series* cannot be used elliptically in negative fragment answers (page 198). We thus conclude that items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials.

## References

- Bernini, G. and P. Ramat (2012). *Negative sentences in the languages of Europe: A typological approach*, Volume 16. Walter de Gruyter.
- Cho, S.-Y. (2014). Fragment answers in Korean: A direct interpretation approach. In *Proceedings of the 2014 KSLA Annual Conference*: 179.
- Fălăus, A. and A. Nicolae (2016). Fragment answers and double negation in strict negative concord languages. In *Semantics and Linguistic Theory*, Volume 26, pp. 584–600.
- Haspelmath, M. (1997). *Indefinite pronouns*. OUP Oxford.
- Haspelmath, M. (2011). *A grammar of Lezgian*, Volume 9. Walter de Gruyter.
- Kozhanov, K. (2011). Notes on the use of Lithuanian indefinite pronouns. *Baltic Linguistics* 2.
- Li, F., J. Borràs-Comes, and M. T. Espinal (2019). Mismatches in the interpretation of fragment negative expressions in Mandarin Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 152, 28–45.
- Mosquera, M. (2012). *Quechua de Huarás, en Español e Inglés: Glosario (Multilingual Edition)*. Bloomington, IN: XLIBRIS.
- Nishioka, N. (2017). Expressions that contain negation. In M. Shibatani, S. Miyagawa, and H. Noda (Eds.), *Handbook of Japanese Syntax*, pp. 635–662. Boston/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Surányi, B. (2006). Quantification and focus in negative concord. *Lingua* 116(3), 272–313.
- Szabolcsi, A. (2018). Strict and non-strict negative concord in Hungarian: A unified analysis. In *Boundaries Crossed, at the Interfaces of Morphosyntax, Phonology, Pragmatics and Semantics*, pp. 227–242. Springer.
- Werle, A. (2002). A typology of negative indefinites. In *Papers from the 38th Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*.

- Willis, D., C. Lucas, and A. Breitbarth (2013). Comparing diachronies of negation. In *The development of negation in the languages of Europe, Vol. I: Case studies*, Volume 5, pp. 1–50. Oxford University Press.
- Zeijlstra, H. (2004). *Sentential negation and negative concord*. Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics.
- Zerbian, S. and M. Krifka (2008). Quantification across bantu languages. *Quantification: A cross-linguistic perspective* 64, 383–414.
- Zimmermann, M. (2008). Quantification in hausa. *Quantification: Universals and variation* 64, 415–475.