FROM LATIN QUO(D) VELLES TO ROMAGNOL *CVËL*: A CASE OF DEGRAMMATICALISATION FROM A FREE-CHOICE INDEFINITE TO THE NOUN 'THING'[1]

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Abstract

Degrammaticalisation is an oft-dismissed category of language change. In this paper evidence is provided for its existence, its triggers, and its conditions. This case study details the development of an understudied Old Italo-Romance indefinite, *covelle*, a polarity-sensitive item roughly translating as 'anything' which originated from a Latin free relative with Free-Choice interpretation. It is shown that in Old Italo-Romance the original Free Choice use was expanded to further nonveridical contexts. Subsequently, a curious development of covelle in Old Romagnol, a 16th-century Gallo-Italic variety, is examined whereby polar neutralisation (loss of sensitivity to polarity) of the indefinite was taking place. Contextually, a process of degrammaticalisation had begun through which the indefinite pronoun developed into the classifier 'thing'. In Modern and Contemporary Romagnol *cvël* is almost exclusively employed as a noun/classifier. It is argued that two parallel processes have initiated a cycle that led *cvël* to complete degrammaticalisation: (i) the grammaticalization of the old noun for 'thing', *co(n)sa*, into a wh-word, calling for lexical replacement, and (ii) competition from the Negative Concord Item *gnit*. The development of *covelle* in Romagnol represents a well-documented case of degrammaticalisation, whose causes and conditions can be thoroughly described and motivated within an interaction with cyclical change.

Sommario

La degrammaticalizzazione è una categoria del mutamento linguistico che viene spesso trascurata. In questo articolo vengono fornite prove della sua esistenza e ne vengono esaminate le cause e condizioni. Questo studio descrive lo sviluppo di *covelle* ('qualsiasi cosa') un indefinito polare dell'antico italo-romanzo derivante da una relativa libera latina. Si dimostra che in antico italo-romanzo l'originario uso free-choice si estese ad altri contesti nonveridici. Quindi si esamina un curioso sviluppo di *covelle* in romagnolo antico, una varietà gallo-italica del XVI secolo in cui l'indefinito stava andando incontro a neutralizzazione polare (perdita di sensibilità alla polarità). Al contempo stava avvenendo

un processo di degrammaticalizzazione per cui il pronome indefinito assunse la funzione del classificatore 'cosa'. In romagnolo moderno e contemporaneo *cvël* è utilizzato quasi solo come nome/classificatore. Si propone che due processi paralleli hanno innescato il ciclo linguistico che portò alla completa degrammaticalizzazione di *cvël*: (i) la grammaticalizzazione dell'antico nome per 'cosa', *co(n)sa*, che divenne una parola-wh e necessitò di essere sostituita, e (ii) la competizione dell'indefinito a concordanza negativa *gnit*. Lo sviluppo di *covelle* in romagnolo rappresenta un caso ben documentato di degrammaticalizzazione, le cui cause e condizioni possono essere accuratamente descritte e motivate nell'ambito dell'interazione con il mutamento ciclico.

[Italian]

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will examine a case of degrammaticalisation which involves the reanalysis of the Old Italo-Romance and Old Romagnol indefinite pronoun *covelle/cuell* (meaning 'something' or 'anything', originally from Latin QUO(D) VELLES, 'what you may want') as the Romagnol noun or classifier *cvël*, meaning 'thing'.[1] I propose that this shift provides evidence for the existence of degrammaticalisation as a principled and motivated phenomenon in language change, and for its mechanisms. Moreover, this development represents a case of what Willis (2007) terms 'syntactic lexicalisation', a phenomenon whereby an ambiguous syntactic context leads speakers to reinterpret a functional element as a lexical one. Specifically, I argue that the occurrence of *cuell* in nonveridical (but crucially not negative) contexts, on the one hand, and as the existential core of other complex indefinite pronouns, on the other—two environments which allow for a plain existential interpretation of *cuell*—were the triggers of this change.

Moreover, I will propose that some additional factors were at work in bringing about the degrammaticalisation of *cvël*: (i) polar neutralisation, that is, loss of sensitivity to non- and antiveridicality, (ii) lexical competition, due to the presence of a stronger candidate for the old function of the degrammaticalising item, which is preferred by virtue of its markedness and (iii) the parallel influence of grammaticalisation, which may prompt the lexicalising item to substitute for another lexical element that is in turn undergoing grammaticalisation. The latter phenomenon also suggests that degrammaticalisation is not an isolated development but may also interact with ongoing grammaticalisation processes in a chain shift.

The paper is organised as follows. In the remainder of Section 1, I will expose the main theoretical assumptions that underlie the present case study with respect to the principles of linguistic change, and to the analytical categories that will be discussed in this paper, in particular those related to the categorisation of indefinite pronouns. Section 2 presents the data on the origin, functions and development of the Old Italo-Romance indefinite *covelle*, the elder cognate of the Romagnol indefinite which will be the focus of the analysis. I will describe its relation to polarity, especially its attestation in nonveridical, antiveridical and veridical contexts. Section 3 is concerned with the developments of the Romagnol indefinite *cvël* through the Old, Modern and Contemporary stages of the language. Section 4 examines the causes of these developments in terms of polar neutralisation, functional competition and parallel grammaticalisation processes. Section 5 concludes.

1.1. A multidirectional model for language change

It is inevitable for a paper on degrammaticalisation to begin with some considerations on its theoretically well-established, more reassuring counterpart, namely grammaticalisation. It would border on arrogance to think that one can give an exhaustive, or even just representative, list of

references on the literature on this topic. One interesting aspect of grammaticalisation, whose formal study was initiated around the same time as contemporary linguistics, is that its theoretical basis has not changed much from its Jespersonian-Saussurean foundations to its treatment in more recent linguistic approaches, like the minimalist paradigm of generative linguistics originating in Noam Chomsky's work. Trying to summarise the common understanding of the phenomenon in a curt way, we can define grammaticalisation as the development of grammatical (or functional) items starting from lexical ones. This definition, which I believe most linguists agree upon, is nearly identical to Meillet's (1912: 131) famous and still valid formulation: «le passage d'un mot autonome au rôle d'élément grammatical», the shift of an autonomous word to the role of grammatical element. This definition is sometimes coupled with the addendum that grammaticalisation also concerns the shift from grammatical to 'more grammatical' functions. Further research in the following years and decades (to mention a famous example, Jespersen's (1917) work on the negative cycle that bears his name) has demonstrated the theoretical relevance of grammaticalisation as one of the richest and most fertile fields for a morphosyntactic analysis of language change.

This understanding of grammaticalisation is the one that can be found in modern works such as Heine & Kuteva (2002), Hopper & Traugott (2003), and even in works that apply the tools of the minimalist theory to grammaticalisation, such as Roberts & Roussou (2003) and van Gelderen (2011). But a century of busy research has not passed in vain, and more features have been added to the understanding of this phenomenon over the decades. One such feature, which I will be especially interested in in this paper, is unidirectionality, one that is particularly associated with Heine & Kuteva's (2002) perspective. The idea behind unidirectionality is that the forces behind grammaticalisation can only drive change in one specific direction. I will devote some lines to breaking down this core concept.

On closer inspection, there appear to be two aspects to this unidirectionality. The first is trivial, as noted by Willis (2007: 276): once an item has grammaticalised, it does not go back to its original lexical meaning. The reason this understanding of unidirectionality is trivial is that the contrary would require language to have some sort of memory, allowing it (or rather, speakers) to go back, sometimes several centuries, to the original function of the grammaticalised item. The second understanding is a stronger and, as will be demonstrated, far more problematic claim: change only goes from lexical to grammatical, never the other way around. This means, for example, that it is supposed not to be possible that an indefinite pronoun should become a common noun, or that an auxiliary should become a lexical verb, although cases are well known from the literature in which an older lexical use of an item coexists with its grammaticalised counterpart (a classic example being future marker *will* and lexical verb *will* in English).

There are notable counterexamples to this claim, some of which are analysed by Willis (2007) and Norde (2009). One is deflexion, which is the change whereby bound affixes become independent words. Some cases cited by Willis (2007: 274) are the Irish first-person plural pronoun *muid*, derived from verbal inflection, and the development of the English genitive clitic *'s* from an original genitive case ending. These cases may be seen as tenuous counterexamples (especially since both *muid* and *'s* do retain a somewhat 'functional' nature), but weak as they may be, the strength of the claim that grammaticalisation is adamantly unidirectional is put in jeopardy even by the slightest movement in the opposite direction.

More robust evidence is provided by a process which Willis (2007: 276) calls syntactic lexicalisation, a shift that concerns a reanalysis of a functional item as a lexical one and which «involve[s] a demonstrable continuity between the old and the new function, with the new function arising out of reanalysis of ambiguous instances of the old function». Syntactic lexicalisation includes such observable shifts as the derivation of Bulgarian *nešto* 'thing' from an indefinite pronoun meaning 'something or anything', Welsh *eiddo* 'property' from a third-person masculine possessive pronoun, or Welsh *nôl* 'to fetch, bring' from the preposition *yn ol* 'after' (possibly itself a grammaticalisation from a phrase meaning 'on the tracks'). What these cases studied by Willis

have in common is that the shift was caused by the occurrence of the degrammaticalising item in ambiguous syntactic contexts, in which the item lent itself to a potentially lexical interpretation. For instance, for the case of *nešto*, which is the closest to the present case, Willis (2007: 278–283) proposes that the shift from 'something' to 'thing' had one semantic cause and three syntactic ones. Semantically, *nešto* lent itself not only to non-specific readings ('something' unknown), but also to specific ones where it may be interpreted as «'a thing', the identity of which is known to one or both participants». From the morphosyntactic point of view, speakers were led to infer that *nešto* is a generic noun by its ending *-o*, which it has in common with neuter nouns. Moreover, in older stages of the language, the indefinite transparently contained the *wh*-item *čito* ('what'), which brought it closer to an indefinite interpretation, but in more recent stages of the language that *wh*-item was replaced by *kakvo*, which obscured the evidence that *nešto* was an indefinite pronoun (rather than a noun). Finally, *nešto* had a highly irregular genitive form *něčeso*, which proved that *nešto* was not an ordinary noun. This obstacle, too, was removed when the older case system was eroded, which along with the positive evidence allowed for the reanalysis of *nešto* as a common noun.

The definition of syntactic lexicalisation is supposed to exclude those cases of conversion such as the English verb *to down*, which is derivationally (i.e. synchronically) formed from the preposition *down*. As such, it involves no shift from grammatical to lexical, but rather a productive process of zero-derivation which takes any category (lexical ones, like nouns and adjectives) and 'forces' them to function as verbs; the fact that this rule also applies to prepositions is an index of the outreach of its productivity, but does not qualify it as a specific process of degrammaticalisation if the latter is intended as 'grammaticalisation in reverse'.

An Italian example of a 'faux degrammaticalisation' is represented by the use of modal verbs like *volere* 'want', *dovere* 'must' and *potere* 'can' as the nouns 'will', 'duty' and 'power' respectively. This shift is essentially like English zero-derivation, since the modals are simply recast in a nominal syntactic configuration: they are treated as nouns both distributionally and morphologically, and their verbal morphology is simply reinterpreted as nominal.

Overall, this paper is based upon the idea that linguistic change has conditions, but not directions. This position not only paves the way for a fruitful analysis of some (admittedly rarer) cases of 'downward' linguistic change, but also imposes fewer conditions on change itself, which would then have to be motivated against empirical evidence. As to the relative rarity of degrammaticalisation, I do not deny that classic grammaticalisation is in a way 'easier' to get into for language, and that it obeys some factors that are ingrained in language design and abide by a principle of economy; but while this 'naturalness' of economy motivations aptly explains the statistically higher frequency of grammaticalisation, it is definitely not enough to rule out cases of opposite developments if a given set of syntactico-semantic conditions conspire to bring them about.

Of course, the multidirectionality of language change is not to be understood in terms of anarchy; the changes involved in degrammaticalisation are interesting precisely because the factors that cause it constitute conditions that can be analysed in a principled way as much as those that trigger grammaticalisation, and these cases are by necessity confined to those phenomena that are motivated by such factors. But language change is not constrained by such requirements as, for instance, being only possible in an upward direction along the syntactic tree, nor indeed by the requirement of a weakening at the featural or phonetic level. That is in essence the position taken in this work, and one which I believe is more easily defendable than a unidirectional one, even just empirically.

