Nominal Negative Quantifiers as Adjuncts

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ABSTRACT. The topic of the following article is an exceptional use of the negative quantifier *nothing* and its correspondents in German, Dutch and Italian in which this element turns out to act like a negative polarity item (NPI). The circumstances under which this is the case have very briefly been described in Bayer (2006). *Nothing* is interpreted like an NPI whenever it is not licensed as an argument. Closer inspection reveals that adjunct status alone is too coarse a distinction, and that *nothing* must in fact be associated with the structural object position of the verb. The article is organized as follows. Section 1 presents the key observation using English data. Sections 2, 3 and 4 present constructed as well as attested data from English, German and Dutch respectively. Section 5 contains considerations of argument structures which trigger the interpretation of *nothing* as an NPI. Section 6 presents the core account. Section 7 sketches a diachronic scenario. Section 8 turns to negative concord and expands the account to Italian data. Section 9 contains a conclusion.

1. The key observation

In modern English nominal negative quantifiers such as *nobody* and *nothing* according to traditional wisdom serve two functions, they fill an A-position, and they negate the containing proposition.[1]

(1)	a.	Nobody was interested	SUBJECT
	b.	I could trust nobody	OBJECT
	c.	Nothing went wrong	SUBJECT
	d.	I ate nothing	OBJECT

A plausible and widely accepted assumption about the structure is that the negative quantifier (NQP) activates a Negation Phrase (NegP) whose head remains silent. Let us follow the line of research of Pollock (1989), Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991), Acquaviva (1993), Haegeman (1995) and others who have proposed a NegP in which a Neg-head (which is either empty or filled with a morpheme of negation) may associate with an NQP in one way or the other, a process which leads to cancellation of the neg-feature of the NQP. Of the different technical implementations (which are not in the center of the present article) a feasible one may follow from a combination of minimalist syntax with the semantic account of indefinites of Heim (1982). Under such an account the neg-head values the (uninterpretable) neg-feature of the NQP leaving behind an indefinite. If we follow the lead of Heim (1982) and take the indefinite as a restricted variable which is existentially bound via a default operation, we arrive at a tripartite semantic representation of the examples in (1) as in (2) in which the NQP appears to be properly decomposed into a neg-feature which is ultimately checked by sentential negation, a restricted variable and an existential quantifier which binds it.[2]

(2)	a.	$\neg (\exists x, x \in \text{PERSON}, x \text{ was interested})$
	b.	$\neg (\exists x, x \in \text{PERSON}, I \text{ could trust } x)$

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[1] Throughout this article I will use the terminology "negative quantifier" or "NQP" in a purely descriptive way in order to refer to n-words like *nothing*. Semantically these phrases are presumably neither genuine quantifiers nor are they the actual exponents of sentential negation.

[2] For an overview of various syntactic and semantic accounts of negation and an approach which is close to my own assumptions some of which were initially formulated in Bayer (1997), cf. Weiß (2002b).

       c. $\neg$ ($\exists x$, x $\in$ THING/EVENT, x went wrong)

       d. $\neg$ ($\exists x$, x $\in$ THING, I ate x)

Once the "logical" features have been stripped off, the residue of the NQP can be identified with the restricted variable that satisfies the argument structure of the contentive verbal head of the clause.

    Notice now that there are cases which in one sense escape this schema because the nominal element *nothing* is licensed without filling an A-position. The following examples in which *nothing* follows an intransitive verb were found on the internet.

(3)   I know the Mayor and he looks nothing like that

(4)   okay, my dentist's chair looks nothing like that

(5)   First of all she talks nothing like that, second of all, ...

(6)   Okay, so he looks and talks nothing like that character, but he has the same hat and cab

(7)   Now I've burned discs that my player had a difficult time reading before and this current situation appears nothing like that

(8)   The StoreFront web site says that their software is highly flexible and scalable, and tops in the industry. It appears nothing like that to us. Am I missing something?

(9)   My car runs nothing like that though

(10)   Actually, I don't know why they call it *goose step*. Geese walk nothing like that

(11)   It is simply the rc plane physics. A dodo flies nothing like that

In all these cases, *nothing* (*like that*) represents sentential negation but at the same time has the flavor of emphasis or strengthened negation which is typically found in negative sentences with a Negative Polarity Items (NPI). For instance, (3) can be successfully paraphrased as in (12).

(12)   I know the Mayor and he doesn't look anything like that at all

Significantly, this NPI-interpretation is missing in cases like (1) in which the NQP is associated with an argument position. (1d), for example, does not mean the same as (13).[3]

(13)   I didn't eat anything at all

The first question to ask is whether *nothing like that* is a standing expression in which *nothing* contributes negation and the comparative anaphoric part *like that* is the NPI proper. In the following section we will take a closer look at English data, and we will see that this does not

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[3] This should not mean that (1d) cannot be strengthened toward an NPI-interpretation. Extra stress on *nothing* would have such an effect. For mechanisms of widening and strengthening utterances with *any* cf. Kadmon and Landman (1993). While *any* has a general domain widening effect (p.368), it does not as such turn its complement into an NPI. If it did, strengthening with *at all* as in (13) would not be expected. Paolo Acquaviva (p.c.) points out an example of strengthening from Old Italian which in addition shows a non-argumental use of *niente* (which in Italian also occurs in *Niente lavoro, niente soldi!* , "no work, no pay!").

    (i)   Sono alquanti suoi doni (cioè dello Santo Spirito) senza   i   quali <u>in nessunomodo</u> <u>niente</u>

           are   some   his gifts i.e. of-the holy   spirit   without the which in no   way   nothing

           si   può andare a vita eterna

           REF   can go   to life eternal

           "There are some