1.2. A categorisation of indefinite pronouns

Before proceeding to the case study on *covelle*, it is necessary to clarify some of the terminology and to present the analytical categories that will be used throughout this paper, to better understand the

developments involved in the history of the indefinite pronoun. I will begin with the concept of Free Choice, and of Free-Choice Item (FCI). What is meant by Free Choice (a term which, as Haspelmath (1997: 48) notes, goes back to Vendler (1967)) is an interpretation, usually associated with certain quantifiers and indefinite pronouns, in which the quantified element *X* has a non-specific meaning which can be glossed as 'it does not matter which *X*'. For instance, in the sentence *Take any apple*, the determiner *any* has a Free Choice interpretation: the sentence means *Take an apple* [*from the fridge*], *it does not matter which apple* (cf. Degano & Aloni 2021: 448).

Giannakidou (2001) demonstrates that FCIs are polarity items, which in her model (Giannakidou 1998, 1999) is equivalent to saying that they are licensed under nonveridicality. Given a propositional operator *F* and a proposition *p*, *F* is nonveridical if *Fp* does not entail or presuppose that *p* is true. For example, a question is a nonveridical environment because it does not provide a truth value for *p* (asking *Is John a doctor?* clearly does not entail that the proposition *John is a doctor* is true). Likewise, imperatives (cf. *Take any apple* above), the protasis of conditionals, modals, etc., do not assert any proposition, hence are not veridical. Moreover, negative operators are *antiveridical*: in addition to not entailing that *p* is true, negation asserts that *p* is *not* true. Nonveridicality is defined more formally below:[2]

(1)   *(Non)veridicality* (Giannakidou 1999/2001)
       Let *c* be a context which contains a set M of models relative to an individual x.
              A propositional operator *Op* is veridical iff $[\![Op\ p]\!]_c = 1 \rightarrow [\![p]\!] = 1$ in some epistemic model $M_E\ (x) \in c$; otherwise *Op* is nonveridical.

Giannakidou (1998) takes nonveridicality to be the fundamental relation that underlies the licensing of polarity items, which are broadly understood as linguistic expressions that are sensitive to the polarity (positive or negative) of the sentence in which they appear. These items, originally studied by Klima (1964) and especially Baker (1970), are exemplified below:

(2)   a.   I did not see **anything**.
       b.   *I saw **anything**.

(3)   a.   I saw **something**.
       b.   I did not see **something**.
              (∃ > ¬, *¬ > ∃)

The negative polarity item (NPI) *any*(*thing*) cannot be licensed in the positive episodic sentence in (2b), while the positive polarity item (PPI) *some*(*thing*) cannot be interpreted in the scope of negative operators (i.e., (3b) can only be interpreted as 'there is something which I did not see', but not as 'I did not see anything'). PPIs are *antilicensed* by negation, which means that, even when they linearly follow a negative operator at surface level, at logical form they must be interpreted as scoping above it. Giannakidou's concept of nonveridicality (rather than a dualistic opposition between positive and negative polarity) is more apt to explain the distribution of polarity items than previous theories. One such theory, going back to Ladusaw (1979), takes downward entailment (DE), or downward monotonicity, to be responsible for the licensing of NPIs in particular. Downward monotonicity is the property of certain operators which, for a relation R and an argument X, are such that R holds for subsets of X. For example, negation and

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[2] Reference to the epistemic model M_E, valid for an individual x, is needed to account for the interaction of nonveridicality with propositional attitudes. While they are part of the general definition of nonveridicality, they can be disregarded for the purposes of this paper.

the monotone decreasing quantifier *few* create a downward entailing environment: if I did not read a book, then it is automatically true that I did not read a novel (since novels are a subset of books), while the opposite relation (upward entailment) does not hold. Likewise, if few students read books, then it is also automatically true that few students read novels. Ladusaw (1979) proposes DE as the licensing condition for NPIs, since not only negation, but also monotone decreasing (i.e. DE) quantifiers and other DE operators license them: for instance, *Few students read any book* is fine. Nonetheless, the literature on polarity sensitivity has shown that, while DE contexts do license NPIs in the general case, NPIs are also licensed in many other environments that are not DE (like questions, the scope of *hardly* and *barely*, certain quantifiers like *exactly three*, habitual and generic sentences, imperatives, modal verbs, irrealis contexts like the protasis of conditionals, the restrictor of universal quantifiers, etc.). What the contexts, both monotonic and non-monotonic, that license NPIs have in common is, according to Giannakidou (1998), the fact that they are nonveridical, and it is nonveridicality that licenses NPIs. Thus, in Giannakidou's model, sensitivity to nonveridicality and polarity sensitivity are one and the same thing. In fact, Giannakidou (1999) notes that nonveridicality corresponds to those that in Klima's (1964) seminal work are called 'affective contexts', which in addition to negation also included the non-negative environments in which polarity items can be licensed.

As noted above, Giannakidou (2001) further notes that FCIs, too, are polarity items: they are «intensional indefinites that can be interpreted in a sentence only if the sentence provides possible worlds which can serve as identity alternatives inducing variation. Nonveridical sentences (modal, generic, habitual, etc.) are such cases. Veridical and episodic sentences, on the other hand, do not provide the kind of alternatives needed for the interpretation of FCIs, hence FCIs are ruled out» (Giannakidou 2001: 666). The possibility of variation among a set of alternatives is thus central to the semantics of Free Choice, and such variation is only warranted by those nonveridical sentences which involve a quantification over possible worlds. For the 'apple' example above, the permissive reading of the imperative allows *any apple* to exhaustively vary in each possible world. For instance, if there are four apples, *any apple* can refer to a different alternative in all the possible worlds that are quantified over by the imperative (i.e. in world 1 I can take apple 1, in world 2 I can take apple 2, and so on). On the other hand, **I ate any apple*, which is an episodic veridical sentence which is true in a single world (one in which I did eat a specific apple) fails both the nonveridicality and the variation requirement for FCIs.[3]

Finally, it is important to distinguish NPIs (and FCIs) from Negative Concord Items (NCIs). NCIs, which in less recent literature were known as *n-words* (Laka 1990), are those elements that enter into an Agree relation with a negative operator (Zeijlstra 2004, 2008) and are defined by Giannakidou (2006) along the following lines (where the term *n-word* is replaced with the modern

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[3] One of the problems dealt with by Giannakidou (2001) and by much literature on English polarity items is that *any* is not a 'pure' FCI, since it has prominent non-FC uses, like those in the scope of negation and in questions, which are nonveridical but in which *any* does not have a FC interpretation. For this reason, I further exemplify with the Italian FC *qualsiasi*, itself derived from a free relative (cf. §2.1 and Kellert 2022), which conforms to Giannakidou's definition: in (i), the modal verb *potere*, 'can', provides both a nonveridical environment and variation over possible worlds, which is enough to license *qualsiasi*, while in (ii), a positive episodic past sentence, neither condition is satisfied and *qualsiasi* is not properly licensed, which derives ungrammaticality.

(i)   Puoi   prende-re qualsiasi mela.
        can.PRS.2SG take-NFIN any   apple
        'You can take any apple.'

(ii)   *Ho   preso   qualsiasi mela.
         have.PRS.1SG take.PTCP any   apple
         '*I took any apple.'

NCI):

(4)   An expression α is an NCI iff:
       (a) α can be used in structures containing sentential negation or another α-expression yielding a reading equivalent to one logical negation; and
       (b) α can provide a negative fragment answer.

What NCIs and NPIs have in common is thus that they enter into a licensing relation with a negative operator. This means that they cannot freely occur in positive or veridical contexts but require a nonveridical or antiveridical licensor. What distinguishes NCIs from NPIs, as exemplified below with Modern Italian, is the possibility for the former of having negative meaning in isolation and, additionally, of conveying negative meaning on its own in preverbal position (6b):[4]

(5)   A: Cosa hai fatto?
             'What have you done?'
       B: **Niente**.
             'Nothing.' (cf. '*Anything.')

(6)   a.   **Non** ho   fa-tto   **niente**.
             NEG have.PRS.1SG do-PTCP nothing
             'I have done nothing.'
       b.   **Niente** è   sta-to   fa-tto.
             nothing be.PRS.3SG be-PTCP do-PTCP
             'Nothing was done.' (cf. the preverbal NPI '*Anything was (not) done.')

The degree to which NCIs are intrinsically negative has long been a matter of debate. The fact that they are ungrammatical in postverbal position unless they are in the scope of a negative operator would make one think that they are a kind of NPI, but the fact that they are negative in preverbal position and in isolation brings them closer to semantically negative quantifiers (like English 'nothing'). This long-standing debate cannot be resolved in this context. Here I simply observe that, again like NPIs, in Non-Strict NC languages there are some non-negative nonveridical contexts in which NCIs can occur without a negative interpretation (like questions, or the standard of comparatives), which weakens somewhat the assumption that they are lexically negative elements:

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[4] Actually, things are more complex than this; the general understanding in the literature has been that NPIs are subject to a semantic licensing requirement (DE or nonveridicality), while NCIs, especially in Zeijlstra's (2004, 2008) model, are subject to a syntactic licensing condition (an Agree relation in Minimalist terms, in which NCIs have 'uninterpretable' negative features that are checked in a syntactic configuration with a negative operator that bears 'interpretable' negative features). Negative Concord is debated at least as much as polarity licensing and can only be presented in a sketchy way here. Here I just want to add the important observation that, in Giannakidou's well-established terminology, there are two types of Negative Concord: a Non-Strict type, represented for instance by Italian and Spanish, in which as exemplified in (6b) preverbal NCIs have negative meaning even in the absence of a sentential negative marker, and a Strict type, common e.g. in Slavic languages and exemplified below with Serbian, in which the negative marker is always present, even when the NCI is preverbal Progovac (1994: 37):

(i)   Nitko *(ne) vidi   Mario.
       nobody NEG see.3SG Mario
       'Nobody can see Mario.'

(7)   a.   Ha-i   visto   **nessuno**?   Italian
           have-PRS.2SG see.PTCP nobody
           'Did you see anybody?'

      b.   Juan es   más alto que **ninguno**.   Spanish
           Juan be.PRS.3SG more tall than nobody
           'Juan is taller than anyone else.'

2. OLD ITALO-ROMANCE *COVELLE*

The case study to which I will dedicate the rest of this paper focusses on the development of an indefinite found in Old Italo-Romance (OIR), which has not yet received much attention, and especially its development in the history of Romagnol, a Gallo-Italic language. The original form of this item in OIR is *covelle* or *cavelle*.

The term Italo-Romance refers to the group of languages spoken in the Italian peninsula and major islands which descended from Latin. Pellegrini (1977) further subdivides this group in several subgroups whose members share a series of common features at several levels (phonological, morphological, etc.) due to a common substrate (e.g. Gallo-Romance languages, to which Romagnol belongs, are regarded as being influenced by a Celtic, or Gallic, substrate, plus a Germanic superstrate). Pellegrini's taxonomy offers both a genetic and a geographical subdivision and, despite some criticism regarding aspects of the classification of some of these languages (some of which came from Rohlfs (1968)), by and large they represent the standard analysis for the subgroups of Italo-Romance languages. What I term Old Italo-Romance is thus not a single language but rather those languages, or varieties (intended as a specific form of a language at a given time and in a certain context), that are attested in the earliest examples of Italian literature written in Romance languages. These early attestations become more numerous starting from the 13th century. As far as *covelle* and its cognates are concerned, the languages that will be dealt with in the next pages will mainly belong to Central Italo-Romance (in particular Tuscan and Umbrian) which account for most of the earliest occurrences of the indefinite under exam. While Old Tuscan, and Old Florentine in particular, is the language on which Modern Standard Italian is based, importantly Modern Italian cannot be equated with Old Florentine, nor can one consider the latter as a 'common' language in Medieval Italy; albeit Florentine, due to the exceptional literary output of its authors in the 14th century, soon rose to a prominent position as a literary language well beyond its original region, the linguistic profile of Medieval Italy is one of great diversity, in which many languages were spoken by the general population in different areas of the peninsula (and was so as late as the first half of the 20th century).

The relatively late attestation of Romagnol (well into the 16th century) means that the data on *covelle* for earlier periods must be integrated with other Italo-Romance languages, which provide us with a window on the developments that brought into existence the indefinite pronoun starting from its Latin origin.

2.1. *The grammaticalisation of covelle from Latin QUOD VELLES*

The indefinite *covelle* itself is the outcome of a grammaticalisation process. As noted by Rohlfs (1968: 221–222), *covelle* is derived from Latin QUOD VELLES/VOLES, or QUAM VELLES/VOLES, 'what you may/will want'.[5] This free relative (a relative clause that lacks a

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[5] QUOD VELLES is the origin of the *covelle* form, while QUA(M) VELLES is the origin of *cavelle*. QUA(M) probably stands for QUA(M) RE(M)/CAUSA(M), 'whichever thing', or a similar expression. A *chivelli* ('anyone') form is also attested, which derives from QUI VELLES/VELIS ('who you may want'). In what follows I will use *covelle* as a cover term for all these variants.

nominal head and is introduced by a *wh*-expression) was used in Latin with a Free Choice interpretation, as in the example cited below, from Rohlfs (1968: 221):

(8)   Oratio Laeli-i   de   collegi-is   non melior quam de   mult-is
      speech Laelius-GEN about college-ABL.PL NEG better than about many-ABL.PL
      qu-am   vol-es   Scipio-nis.
      which-ACC.FSG want-FUT.2SG Scipio-GEN
      'Laelius' speech *De Collegiis* is not better than any of those which Scipio wrote
      on many subjects.'

                                                                              Cicero, Brutus 83

In a way, the Latin free relative has a compositional Free Choice interpretation: it literally means 'what(ever) you want'. The development from free relative to FCI is not unexpected. Free relatives (or amount/degree relatives, cf. Grosu & Landmann 1998) containing a volitional verb are often the starting point for the formation of FCIs, which are sometimes lexically transparent even after the shift from free relative to indefinite pronoun. As noted by Caponigro & Fălăuș (2018), there is a class of free relatives, termed *free choice free relative clauses* by the authors, which in languages like Italian and Romanian convey the kind of FC interpretation that is conveyed by *any* in English. There is thus a strict semantic kinship between this kind of free relatives and FCIs, which is at the origin of the semantic interpretation of *covelle* as a one-word indefinite. For instance, Aguilar-Guevara et al. (2012) provide an analysis of the grammaticalisation cline of the Spanish indefinite *cualquiera* whereby an original free relative with a free-choice interpretation, similar to Latin QUOD VELLES (*cual quiera* 'what he may want'), develops into the current FCI *cualquiera* ('whichever'). Aloni (2022) and Kellert (2022) describe similar developments for Italian *qualsiasi* and *qualunque* respectively. The reason we can speak of grammaticalisation for *covelle*, then, and not just of some process of univerbation, is that the lexical composition of the elements that make up the free relative, including reference to the Speaker in the second person, becomes opaque and takes on a more functional meaning, sanctioned by nonveridical licensing.

But differently from Italian and Spanish FCIs, OIR *covelle*, and even more so its modern descendants, are not transparent: their Latin origin is not evident to speakers. This means that at a certain point, the previously conventional/compositional free-choice interpretation of the Latin free relative is formalised in a precise semantic requirement: polarity sensitivity.

The examples discussed in the next subsection are taken from two corpora of OIR, the OVI corpus and the MIDIA corpus (see Sitography). These corpora were searched for the keywords *covelle*, *cavelle*, *kivelli/chivelli*, *chevelle*, and *chivelle*, which yield a total of 152 occurrences of the item.

As for the typology of texts in which *covelle* is found, it appears to have been more common in prose (115 occurrences) than in poetry (37). The prose examples are mostly represented by statutes and legal texts of Tuscan and Umbrian *comuni* (Siena, Assisi, etc.) and by other administrative or bureaucratic documents, like private ledgers and chapters from monasteries. *Covelle* and its cognates are also frequent in letters and private correspondence. The most prolific user of *cavelle* is St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), who accounts for 44 occurrences coming from her devotional works and private correspondence. *Covelle* appears to have been used in texts that were supposed to be easily accessed and interpreted, as also confirmed by its relatively high frequency (18) in *volgarizzamenti*, or translations from Latin of classic and medieval works.

In structural terms, *covelle* is always pronominal and is never used as determiner or in adjectival function (i.e. as a nominal modifier). However, it does co-occur with another quantifier: *ogni*, 'every', in universal quantifiers like *ogni cavelle/onnechivegli* ('everything'/'everybody'), as also

noted by Rohlfs (1968). Similar constructions will play a role in the discussion of Romagnol in the next pages.

With respect to polarity, *covelle* is robustly attested in the direct scope of negation, which accounts for 124 (81.58%) of all occurrences. The remaining 28 occurrences (18.42%) are mainly found in nonveridical contexts, such as indirect questions, *if*-clauses, comparatives, free-choice readings, free relatives, and the scope of monotone decreasing quantifiers. This group includes five dubious cases for which it was unclear whether *covelle* was to be interpreted in the scope of negation or not. There are also a couple of examples of *covelle* in the scope of veridical operators, whose treatment I defer to the end of this section. I will begin with the analysis of the non-negative nonveridical uses and later move on to the antiveridical ones.

2.2. The distribution of covelle in OIR

The expansion of the contexts in which *covelle* is found is the result of its association with nonveridicality. The picture we receive from OIR is one of a generalised use in nearly all nonveridical contexts, and most of these contexts are those that present the antiveridical operator *par excellence*, negation.

Unfortunately, the scarcity of extensive attestations of Italo-Romance varieties prior to the 13th century means that the development of *covelle* from Latin is impossible to attest. Nonetheless, as soon as early Italian literature started to flourish, attestations of the item become relatively numerous, especially in Central Italo-Romance varieties. In this section, I provide a thorough description of the uses of *covelle* in the period from the late 13th to the late 14th century. Before doing so, I provide a brief description of the indefinite system of Old Italo-Romance.

The system of indefinites in Old Italo-Romance and its development from Latin was described in several works (to mention a few, Poletto 2014, Gianollo 2018, 2020). Old Italian had several indefinites that could overlap with *covelle* in distributional terms. A possible competitor in non- and antiveridical contexts was *alcuna cosa*, 'any thing', where the classifier (*cosa*) is modified by the determiner *alcuno* (which could modify any noun, like English *any*). Additionally, *alcuno* could have a non-NPI existential interpretation as 'some' (or 'somebody'). As in Modern Italian, *qualcosa* corresponded to the positive indefinite 'something'. OIR also had specialised FCI determiners like *qualunque, qualsiasi, qualsivoglia* (cf. Kellert 2022), which in the forms *qualunque cosa* could compete with *covelle* in nonveridical contexts (but not in negative ones in the general case, as will be discussed in §3 and §4). As for indefinites that could be used in negative contexts, the matter is more complex. Apart from *alcuno*, Italian had negative indefinites like *neente/niente/nulla* ('nothing'), *neuno* ('no'), *neuna cosa* ('no thing'), etc., which showed NCI behaviour. A thorough description of the syntax of negative indefinites in Old Italian is given by Poletto (2014), who argues that the language had a hybrid Negative Concord system which depending on the syntactic environment could alternate between a Strict and a Non-Strict behaviour (for these concepts, cf. fn. 4). In any case, she concludes that Old Italian was developing towards a Non-Strict NC status, which as shown above Modern Italian maintains to this day.

2.2.1. Non-negative nonveridical covelle

Covelle is found in several nonveridical contexts, like the scope of the comparative marker *più*[6]:

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[6] Note that the *-i* ending in (9) is not to be understood as a plural morpheme: it is more likely to be the result of the Latin present subjunctive form in the expression QUI VELIS ('who you may want'). Note that similar *-i* endings for descendants of covelle in other Italo-Romance varieties, like Salentino *ciueddhi*, 'nobody', are morphologically singular, as shown by singular agreement on the verb (cf. Poletto & Rasom 2007). No examples of plural covelle have been found in the corpora.

(9)   Cristo ama-va   plu ke **kivelli**.
        Christ love-PST.IPFV.3SG more than anyone
        'He loved Christ more than anyone (else).'

<div align="right">*Jacopone da Todi, Umbrian, late 13th century*</div>

The same author also uses it in the scope of free relatives:

(10)   Ma a quil   che **covelle** me   don-a,
        but to DEM.MSG COMP anything 1SG.DAT give-PRS.3SG
        mustr-o=li   liet-a   persona.
        show-PRS.1SG=3MSG.DAT glad-FSG person

        'To him who gives me anything, I show a glad countenance.'

Covelle is also found in *if*-clauses:

(11)   E se trova-ranno scip-ato   **cavelle**,
        and if find-FUT.3PL spoil-PTCP anything
        sèno   ten-ut-i   esso fa-re   raconcia-re.
        be.SUBJ.3PL hold-PTCP-3MPL 3MSG make-NFIN mend.NFIN
        'And if they find that anything has been spoiled, let them be responsible for
        having it repaired.'

<div align="right">*Statuti senesi, Tuscan, 1301-1303*</div>

Moreover, *covelle* is found in the scope of the monotone decreasing operator *appena*, 'hardly'
(Ladusaw 1979; van der Wouden 1997):

(12)   Tanto che en ventre appena lgi   reman-e   **covelle**.
        so.much COMP in belly hardly 3PL.DAT remain-PRS.3SG anything
        'To the point that hardly anything is left in their stomach.'

<div align="right">*Volgarizzamento della Mascalcia di Lorenzo Rusio, Lazio, 13th century*</div>

For the first half of the 13th century, I have not been able to find any examples in which *covelle*
does not follow a nonveridical operator of some kind. Nonetheless, it may have been noted that,
while I glossed it as 'anything', in many of the nonveridical contexts in which *covelle* is found it
could also translate as 'something'. In this respect, Aloni (2022: 214) notes that «[t]here are contexts
where they [*any* and *some*] can be used without a notable meaning difference (*If you hear
something/anything, call me*), others in which they cannot be interchanged». This fact will play a
very important role in the argumentation of the next sections. For the moment, it can be noted that
nonveridical contexts are potentially ambiguous contexts (cf. Willis (2007) above), where in
principle both indefinites that have a specific interpretation as 'something' and those that have non-
specific one as 'anything' can appear. Such ambiguity is syntactic insofar as it is due to a feature
(nonveridicality) of the syntactic environment in which the indefinite appears, but since this feature
is a semantic one it has potential consequences for the semantic interpretation of the indefinite itself,
as will be argued for Romagnol in §3.

2.2.2. Antiveridical covelle

As noted above, antiveridical contexts are a subset of nonveridical ones (Giannakidou 1999). Very
informally, this is because stating that *p* is *not* true is one of the ways of *not* stating that *p* is true. It
follows, then, that an item that is allowed in nonveridical contexts should also be allowed in

antiveridical ones. That is what we see with *covelle*, whose most numerous attestations are indeed in negative contexts.[7]

The earliest example of negative *covelle* comes from the same author who provided the earliest examples of nonveridical uses:

(13) Luna, sole, cielo e   stelle fra   i   mi-ei   tesaur-i
      moon sun sky   and stars among ART.3MPL POSS.1SG-3MPL treasure-PL
      non so'   **covelle**.
      NEG be.PRS.3PL anything
      'Moon, sun, sky and stars are (worth) nothing among my treasures.'

                                   Jacopone da Todi, Umbrian, 13th century

Covelle is also used as an adverbial indefinite. In the following example, it is followed by the negative concord item *nulla* in the second conjunct:

(14) Perciò che quell-i   che guadagna-sse   non miglior-erebbe   **cavelle**,
      thus COMP DEM-MSG COMP earn-SUBJ.PST.3SG NEG improve-COND.3SG anything
      e   quell-i   che perd-esse   non perd-erebbe   *nulla*.
      and DEM-MSG COMP lose-SUBJ.3SG NEG lose-COND.3SG nothing
      'So that he who would earn would not improve at all, and he who would lose
      would lose nothing.'

                                                        Egidio Romano, 1288

Covelle is also licensed in the scope of the nonfinite negator *senza*:

(15) Ine congreg-ò   n-el   principio circa diciotto fanciull-e
      then congregate-PST.3SG in-ART.MSG beginning about eighteen maiden-PL
      vergin-i senza   ave-re   **cavelle**.
      Virgin-PL without have-NFIN anything
      'Then, in the beginning he congregated about eighteen maidens without having
      anything.'

                                   St. Catherine of Siena, second half of the 14th century

The fact that the majority of occurrences of *covelle* were found in the scope of negation and the stability and frequency of attestations of the indefinite in negative contexts throughout its early history thus confirm that it is a polar indefinite, which is sensitive to nonveridicality.

Nevertheless, this clear picture is complicated by some developments that took place in the late 14th century, in which the sensitivity of the item to nonveridicality and polarity seems to weaken. In the next section, I will briefly present the data that attest to the beginning of this shift and describe some potential difficulties that seem to arise from it.

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[7] An anonymous reviewer notes that, despite the inference from anti- to nonveridicality, the solidarity of *covelle* with negation is still surprising given its FCI origin in Latin since indefinites that are specialised for the expression of FC are usually ungrammatical under negation (e.g., in Greek). I think the reviewer describes them as 'usually' ungrammatical because, as shown by Giannakidou (2001: 682–685) for Greek FCIs, what rules out these indefinites under negation is episodicity, rather than negation itself: as noted above, episodic sentences disallow the variation over possible worlds that is one of the licensing conditions for FCIs. In fact, Giannakidou shows that negative sentences that are not episodic, for example those whose main verb is in the habitual imperfective, do allow for FCIs in Greek. The reviewer's argument is that some major development must have taken place that caused the descendant of QUO(D) VELLES to develop a preferential relation with negation from the original FCI semantics. Indeed, as noted by Haspelmath (1997) and Degano & Aloni (2021), FCIs of all indefinite pronouns are particularly unstable diachronically and tend to undergo semantic and distributional shifts. In recent work, Breitbarth, Lucas & Willis (2020: 151–187) argue for the existence of a free-choice cycle, which is responsible for turning FCIs into NPIs. A similar development must have taken place in the shift from QUO(D) VELLES to *covelle*, unfortunately before the beginning of documentation.

2.2.3. Veridical covelle

Boccaccio's *Decameron* (ca. 1370) presents a couple of uses of *covelle* that are in line with the previous picture. Boccaccio, one of the most prominent prose writers of his time, at first sight conforms to the general OIR use of *covelle*, as shown by (16) where the indefinite pronoun is licensed by the negative marker:

(16)   Lasc-iamo sta-re   ora costett-e parol-e che **non** monta-n   **cavelle**.
        let-SUBJ.1PL be-NFIN now DEM-FPL word-PL COMP NEG amount-PRS.3PL anything
        'Let us now disregard these words that are of no importance.'

Decameron, IX, 4

What may seem confusing is that in the same work, in a highly interesting example which will need to be carefully broken down, Boccaccio uses *covelle* in what appears to be a clearly veridical use:

(17)   —Pot-rebbe   egli esse-re che io av-essi   nulla?
         can-COND.3SG 3SG be-NFIN COMP 1SG have-SUBJ.PTS.1SG nothing
        —Sì, pot-restù   ave-r   **cavelle**,   non che nulla;
         yes can-COND.2SG have-NFIN something NEG COMP nothing
        tu pa-r   mezzo morto.
        2SG seem-PRS.2SG half   dead

        —Could I have anything?
        —Yes, you may have *something*, not *nothing*; you look half dead.

Decameron, IX, 3

In the example above, Calandrino, who asks the question, is made to believe that he has caught a deadly illness. He asks one of his prankers whether something may be wrong with him. Notably, Calandrino uses the NCI *nulla* in the scope of the nonveridical question operator. As mentioned in §1.2, NCIs in Non-Strict Negative Concord languages can also appear with a non-negative interpretation in the scope of some nonveridical operators, as in questions (Giannakidou 2000). This means that, depending on the context, *nulla* may either be interpreted as a negative quantifier (under negation), or as a non-negative quantifier (when in the scope of nonveridical operators). At this point, Boccaccio exploits the duality of this indefinite to make a subtle pun. Playing on words and echoing Calandrino's question, Buffalmacco in his response to Calandrino contrasts *nulla* with *covelle*. The exquisitely semantic alternation seen in the text involves the recovery of Calandrino's term and its reuse as a negative indefinite. That this shift takes place is made evident by the fact that the negation *non (che)* is preposed to *nulla* in a double negation rather than in a negative concord reading, and that the remark is followed by the rejoinder *You look half dead*. Buffalmacco's utterance translates as something along the lines of *You do not have 'nothing', you rather have something; in fact, you look half dead*. What is interesting in this example is that for it to make sense, *covelle* must have a (positive) existential meaning to be contrasted with the negative interpretation of *nulla*. In the end, this means that *covelle* here is interpreted as a positive existential (a plain 'something'), not as an FCI or NPI.

This may seem a matter of little importance, at first sight. Jäger (2010) discusses cases of German indefinite pronouns that shifted from positive to negative polarity, but also from negative to positive, or that underwent a restriction or expansion of the contexts in which they could occur due to a stricter association with negative or veridical contexts. Nonetheless, what we have here is slightly different because the author who uses positive/veridical *covelle* also uses it as an NPI. The reason this seems problematic is that PPIs and NPIs have opposite licensing requirements. Or, rather, an

important subset of the contexts that allows NPIs (negation) is precisely the one which anti-licenses PPIs. These, on the other hand, are fine in veridical contexts, which are in turn lethal for NPIs. The next sections will be devoted to the Romagnol case, which will bring some clarity to the issue.[8]

3. Romagnol *cvël*

In a way, the diachronic development of *covelle* in Romagnol picks up where OIR left in the last section. In fact, Old Romagnol (second half of the 16th century) presents a situation that is very similar to the Florentine case but allows to verify the further developments of the item up to Contemporary Romagnol. These developments, as will be shown, represent the extreme consequences of the processes that were described in OIR.

Romagnol is a Gallo-Italic variety spoken in the historical region of Romagna (Northeastern Italy), more specifically in the provinces of Ravenna, Forlì-Cesena, and Rimini. Romagnol varieties are also spoken in Northern Marche (province of Pesaro and Urbino) and there are significant offshoots in the Metropolitan City of Bologna (Imola) and in three *comuni* in the Metropolitan City of Florence.

Romagnol is attested much later than the other Italo-Romance languages and in general attestations are scarcer than for other Northern Italian varieties. The first extensive attestation of Romagnol is the mock-heroic poem *Pvlon Mat* ('Mad Paul'), a parody of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* of which only a few *canti* have survived. The anonymous author was probably a learned individual from Cesena and the poem has been dated to the end of the 16th century. Other sources of Old Romagnol are the *Commedia Nuova* by Piero Francesco da Faenza, published in 1540, the play *La finta schiavetta*, by Francesco Moderati of Rimini, published in 1626, and the *Batistonata*, a *frottola* (a long satirical poem) composed for Carnival by Lodovico Gabbusio of Ravenna between 1626 and 1636. These sources are all we have and, given the lack of corpora for Romagnol, they have been searched for occurrences of the relevant forms to draw a picture of the indefinite system of the language. The sources for the different stages of Romagnol, from which the examples used in these sections are taken, are listed at the end of the article.

From an analysis of the data, it emerges very clearly that Old Romagnol had Negative Concord for at least some of its indefinites. As is not uncommon for OIR languages in general (Cecilia Poletto, p.c.), Old Romagnol seemed to alternate quite freely between the Strict and Non-Strict type of Negative Concord (cf. fn. 4).[9] For example, as shown by the following examples from the

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[8] While it is not possible to follow the development of *covelle* and its cognates in Tuscan here, the situation in the following centuries, when the indefinite according to the corpus data seems to decline in literary use, is not significantly different from the picture that emerges from OIR; to make a few examples, Lorenzo de' Medici (second half of the 15th century) uses it as an FCI (*La Nencia a far covelle non ha pari*, 'Nobody equals Nencia at doing anything'), Matteo Bandello (1485–1561) uses it as an NPI (*io ancora non ho fatto covelle*, 'I have not done anything yet', cf. https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/covelle/), and Michelangelo Buonarroti il Giovane (1568–1646) uses it in questions (*ècci cavelle?*, 'Is there anything/something?'). Rohlfs (1968: 221–222) reports that several Modern Italo-Romance languages, especially Central and Southern varieties, still have descendants of *covelle* in their indefinite system, either with the meaning 'nothing/nobody' (as NCIs), or, more rarely, as 'something'. In these varieties, then, the negative interpretation seems to have prevailed. A quite interesting (socio)linguistic observation comes from the scholar and grammarian Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), who despite being himself Venetian was possibly the most influential individual in the codification of literary Italian as a language based upon Boccaccio's and Petrarch's 14th-century Tuscan. In a chapter of his most famous work, the *Prose della volgar lingua*, 'Prose of the Vernacular Tongue', published in 1525, he comments on the expression *cavelle*, which he characterises as archaic, with the following words: «[in the ancient texts] one reads *punto* ['point'] instead of *niente* ['nothing'], and also *cavelle*, *a term which by now is only Romagnol*» («Leggesi Punto in vece di Niente, e Cavelle, voce ora del tutto romagnuola», *PVL*, 3, LXXVII). This shows that already in the first half of the 16th century *cavelle* was considered either archaic or vernacular and, in particular, markedly Romagnol.

[9] In fact, this optionality of the negative marker with preverbal NCIs is not limited to Old Romance but is also famously instantiated by present-day Catalan (for an analysis of this case, cf. Martins 2000, Herburger 2001).

Batistonata, the NCI *ansun/nisun* ('nobody' or 'no'), which occurs 30 times in the corpus, could appear in preverbal position both with and without the standard negative marker (18). Moreover, NCIs could occur in nonveridical contexts, like questions (19):

(18) a. **Ansun** è   mè stench in st'   bià   mstir.
          nobody be.PRS.3SG ever tired in DEM.MSG blessed trade
          'Nobody is ever tired in this blessed trade.'
      b. **Ansun** i   **'n** sar-iè   mè arsgh-è.
          nobody there NEG be.COND-3SG ever risk-PTCP
          'Nobody would ever risk that.'

(19) È=l   qua **ansun** dutur?
      be.PRS.3SG=SCL.3MSG here no   doctor
      'Is there any doctor?'

Old Romagnol also had a [−human] NCI, *nient* ('nothing' or 'no'), which as will be shown is scarcely attested. The language also had the PPI *qual quel/qualcosa* (variously written) corresponding to the existential quantifier 'something', and *agna cuell/ogni cosa*, meaning 'everything'. Crucially, the latter forms contain the element *cuell/quell*. This is the Romagnol cognate of *covelle*, which will be described in the next subsection. While the data for Old Romagnol are scarce, they provide a very interesting picture of the starting point for the further developments of *cuell*.

3.1. Old Romagnol

Before analysing the data from Old Romagnol, it is interesting to note that the very first line of (Italianate) Romagnol, which comes from a comic sonnet by Bernardino Catti that was published in Ravenna in 1502, presents the word *covello*. The sonnet mocks the mangled Italian and aggressive customs of Romagnol peasants. The indefinite appears in an ambiguous nonveridical context where it could be translated both as *anything* and as *something* and is curiously followed by a partitive construction.

(20) Di=mmi,   Barison car, se=l   c-e   **covello** di-l
      tell.IMP=1SG.DAT Barison dear if=SCL.3SG THR-be.PRS.3SG anything of-ART.MSG
      Turco.
      Turk
      'Tell me, dear Barison, if there is any/some Turk.'

Although it is an isolated example, it suggests that *covello* was arguably part of the lexicon of Romagnol-speaking lower classes of Ravenna at the start of the century.

The data from the second half of the century are more representative of the situation of the indefinite, as shown in these examples from the *Pvlon Mat*. *Cuell* can be interpreted in the scope of negation, confirming the compatibility of the indefinite with antiveridical contexts:

(21) S' Flpon   n' fuss   tuo   par un sar-ia   **cuell**.
      if Big.Philip NEG be.SUBJ.3SG POSS.2SG peer NEG be.COND-3SG anything
      'If Big Philip were not your peer, it would not matter.'

The indefinite can also appear in object position, including in (23) where it is licensed by the higher sentential negator along with *en* ('nor'):

(22) N' guadagn-a **cuell'** s=la=u fa muri-r
     NEG earn-PRS.3SG anything if=SCL.3FSG=3MSG.ACC make.PRS.3SG die-NFIN
     d' dulor.
     of pain
     'She earns nothing from making him die of pain.'

(23) L' fin-s enca n' uude-r l' lagarm-Ø, e u
     SCL.3MPL pretend-PST.3PL also NEG see.NFIN ART.FPL tear-FPL and ART.MSG
     russor, en **cuell** alt.
     redness nor anything else
     'They even pretended not to see the tears, and the redness, nor anything else.'

Quite interestingly, *cuell* can also appear with a DP-level negator, taking the meaning of 'trifle', 'thing of no relevance'

(24) Ch' uu alt femn-Ø u si tant dsdgnos
     COMP SCL.2PL other woman-FPL SCL.2PL be.PRS.2PL so haughty
     ch' pr' **no cuell** a=u curz-è sa-i
     COMP for NEG *cuell* SCL.2PL=2PL pout-PRS.2PL with-ART.MPL
     fauurì.
     favourite-PTCP.3MPL
     'You women are so haughty that you take offence at your favourites for a mere trifle.'

This use is reminiscent of Italian *nonnulla*, literally 'not nothing'.[10] As for its Italian counterpart, *no cuell* is not an NPI, but a noun-like element that occurs in positive sentences:

(25) Gianni si arrabbi-a per un **non-nulla**. (Italian)
     Gianni REFL get.angry-PRS.3SG for ART.IND.MSG NEG-nothing
     'Gianni gets angry for a mere trifle.'

Cuell can also be found in nonveridical contexts, as in (26a, from *Pvlon Mat*) and (26b, from the *Batistonata*). As for the OIR examples cited in §2, *cuell* here could be translated both as a positive and as a negative polarity item.

(26) a. s=i cont-a **cuell**, ch' agnun n' heiba
        If=SCL.3PL tell-PRS.3PL *cuell* COMP everybody PART.PRN have.SUBJ.3SG
        cunscenza.
        knowledge
        'If they tell something/anything that is known to everybody.'
     b. S=a diz-ì **quel**, i vol
        if=SCL.2PL say-PRS.2PL something/anything SCL.3PL want.PRS.3PL
        rason; e s=a vl-i di-r **quel** …
        reason; and if=SCL.2PL want-PRS.2PL say-NFIN something
        'If you say something, they want to be right; and if you want to say something …'

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[10] It is also interesting that *nonnulla* originates as the neuter plural of the Latin indefinite NONNULLUS, which means 'some' (cf. Gianollo 2018). Clearly, even at the DP level Latin behaves like a double negation language: the negation carried by NON is cancelled by that carried by NULLUS, deriving its meaning in the following way: 'not nothing' ⟶ 'some(thing)'. In the shift to negative concord that took place in Romance, *nonnulla*, too, was affected; the *nulla* part was interpreted as singular 'nothing', an NCI, and agreement with the constituent negator *non* derived the interpretation 'nothingness', 'trifle'. The fact that the negative feature of the NCI was interpreted or valued at the DP level also meant that it no longer needed to be interpreted by sentential negation, causing the negated DP to appear in positive sentences as in (25) above.

An example that is more problematic, and one that brings us to the same problem encountered with Boccaccio, is the following:

(27) Lu n' era ancora turn-ed à cà à zarc-ar **cuell'**
  3SG NEG be.PST.IPFV.3SG yet return-PTCP at home to search-NFIN *cuell*
  pr-i dient.
  for-ART.MPL tooth.PL
  'He had not yet returned home to look for something to eat.'

In the most obvious reading of (27), *cuell* is to be interpreted outside the scope of the higher negator. Clearly, the meaning of the sentence is that the subject has not yet returned home to look for something to eat, not that there is no edible *x* such that the subject has not yet returned home to search for it. Nonetheless, this example is not too clear since, if *cuell* is an NPI, then it can be licensed by negation in long distance configurations, especially through the weak boundary represented by the infinitive clause.[11]

Here are two more examples from the *Pvlon Mat* and the *Batistonata* respectively:

(28) a. Pr' santi-r s' quul Ragazz-i=j hav-iss ditt
    for hear-NFIN if DEM.FPL girl-PL=SCL.3FPL have-SUBJ.PST.3PL say.PTCP
    qualch' **cuell** alt più inenz
    some thing else more forward
    'In order to hear if those girls had said something else further on.'

  b. Semper u 's ved-ea casc-ar **qualch quel**.
    always IMPS see-PST.IPFV.3SG fall-NFIN some thing
    'One always saw something fall.'

Here, *cuell* is preceded by the determiner *qualch'*, 'some'. In cases in which *covelle/cuell* were treated as non-negative indefinites, they translated as 'something'. The fact that *qualch'* must be added to *cuell* indicates that *cuell* here is treated as a classifier, not as an indefinite meaning 'something', for which the addition of *qualch'* would be redundant.

A clearer example of this nominalisation, and a more striking one, is (29):

(29) la *consa* d la matieria puo a-lla fin
  ART.FSG thing of ART.FSG madness then at-ART.FSG end
  L=è poch **cuell**.
  SCL.3MS=be.PRS.3SG little thing
  'Eventually, then, the thing with madness is a little thing.'

In (29) *cuell* is used as a noun, or as a classifier, meaning 'thing'. Differently from the previous example, here the context is clearly veridical. As noted by Jäger (2010: 791), «[i]tems without any polarity feature specification can occur in positive, that is, [−affec, −neg] contexts as well as in [+affec, −neg] and in [+affec, +neg] contexts. *Most lexical items—most nouns, verbs, etc.—are*

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[11] The same is arguably true of some uses of NCIs in Italian, such as the following:

(i) Gianni non ha detto che av-rebbe fa-tto niente.
  Gianni NEG have.PRS.3SG say.PTCP COMP have-COND.3SG do-PTCP nothing
  'Gianni didn't say that he would do anything.' (i.e., 'There is no *x* such that Gianni said that he would do it')

underspecified with respect to the two polarity features and are free to occur in any kind of polarity context including the scope of negation» (our italics; note that the [affec] feature stands for Klima's category of affectivity referred to in §1.2). Moreover, here *cuell* is quantified by the determiner *poch*, 'little', another noun-like feature. Another interesting feature of this example is the presence, in the previous line, of the word *co(n)sa*, the word for 'thing', as well as the *wh*-word 'what' (30–31):

(30) No ds-i   più   sta   **consa** car fiol.
      NEG say-IMP.2PL anymore DEM.FSG thing dear son
      'Don't say this thing anymore, dear son.'

(31) **Consa** fa=ll   puo?
      what   do.PRS.3SG=SCL.3MS then
      'What does he do, then?'

The same situation is attested in the rest of the Old Romagnol corpus, for instance, in Moderati's *La finta schiavetta*:

(32) Perche dimand-a=u   cost-a   **consa** per ben, o per mal?
      why   ask-PRS.2PL=SCL.2PL DEM-FSG thing for good or for evil
      'Why do you ask this, for good or evil?'

(33) **Cosa** vul-id   me da lu?
      what want-PRS.2PL ever from 3MSG
      'What do you want from him?'

(34) e   à dess a=u-oi   and-a a compr-a
      and now   SCL.1SG=want-PRS.1SG go-NFIN to buy-NFIN

      d-el   **chuell**   da pranc-er.
      of-ART.FPL(?) thing[PL] to have.lunch-NFIN
      'And now I want to go and buy some things to eat.'

Here, too, we see the double use of *co(n)sa* as noun and *wh*-word, as well as the use of *c(h)uell* as a noun-like element. Note that in (34) *chuell* is preceded by a partitive determiner, which moreover appears to be in the feminine plural. From this, it would follow that *cuell* could also be pluralised, one further feature that brings it closer to nouns than indefinite pronouns.

3.1.1. Summary of Old Romagnol cuell

In Old Romagnol, *cuell* occurs in the following different uses, or contexts: (i) antiveridical contexts, as a 'direct negation' indefinite in the terms of Haspelmath (1997), (ii) nonveridical contexts, where it can be interpreted either as a positive, or as a negative polarity item and (iii) nominal/classifier uses, which as such are neither licensed by negative polarity, nor anti-licensed by it.

There are 26 examples of *cuell/quel* in Old Romagnol. Of these, eight are in the scope of a negative operator where *cuell* translates as 'nothing', six are in non-negative and nonveridical contexts (and hence ambiguous as shown above, allowing both for an interpretation as an NPI

('anything') and for an interpretation as 'something').[12] 5 are nominal uses translating as 'thing'. There is also 1 *no cuell* use, as shown above. In addition, there are five examples of *qualch cuell* ('something') and 1 of *agna cuell* ('everything'), where *cuell* is the existential core, respectively, of a non-negative existential and of a universal quantifier. On the other hand, *co(n)sa* occurs 42 times in the corpus, 30 as the noun or classifier meaning 'thing', and 12 as the *wh*-word 'what'. *Nient*, 'nothing', occurs five times; in three cases it does translate as the negative indefinite 'nothing', while in two it translates as 'at all'. It thus appears that *cuell* was the most common [−human] indefinite in the scope of negation at this stage and that, on the other hand, *co(n)sa* was the most common word for 'thing', while it already doubled as the *wh*-word 'what'. While it is hard to assess the extent to which *nient* was used given the poor attestation in the corpus, it seems that it was still less common than *cuell* as an indefinite specialised for the scope of negation.[13]

The scarcity of the 16th century material and the late attestation of Romagnol prevents us from gathering further data on these phenomena for the same period. However, to see the further developments of this indefinite we can turn to the following literature in Romagnol, to verify where the changes that were taking place in Old Romagnol were headed.

3.2. Modern Romagnol

After rare and sparse attestations in the late 17th and 18th century, which represent another gap in the history of the language,[14] Romagnol literature and lexicography flourished during the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, especially in the form of poetry and dictionaries. The sources confirm the Old Romagnol tendency to treat *cuell* as an increasingly noun-like item.

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[12] One of these occurrences in nonveridical contexts (from *Pvlon Mat*, III, 70, v. 5–6) is the following, where *cuell* appears with in the diminutive form *cuulin* (i.e., *cuvlin*):

(i) T'   e=ll   antraun-ù   cuul-in […]   contra tu-o   gust?
     2SG.DAT be.PRS.3SG=SCL.3MSG happened-PTCP something-DIMN against POSS.2SG-MSG taste
     'Did some (little) thing happen to you that was against your taste?'

The presence of the diminutive morpheme *-in* should not lead one to take this as a nominal use of *cuell*, since indefinite pronouns can be modified by diminutives, too (cf. It. *qualcosina*, 'some little thing'). The absence of a determiner of any sort and the interpretation of the example in its context also point to a pronominal interpretation for the item. Nonetheless, the possibility of modifying the indefinite pronoun with a diminutive seems to be dependent on the possibility of thus modifying the classifier that constitutes its existential core (that is, in Italian one gets *qualcosina*, but also *cosina*, 'little thing', from *cosa*, 'thing'). In this sense, one could also take the use of the diminutive form *cuvlin* as a quasi-nominal trait. As will be shown in the next subsections, later stages of Romagnol also have the noun *quilen/cvilen* ('little thing'), modified by the diminutive *-en*.

[13] As an aside, in addition to the aforementioned *ansun/nisun* ('nobody'), which is well represented in the corpus, the *Pvlon Mat* has one *cuiel*, which also translates as 'nobody' and is with all likelihood a cognate of OIR *chivelli* ('anyone'). Since as far as I could see it is a hapax, I will have nothing more to say about this indefinite.

[14] «The following two centuries yield a meagre harvest», as Gregor (1972: 15) puts it referring to this period. The only material I could find is a handful of poems written in the second half of the 18th century by Fr. Pietro Santoni (1736–1823), who seems to use *cuell* and *cosa* in a very conservative way. While due to their scarcity these data are of little statistical relevance, it can be reported that the author uses *cuell* 6 times, always in the scope of negation (*nient* is not present at all in the poems), while *cosa* is the only word for 'thing' (5 occurrences) and is also used as the wh-word 'what' (11 occurrences). The renowned mycologist Giovanni Antonio Battarra (1714–1789) is reported to have written some sonnets in Romagnol, but I have not been able to find them anywhere.

The data for Modern Romagnol have been gathered from the corpus of Romagnol fairy tales (Baldini & Foschi 1993, 1994) collected through fieldwork by Ermanno Silvestroni around 1920–30 in San Pancrazio di Russi, in the province of Ravenna. Two volumes of this work were searched for occurrences of the relevant indefinites, with the following results. *Cvël* occurs 87 times as a noun (65 times in the singular and 20 in the plural form *cvel*, 'things', plus two plural forms of the diminutive *quilen*, 'little things').[15] It occurs 19 times as an indefinite pronoun corresponding to 'something', while uses in the scope of negation are completely absent. This function is taken up by *gnit*, 'nothing', which occurs 266 times and has the distribution of an NCI (i.e. it conveys sentential negation in preverbal position and is negative in isolation). On the other hand, the most common non-negative indefinite meaning 'something' is not *cvël*, but the form *calcvël*, ('some-thing'), which occurs 142 times. *Gnacvël*, 'everything', occurs 82 times. As for *côsa*, I found only 1 nominal use as 'thing' in the whole corpus, while it occurs 191 times as the *wh*-word 'what', mainly in reduced forms such as *cus, s (a)* and *csa*. Modern Romagnol has resolved the Strict/Non-Strict ambiguity of the Old stage in favour of the latter, as shown by the distribution of *gnit* and of the [+human] NCI *nison/incion* ('nobody'). These items convey negation in preverbal position in the absence of a further negative marker, they require it in postverbal position, and they are negative in isolation. Hence, Modern Romagnol had become a Non-Strict Negative Concord language, like Standard Italian. Like the Contemporary variety, Modern Romagnol does not have pronominal FCIs (like English 'anything' in its FCI use). It does have the invariable postnominal *purcaseja* (lit. 'as long as it is', cf. It. *purchessia*, 'whatever'), which roughly translates as 'whatever', but it only accompanies nouns in adjectival fashion, as shown below:

(35) Tu   un   lìvar purcaseja.
      take.IMP ART.INDF.MSG book   whatever
      'Take any book.'

Thus, the function of pronominal FCI (a function which we can only hypothesise to have been vacated by *cuell* before the first attestations of Old Romagnol) does not appear to be lexicalised as a single word indefinite in the more recent stages of the language.[16]

It is also interesting to look at the entry for *quell* in Antonio Morri's (1840) dictionary of Faentino (a variety spoken in the province of Ravenna), which lists only two uses: (i) *qualcosa* ('something'), and (ii) *coso* ('thingumajig', a thing which the speaker cannot or does not want to identify more specifically). There is no mention of a negative use.[17] 20th century dictionaries also do not mention a negative use for *cvël*. Ercolani's (1960), which is based upon the dialect of Bastia, in the countryside of Ravenna, translates it as *cosa, coso* and does not even mention the pronominal use. Masotti (1996) mentions the pronominal use as 'something' and the nominal use as 'thing'. Not only is the nominal use of *cvël* recorded by all lexicographers, then: it also appears that the only indefinite use for the item that was available for the last two centuries or so was as a positive indefinite and crucially not as an NPI or NCI.

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[15] As an aside, the form *röbi* (the plural of the mass noun *röba*, 'stuff') is very frequently used with the plural meaning 'things' and is much more common than the plural form *cvel*. *Röbi* occurs 130 times in the corpus. The pluralisation of a mass noun usually has a singulative effect (cf. 'wines' which is understood as 'types, or bottles, of wine') and accordingly in the case of *röbi* the meaning is then not 'stuffs', but 'things'. Since the plural form *cvel* does exist, we cannot speak of suppletivism proper for *röbi*, but the latter form certainly competes with the plural form *cvel* in the expression of a generic plurality of inanimate things.

[16] Nor does postnominal *purcaseja* perfectly fit the FCI definition; Kellert (2022) notes that postnominal FC elements like Italian *qualunque* or *purchessia* (e.g., *un libro qualunque/purchessia*, lit. 'a book whatever') have more of a Random Choice Interpretation (RCI, cf. Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2011) or an evaluative, quasi-adjectival interpretation ('an average, unremarkable book'). That is, the choice is either presented as random (rather than free), or the modified noun is qualified as average or mediocre. The analysis of the derivation of this secondary semantics for FCIs/RCIs is extensively dealt with in Kellert's paper but cannot be further pursued here. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that work to me.

[17] Antonio Mattioli's (1879) dictionary of Imolese lists an entry for *quell*. He then proceeds to link it to its OIR counterpart (correctly) but ends up providing exclusively Old Italian examples involving *covelle* and not a single Romagnol example. For this reason, I disregard it.

This appears to be confirmed by syntactic behaviour of *cvël*. In fact, it can be modified by determiners and adjectives:

(36) E'   vest   **un**   **quël négar**.
      SCL.3MSG see.PST.3SG ART.INDF.MSG thing black
      'He saw a black thing.'

But it is also used with a clear pronominal interpretation:

(37) quând a   m'so   avi-ê   i   m'à
      when SCL.1SG 1SG-be.PRS.1SG leave-PTCP SCL.3PL 1SG.DAT-have.PRS.3PL
      d-ê   **quël**.
      give.PTCP something
      'When I left, they gave me something.'

This situation points to a de-negativisation of *quell* and to a general tendency to expand its nominal and classifier use and to generalise the positive use as an indefinite.

Additionally, as mentioned, there is an increase in the use of the indefinite *gnit*, the descendant of Old Romagnol *nient*, which is the only [−human] negative indefinite. As anticipated, *gnit* is an NCI, which is licensed by negation and provides negative fragment answers:

(38) a.   A   n'ò   vèst **gnit**.
           SCL.1SG NEG-have.PRS.1SG see.PTCP nothing
           'I haven't seen anything.'
      b.   A: S'ë=l   suz-ëst?
                what-be.PRS.3SG=SCL.3MSG happen-PTCP
                'What happened?'
           B: **Gnit**.
                'Nothing.'

The final stage of this development is represented by the contemporary varieties, especially the North-western ones. In the next subsection I will review the present state of *cvël* in Romagnol, then I will proceed to analyse the triggers and causes of the developments described in this section.

3.3. *Contemporary Romagnol*

Contemporary Romagnol is the variety in which the developments of *cvël* have reached what appears to be the endpoint of the processes described in the previous subsections. The data for this stage of the language are far more substantial and have been drawn from the journal *la Ludla* (written in Italian and Romagnol), which is digitised and thus searchable as a quasi-corpus. The years from 2003 to 2022 (200 volumes in total) were searched for occurrences of the relevant items, with the following results. *Cvël/ quël* occurs 247 times, of which 219 (88.66%) are as a noun or classifier meaning 'thing' or 'object', and 26 (10.53%) correspond to the indefinite pronoun 'something'.[18] Additionally, there are 95 occurrences of *calcvël* ('something') or similar forms, and 157 of *ignacvël* ('everything'). *Côsa* occurs

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[18] I found two more cases in which *cvël* is seemingly used as a negative indefinite. Apart from the little statistical significance (just two cases and 0.81% of the sample), both cases involve the expression *senza di quël*, 'without saying anything'. This suggests that this use of *cvël* could be analysed as a residual formulaic expression, which is lexically fixed and incorporates an older use of the indefinite as a negative expression. Moreover, it is not even obvious that *cvël* should not be analysed as a noun in this case as well: bare singular nouns are allowed in the scope of negation in Italian too, with an indeterminate interpretation (cf. It. *senza proferire parola*, literally 'without uttering word'), and the expression above could also translate as 'without saying a single thing', or 'a thing whatever'.

23 times as a noun, while *gnicôsa* ('everything') occurs 29 times, and *chicôsa* ('something') 70 times.[19] *Côsa/cs(a)/cus* occurs 173 times as the *wh*-word 'what', but this number is not representative of its real frequency since it does not include the frequent abbreviation *s(a)*.[20] *Gnit* and its variants *gnint* and *gnent* are the only inanimate indefinites used in the scope of negation and antiveridical operators with the meaning 'nothing', they maintain NCI behaviour and occur 564 times (not counting non-negative nonveridical uses in questions and *if*-clauses).

As already shown in Modern Romangol, *cvël* shows all the hallmarks of a noun or classifier, listed below:

(39)   *Modifiability by determiners and adjectives*
      a.   L=è   **e'**   **prem cvël**   da fê.
          SCL.3MSG=be.PRS.3SG ART.MSG first   thing to do.NFIN
          'It is the first thing to do.'

      b.   Aj=ò   vest   **un**   **cvël vérd**.
          SCL.1SG=have.PRS.1SG see.PTCP ART.INDF.MSG thing green
          'I have seen a green thing.'

(40)   *Plural form and quantifiers*
      Aj=ò   **tent**   **cvèl**   da fê.
      SCL.1SG=have.PRS.1SG many[MPL] thing[PL] to do.NFIN
      'You have many things to do.'

(41)   *Existential core for indefinite pronouns*
      a.   Aj=ò   purt-ê   **igna-cvël**.
          SCL.1SG=have.PRS.1SG bring-PTCP every-thing
          'I have brought everything with me.'

      b.   Aj=ò   bsógn ad **cvêlc-cvël**.
          SCL.1SG=have.PRS.1SG need   of   some-thing
          'I need something.'

Additionally, there are some occasional uses of *cvël* as a positive indefinite:

(42)   L=éra   and-ê   a zarch-ê   **cvël**.
      SCL.3MSG=be.PST.IPFV.3SG go-PTCP to search-PTCP something
      'He had gone to look for something.'

This is not unexpected: as noted by Willis (2007), it is also the case for Bulgarian *nešto* that the old grammatical function is retained along with the degrammaticalised one.

At the end of this analysis of the development of *cvël* in Romagnol, it appears that this item originating from an indefinite, which in turn originated from a Latin free relative, is mostly used as a noun/classifier, with some residual PPI uses. Now that the changes have been documented, it is time to analyse the reasons that brought them about in more depth.

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[19] This apparent resurgence of *côsa* with respect to the Modern stage may be due to influence from Italian *cosa*, as well as to the more varied origin of the authors who contribute texts to the journal, who are not only from the province of Ravenna but also from other Romagnol-speaking areas where the older word for 'thing' may be more vital. The same two reasons may be proposed for the preservation of the indefinites *chicôsa* and *gnicôsa*, which additionally may have preserved the classifier *côsa* as part of their internal makeup.

[20] Since I was not working with an annotated corpus—and since using forms like *sa, s, 's*, or *s'* would have produced a huge number of false positives—I refrained from searching for these word forms and only used the keywords *cosa, cus*, and *cs*, a search whose outcome was more manageable.

4. ANALYSIS

The history of Romagnol *cvël* exposed in the previous paragraph raises two questions. The first, which also emerged in the discussion of Boccaccio's use of *cavelle*, concerns polarity: how can an indefinite have both the semantics of NPI 'anything' and those of the positive existential 'something'? As noted at the end of §2, the semantic requirements of NPIs seem to conflict with those of positive indefinites, which tend to have the distribution of PPIs and thus to be antilicensed by negation. The second question, which as will be demonstrated is strictly connected to the first, concerns degrammaticalisation proper: how did *cvël* come to be mainly used as a noun in Contemporary Romagnol? I will deal with these two questions in turn, starting from the first one, the answer to which will flow into the solution to the second.

4.1. Polar neutralisation as a stepping stone for degrammaticalisation

The answer to the first question will require little effort once the changes described above are set against a broader typological background. As mentioned at the end of §2, the reason Boccaccio's double use of *covelle* in the scope of veridical and antiveridical operators might appear problematic is that while NPIs and PPIs can occur in nonveridical contexts, antiveridical ones are compatible with the former, but antilicense the latter (cf. Giannakidou 1999), meaning that PPIs that are under the scope of negation at Spellout must necessarily outscope the negative marker at LF, as exemplified below:

(43) a. I didn't see anyone.
      b. I didn't see someone. (*¬ > ∃, ∃ > ¬)

There is thus a domain in which NPIs are possible where PPIs are not allowed. Nevertheless, the difficulty can only follow from a rigid interpretation of existential indefinites as divided into two categories by their association with either positive or negative polarity. The reasoning goes: since polarity is binary (+ or −), then indefinite pronouns must be either PPIs or NPIs. This is neither a necessary consequence nor, in fact, a true one. Van der Auwera & Van Alsenoy (2018), and before them Kahrel (1996), examined a representative sample of languages of the world to verify which strategy is most frequently adopted for expressing indefinites that are interpreted in the scope of negation. What these authors find is that, respectively, 67.7% (for Kahrel's sample) and 49.7% (for van der Auwera & Van Alsenoy's sample) of languages have indefinites that are neutral, namely neither licensed by negation (i.e. they are not NPIs) nor antilicensed by it (i.e. they are not PPIs). These elements, the latter authors note, are sometimes nouns, while sometimes they are indefinite pronouns. The first category is illustrated here with (Modern Standard) Arabic:

(44) a. Mā raʔay-tu **šayʔ-a-n**.
          NEG see-PST.1SG thing-ACC-INDF
          'I didn't see anything.'

      b. Raʔay-tu **šayʔ-a-n**.
          see-PST.1SG thing-ACC-INDF
          'I saw something/I saw a thing.'

In this case, the word 'thing' is used instead of the inanimate indefinite pronoun. A case of a pronominal indefinite that is polarly neutral is the following Nasioi (East Bougainville) example by Rausch (1912: 134, which is cited by Van Der Auwera & Van Alsenoy 2018):

(45)   a.   **Nanin**   nánu-i.
             someone go-RPST
             'Someone went.'

       b.   **Nanin**   nánu-aru-i.
             someone go-NEG-RPST
             'No-one went.'

Jäger (2010: 812, fn. 36) notes that, in cases of polarity shift, lexical ambiguity, intended as the storing in the lexicon of two homophonous items with different lexical specifications, is expected as a common part of the process. Nonetheless, I think that for the case at hand it is not necessary to resort to any such ambiguity. It is much simpler to propose that, perhaps in Boccaccio's language and in more clearly in Old Romagnol, *covelle/cuell* were undergoing polar neutralisation, or depolarisation.[21] Moreover, this proposal is advantageous in view of the further changes that were taking place in

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[21] An anonymous reviewer wonders whether what is instantiated by Old Romagnol *cuell* is, rather than polar neutrality, «an alternation between a widened interpretation of the indefinite with an indiscriminacy ingredient that is relevant for interpretation (Giannakidou's variation requirement for free choice) [cf. English *anything*, ND] and a plain existential interpretation of the indefinite [cf. English *something*, ND]», further commenting that this alternation is not necessarily connected to scope. Widening is a property that Kadmon & Landman (1993: 361) originally attributed to English *any* which specifically refers to a widening of «the interpretation of the common noun phrase (CN) along a contextual dimension», like the one seen with FCIs. The reviewer thus asks «whether the difference in interpretation is due to a wide vs narrow scope flexibility (which would amount to polar neutrality [. . .]), or to a widened vs plain interpretation». I would like to try and summarise the reviewer's question in the following way: does Old Romagnol *cuell* *semantically* alternate between an indiscriminate interpretation as 'anything' and a plain existential interpretation as 'something'? Or does it *syntactically* alternate between wide and narrow scope with respect to negation in particular? The reviewer's observation is of some importance, especially insofar as polar neutrality is linked to scope ambiguity. Nonetheless, after considering the data from Old Romagnol, I believe I do not have enough material to answer the reviewer's point, at least not in a conclusive way. For this reason, while maintaining that polar neutrality proper does play a role in the degrammaticalisation of indefinites (cf. the Scottish Gaelic and Bulgarian data below), for Romagnol I will more cautiously speak of polar *neutralisation* or depolarisation, more broadly intended as the progressive loss of sensitivity to (non)veridicality (which I believe is objectively observable in the history of Romagnol *cvël*).

Nonetheless, the reviewer's observation deserves some additional comments. Firstly, as Kratzer & Shimoyama (2002) and Kadmon & Landman (1993) note, widening indefinites can be used only when they are motivated, i.e., when they yield stronger statements. According to these authors, in negative and nonveridical sentences indefinites that induce widening are fine because in those contexts the alternatives they generate can be exhaustified (cf. especially Chierchia 2013). For example, in a context in which the speaker has seen nothing, the indefinite 'anything' is more informative than a plain existential indefinite, because in a sentence like *I did not see anything* negation exhaustively applies to all the alternatives generated by the NPI. According to this line of research, this means that there is a tendency for indefinites with a widened interpretation to occur in the scope of negation or other nonveridical operators (and to avoid veridical or episodic environments, in which exhaustification does not take place). Even if *cuell* were semantically ambiguous between a plain and a widened interpretation, then, the widened version would have a natural solidarity with non- and antiveridical environments. The only hard and fast, definitive evidence that *cuell* is scopally ambiguous in my opinion would by one in which, despite linearly following negation, *cuell* scopes above it. For example, *Un à vest cuell*, lit. 'not has seen *cuell*', would have to be interpreted not only as 'He did not see anything', but also as 'He did not see something'. Such evidence, as mentioned above, simply does not exist in the modest corpus of Old Romagnol.

There is another important consideration to make, though. As shown in the data analysis, Old Romagnol *cuell* was not an FCI: it was a negative indefinite with some ambiguous nonveridical uses and some nominal ones. While FCIs do have a widening component, as shown by Giannakidou (2011) and as demonstrated with several observations on FCIs and NPIs in various languages, «items that involve domain widening are not admitted in negation and questions. This suggests either that widening does not necessarily correlate with strength, or that widening and strengthening (in whatever version) do not predict the right kind of polarity sensitivity» for NPIs, an insufficiency which also extends to an analysis of negative indefinites as intrinsically scalar or exhaustified items (cf. Giannakidou 2018). In other words, as already noted in fn. 7, an indefinite with an intrinsically widened interpretation would be expected not to be possible in the scope of negation, which in principle argues against a widening analysis for *cuell* (at least in a theoretical perspective like the one adopted here).

A point remains with respect to OIR, where for *covelle* a problematic coexistence of FCI (hence widened), negative ('anything') and plain uses (as 'something') could be said to exist. There one can find some uses of *covelle* which are amenable to FC semantics, especially in Jacopone da Todi's examples. Nonetheless, three generations and some degree of linguistic alterity separate Boccaccio (who was Tuscan and lived between 1313 and 1375) from Jacopone (who was Umbrian and lived from 1230/36 to 1306). Boccaccio (who is the source of the veridical case) uses *covelle* more sparingly and many decades later, thus it may be that Jacopone's language corresponds to a more archaic variety, where the semantics of *covelle*, though tied to nonveridical dependencies, retained some vestige of a specialised FCI use. A further consultation of the OVI corpus seems to show that clearer FCI uses of *covelle* are mainly found in Umbrian texts from the first half of the 14th century (e.g., the Statutes of Assisi), which appears to confirm that the original widening component of the indefinite is found in varieties that are distant from the Tuscan ones where the veridical use of *covelle* appears. These considerations remain somewhat speculative, though, given the limited data that are available to us, and given the availability of FCI uses of *covelle* in later stages of Tuscan (cf. fn. 8).

Romagnol and which were furthered in the following centuries: crucially, polar neutrality is something that nouns, too, exhibit. A polarly ambiguous indefinite is semantically and syntactically very similar to a noun, or rather to a classifier. More specifically, a neutral inanimate indefinite will be close to the classifier for 'thing', the most generic inanimate referent, while a neutral animate indefinite will be similar to the noun or classifier for 'person'. In this sense, one may even doubt whether degrammaticalisation is a further step in this process, or whether it is just a consequence of the blurred boundary between classifier and indefinite pronoun. In Old Romagnol, *cuell* is found in the scope of negation, but also in nonveridical contexts, which are ambiguous, and it is also used as a classifier. In this sense, Old Romagnol *cuell* is not too different from the Arabic case above. The only difference is that Old Romagnol still had *co(n)sa* as the main word for 'thing', while the nominal use of *cuell* appears to be still incipient in this phase.

The first conclusion I want to draw from this overview of *covelle/cuell* and of the subsequent observations is that polar neutralisation and depolarisation are important potential factors in initiating and driving degrammaticalisation, factors that might represent the main trigger of the shift. In fact, another case of degrammaticalisation that involves polar neutralisation can be seen in Scottish Gaelic. In this language, the classifier corresponding to 'person' is *neach* (for instance, as in *neach-labhairt*, 'speaker'). As noted by Willis (2016: 210), this word is derived from Old Irish *nech*, which Willis reports as meaning 'someone'. What should be added to Willis' observation, though, is that *nech* was possibly polarly neutral, being interpreted as 'no one' in the scope of negation (Thurneysen 1949).[22] Indeed, and quite interestingly for the present proposal, in more recent work the author notes that *nech* and its neuter counterpart *ní* had expanded their distribution and interpretation to veridical and nominal uses (as 'person' and 'thing' respectively) from an original NPI distribution. Crucially, the author proposes that the degrammaticalisation of these items was also probably due, at least in part, to an assimilation of *nech* and *ní* to such ambiguous items as *rud*, 'thing', which could in turn be used both as a noun and as an NPI corresponding to 'anything' (Breitbarth, Lucas & Willis 2020: 285–286). This development, which also illustrates the influence of polar ambiguity in leading to degrammaticalisation, should not be regarded as a coincidence in the light of the Romagnol data. The already cited observation by Jäger that polar underspecification is typical of lexical items—including nouns—is crucial in making polarly neutral items ambiguous between a nominal and a pronominal interpretation, creating an 'unstable' categorial situation that is conducive to degrammaticalisation. In fact, Old Irish *nech* is also mentioned by Jäger (2010: 814–815), who notes that it was not only used in negative clauses, but also «in weak NPI contexts such as conditionals and furthermore in free choice use». Citing Vendryès (1983), the author notes that *nech* contains the negation particle **ne-* and is thus negative in origin. The subsequent expansion to positive contexts is mediated by more definite interpretations in which *nech* is read as more specific (i.e. as 'someone' rather than 'anyone'). In Middle Irish, it finally comes to be employed as a noun meaning 'person' along with the pre-existing noun *duine*, which is the situation we find in Scottish Gaelic.[23] Thus, we witness a shift from negative, to nonveridical, to specific/definite interpretations in veridical contexts, to nominal/classifier interpretation, a shift which has much in common with the development of *cuell*.

Another feature which *neach* has in common with both *cvël* and Bulgarian *nešto* is that the pronominal function has not disappeared altogether. Mark (2004: 448) lists two broad interpretations for *neach*. The first is as the indefinite 'anyone' and the second is the nominal, 'person' interpretation. But such an observation on the double characterisation of these items as pronominal and nominal is probably superfluous: once the indefinite pronoun becomes neutral and is

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[22] Willis (2007) mentions that before its degrammaticalisation, the Bulgarian indefinite pronoun *nešto* translated both as 'something' and 'anything'. Albeit he does not further elaborate on this observation, it would be interesting to verify whether *nešto* also exhibited polar neutrality prior to its degrammaticalisation.

[23] The data on the positive interpretation of *nech* in Middle Irish can be found in the *eDIL* dictionary (s.v. *nech*, https://dil.ie/33014).

reinterpreted as a classifier, it is no longer necessary to speak of any further degrammaticalisation, for classifiers with such a vague meaning as 'thing' and 'person' are effectively indistinguishable from neutral indefinites, respectively, inanimate and animate. For Scottish Gaelic, the semantics of the two translations for *neach* in (38) are practically identical:

(46) Chan   fhaca mi **neach**   s-an àite sin.
      COMP.NEG see.PST 1SG person/someone in-ART place DEM
      'I didn't see a person/anyone in that place.'

One could say that the only difference between the 'anyone' and the 'person' interpretation is that the latter allows a specificity that the indefinite pronoun cannot convey: #*I have not seen anyone, and it was John* is not acceptable, while *I have not seen a person/someone, and it was John* is perfectly fine. But what must be kept in mind is that for a neutral element both a specific and a non-specific interpretation are indeed possible, just as they are for nouns (*I have not seen a person* imposes no requirement on the specificity of the person that is referred to). The reason the specific interpretation does not obtain with English *anyone* is that this item has specifically nonveridical semantics, which a neutral indefinite like the ones reviewed above does not have. In a sense, degrammaticalisation was already complete by the 16th century in Old Romagnol: once the item developed depolarised uses, the borders between indefinite and classifier became blurred and this made the question of whether *cuell* was a noun or pronoun increasingly less relevant to speakers.

There is an additional important factor that contributed to the reanalysis of *cuell* as a noun. The syntactic ambiguity of *cuell* was not limited to the phenomena described above but was also reinforced by the fact that, as noted in §3, since its first attestations it appeared as the existential core of the indefinites *qual(ch) cuell* ('something') and *agna cuell* ('everything'). These forms, the latter of which as already mentioned is also attested in OIR data in the form *onnecovelle* ('everything'), appear to be independently derived from Latin. Casadio (2008: 107) cites Latin OMNIA QUAE VELLES, 'all you may want', as the origin for *ignacvël* and he (Casadio 2009: 10) also reconducts *quaiquël/calcvël* ('something') to Latin QUALE (SIT) QUOD VELLES, 'which (it is that) you may want'. I would like to argue that this was one more factor that contributed to the reanalysis of *cuell* as a plain existential or classifier: in fact, within those complex indefinites *cuell* corresponds to the 'thing' classifier in 'some-thing' and 'every-thing', and then, from those expressions, it was in a way back-formed to an interpretation as the common noun 'thing'. Speakers had thus more than one reason to reinterpret *cuell* as a depolarised or neutralised element and hence as a lexical item of a more nominal than pronominal nature.

Despite these observations, the case of *cvël* in Contemporary Romagnol leaves more questions open, which the kinship between neutral indefinites and classifiers is not sufficient to answer. These questions relate to the fact that the degrammaticalisation of this item has been rather complete, so to speak: in some varieties the pronominal use has all but disappeared. The next and last subsection will try to provide the answers to these and to related questions.

4.2. Replacement and competition

Two questions arise at this point: the first concerns the fate of *co(n)sa*, the old word for 'thing'. Why has the degrammaticalised *cvël* taken up so much space in a language that, unsurprisingly, already had a word for 'thing'? The second question has to do with the paradigmatic space that was vacated by *cvël*. Once this element is no longer interpreted in the scope of negation, what takes up this role in the language, and how? The answers to these two questions are related, and the phenomena at the origin of both developments participated in a chain shift that led to the full degrammaticalisation of *cvël*.

4.2.1. The grammaticalisation of co(n)sa

Co(n)sa had two functions in Old Romagnol, as mentioned above. Like Italian *cosa*, it functioned both as the noun 'thing' and as the *wh*-word 'what'. In Contemporary Romagnol, it survives chiefly in the latter function, but in a phonetically very reduced form, which is usually *cus, c's a* or s(*a*):

(47)   a.   **C's'**é=t   adös?
               what-have.PRS.2SG=SCL.2SG upon
               'What's wrong with you?'
     b.   **Sa**   v-u=t?
               what want-PRS.2SG=SCL.2SG
               'What do you want?'

Masotti (1996) does report an entry for *côsa* in his dictionary, a word that is used both as a *wh*-item and as the noun 'thing', but hastens to specify that *quël* is by far the most common way to express the latter meaning. This observation was confirmed by the corpus study on Modern and Contemporary Romagnol, which shows that *côsa* is much less frequent as a noun than *cvël* and thus that the descendant of *co(n)sa* is almost completely confined to its grammaticalised interpretation as a *wh*-word. I argue that this is the factor that 'pulled' *cvël* squarely into the nominal domain: the need to replace for an item that was made unrecognisable by the phonetic erosion that accompanies grammaticalisation. The situation in the history of Romagnol was one in which the old *co(n)sa* was used in a very salient function, the *wh*-word 'what', in which its phonetic appearance was increasingly defaced by the workings of grammaticalisation. As the exclusively nominal association of the heir of Latin CAUSA(M) was waning, another element, the indefinite *cuell*, waxed in its increasing association with the nominal domain. Languages avoid synonymy and what the speakers/learners effected was a division of labour: they had two semantically similar elements in their lexical inventory, one, *co(n)sa*, which was steadily acquiring a grammatical function, and another, *cuell*, which was moving in the opposite direction. The two elements must have been seen as complementary and, eventually, the newcomer must have demoted the increasingly functional *co(n)sa*.

Before I conclude this section, let me note that the degrammaticalisation of *cuell* was by no means *caused* by the grammaticalisation of *co(n)sa*; to say this would only amount to circularity. OIR *covelle* already exhibited a tendency to polar neutralisation, independently of the language-specific phenomena of relatively distant Romagnol. What I am proposing here is a simple synergy of two factors: the grammaticalisation of *co(n)sa* on the one hand, and the neutralisation/depolarisation of *cuell* on the other. It is only by chance that the two phenomena co-occurred and cooperated in the same language, resulting in a centripetal force that drew *cuell*, and later *cvël*, to full degrammaticalisation. The other ingredient of this phenomenon, though, is to be found in the workings of neutralisation itself and in another lexical and functional rivalry that neutralisation started. This rivalry will be the topic of the next and last subsection.

4.3. Negative markedness and paradigmatic competition

A further question concerns the reason for the polar neutralisation of *cuell*. The problem with answering this question for Old Romagnol is that in the first attestations of the language *cuell* already exhibits signs of depolarisation and nominalisation. Nonetheless, we can catch a glimpse of the possible reason for the neutralisation in a comparison between the Romagnol and OIR cases. As noted in §2.2.1, in some of its earliest attestations in OIR, *covelle* appeared in nonveridical contexts and could thus be interpreted both as the NPI 'anything' and as the positive indefinite 'something'. Those in (48) are not antiveridical contexts that would antilicense PPIs (cf. §4.1), but nonveridical

contexts, where in principle both NPIs and PPIs are allowed (as noted above, with some semantic differences):[24]

(48)   a.   If you need *something/anything*, call me.
       b.   E   se trova-ranno scip-ato   **cavelle**,
            and if find-FUT.3PL spoil-PTCP anything
            sèno   tenuti   esso fa-re   raconcia-re.
            be.SUBJ.3PL hold.PTCP.3MPL 3SG   make-NFIN mend.NFIN
            'And if they find that anything has been spoiled, let them be responsible
            for having it repaired.'

In both examples, the nonveridical operator instantiated by *if/se* can as such license an NPI, but it does not antilicense a PPI like *something*. Following Jäger (2010) and Willis (2007), syntactic ambiguity is what is responsible for polarity shifts, as well as for degrammaticalisation. It is likely that this ambiguity contributed to the weakening of the association between *covelle/cuell* and antiveridicality, and later nonveridicality.

But why did this happen with *covelle/cuell* and not with just any indefinite system that has an NPI/PPI distinction? What I want to propose is that in both OIR and Romagnol the indefinite system presented some strong competitors for the anti- and nonveridical uses of the *covelle* indefinites, which ousted these from the indefinite system, leading to obsolescence in Tuscan and to full degrammaticalisation in Romagnol.

As for OIR, Poletto (2014) notes that in 13th- and 14th-century Tuscan, pronominal and adverbial elements like *nessuno* 'nobody', *niente/neente* and *neuna cosa* 'nothing' were undergoing a shift that after the second half of the 14th century would lead into the development of Italian as a Non-Strict Negative Concord language. *Covelle* had some flourishing competitors in the scope of negation: these NCIs had a stronger association with negation and were so to speak splitting the negative space among themselves; *covelle*, which had a weaker association with negation and even allowed for some veridical uses, was no match for these increasingly specialised items. Of course, it is not necessary for a language to have a unique way to express indefinites under negation: Van der Auwera & Van Alsenoy (2018) note that many languages in their sample use at least two kinds of indefinites out of the four possibilities (NPIs, NCIs, negative quantifiers, and neutral indefinites). But Italian was developing towards its modern and contemporary stage as an exclusively NC language in which NCIs are the only negative indefinites, and FCIs and PPIs are used elsewhere. In this thriftier system, there was no room for the more liberal *covelle*. In fact, with the exception of

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[24] An anonymous reviewer objects that PPIs are in general not allowed to scope below polarity operators, including nonveridical ones and not just negation. My impression (and the one I receive from the literature on PPIs) is that these items can never scope below negation, but usually they can (and do) scope below other polarity operators, like monotone decreasing quantifiers. As noted by Szabolcsi (2004: 414–417, 431), PPIs like English *someone/something* cannot scope below antimorphic (i.e., negative) and antiadditive operators, but are fine in downward entailing environments; for example, they scope below monotone decreasing quantifiers (*few* and *at most five*) in *Few boys saw someone*, or *At most five girls called somebody* (Penka 2020). More in general, van der Wouden (1997) notes that PPIs, like NPIs, have varying degrees of 'strength' and that only Strong PPIs are not allowed in the scope of monotone decreasing quantifiers (cf. also Giannakidou 2011). On the other hand, weak PPIs like English *some* cannot scope below negation, but are not antilicensed in nonveridical environments like questions or the protasis of conditionals. The reviewer also notes that a PPI and NPI use cannot coexist in the same element, but such 'bipolar' polarity items have also been noted in the literature, notably by van der Wouden (1997) himself, Nishiguchi (2009) and Spector (2012). Specifically, van der Wouden (1997) proposes that Dutch *ooit*, 'ever', which like (weak) NPIs is fine in monotone decreasing and anti-additive contexts but like (weak) PPIs is bad in antimorphic (i.e., negative) contexts, would be one such element. For these reasons, I would like to maintain that in principle there can be elements that are truly *bipolar* in addition to those that are truly *neutral*. Bipolar elements would be those that are licensed in the intersection of the (veridical and nonveridical) contexts in which both weak NPIs and weak PPIs are allowed, while neutral indefinites proper are those that have no polar restriction whatsoever.

higher registers, Contemporary Italian has no unambiguous NPIs, let alone neutral indefinites.[25]

The point is whether it can be suggested that a similar phenomenon played a role in the history of the Romagnol indefinite pronoun. As noted above, in Modern and Contemporary Romagnol the word that is used in the scope of negation is *gnit*, which is cognate with the Italian indefinite *niente*, 'nothing'. Like the latter, *gnit* is a Non-Strict NCI, which is licensed by antiveridical operators and provides negative fragment answers. As mentioned in the discussion of Old Romagnol, at that stage the term *gnit* is not attested, but its ancestor *nient* does occur a few times, functioning as an adverbial (49, from *Pvlon Mat*) and pronominal NCI (50, from the *Batistonata*):

(49)   St-a   su-o   pruision n   m   pies   **nient**.
       DEM-FSG POSS.3MSG-MSG measure NEG 1SG.DAT please.PRS.3SG nothing
       'I don't like this measure of his at all.'

(50)   Ansun   i   di-s   mai **nient**.
       nobody 3PL.DAT tell-PRS.3SG ever nothing
       'Nobody ever tells them anything.'

However, as shown in §3, it is in the later stages of Romagnol that *gnit* begins to occur more frequently. For instance, it is reported in a particularly interesting entry of Morri's (1840: 372) dictionary as opposed precisely to *quèll* in its capacity as a noun/classifier:

(51)   a.   Qvest   l=è   un   *quèll* da **gnint**.
           DEM.MSG SCL.3MSG=be.PRS. SG ART.INDF.MSG thing of nothing
           'This is a thing that is worth nothing.'
      b.   L=è   méi   què *quèll* che **gnint**.
           SCL.3MSG=be.PRS.3SG better some thing than nothing
           'Something is better than nothing.'
      c.   Fè   par **gnint** un   *quell*.
           make.NFIN for nothing ART.INDF.MSG thing
           'To make a thing out of nothing (i.e. to make a fuss).'

Mattioli (1879) also reports *gnìnt/gnìt* as meaning 'nothing' and exemplifies with *quel da gnìt*, literally 'thing of nothing', translating it as *nonnulla*, 'trifle' (cf. fn. 10).

The final suggestion I want to put forward is that *gnit* replaced *cvël* as a [−human] negative indefinite, as shown by the Modern and Contemporary data. This is the centrifugal factor that cooperated in pushing *cvël* from the functional domain, just as the need for a replacement for *co(n)sa* acted as a centripetal factor. Indeed, since Old Romagnol *cuell* was depolarising, it was less marked for negation than its NCI competitor *gnit*, which meant that the latter became the preferred option as an inanimate indefinite in the scope of negation, as is visible in the contemporary language. Thus, the degrammaticalisation of *cvël* finds its place in the broader context of the chain shift described above. *Co(n)sa*, an element whose lexical semantics was bleaching, was replaced by

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[25] Interestingly, archaic and formal Italian *alcunché* ('anything/something') also seems to show a certain degree of neutrality. It can be used in the scope of negation, but it also appears in veridical contexts, though in the latter context it sounds better if it is further modified (cf. the entry *alcunché* in the Treccani dictionary at https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/alcunche/):

(i)   a.   Non ho   visto alcunché.
           NEG have.PRS.1SG seen anything
           'I have not seen anything.'
      b.   C'è   alcunché di strano n-el   su-o   comportamento.
           THR-be.PRS.3SG something of strange in-ART.MSG POSS.3SG-MSG behaviour
           'There is something strange about his behaviour.'

cvël, an indefinite that was degrammaticalising towards a more lexical meaning; the former grammatical function of *cvël*, in turn, was taken up by a more specific indefinite, which prevailed in that function by virtue of its negative markedness. In this broader context, degrammaticalisation was just one of the phenomena that participated in the reorganisation of the semantic space of indefiniteness in Romagnol, if a crucial one.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I described the development of an understudied Old Italo-Romance indefinite pronoun, *covelle*. I demonstrated that, from its original distribution as a Latin free relative with a Free-Choice interpretation, its use was extended to other nonveridical and antiveridical contexts. After describing an incipient expansion of *covelle* into veridical contexts in late 14th-century Tuscan, I devoted my attention to the distribution of *cuell* in Old Romagnol. I showed that in this variety the loss of association with nonveridicality progressed even further, as the item was degrammaticalising into a noun or classifier-like element with the meaning 'thing'. In the analysis, I associated this shift with polar neutralisation, or depolarisation, a dissociation from sensitivity to nonveridicality which brought *cuell* closer to the nominal domain. Later in the history of Romagnol, *cvël* consolidates its nominal uses and at the same time loses its function as a negative indefinite. I argued that the grammaticalisation of *co(n)sa*—the Old Romagnol word for 'thing'—as the *wh*-item 'what' contributed to making *cvël* the standard word for 'thing' in Modern and Contemporary Romagnol. As for the dissociation of *cvël* from negation, I argued that *gnit*, an NCI, replaced the former nonveridical indefinite *cuell* by virtue of its markedness and of its stronger association with negative contexts. In this sense, it can be concluded that polar neutralisation and depolarisation, and lexical competition and replacement are important factors that drive the degrammaticalisation of indefinite pronouns into nouns or classifiers. The three phenomena described above cooperated in a chain shift of which the degrammaticalisation of *cvël* constituted the central link. This series of shifts and the interaction of grammaticalisation and degrammaticalisation, on the one hand, and neutralisation and negative markedness, on the other, are the forces that put the chain shift in motion and led it towards its final stage in Contemporary Romagnol.

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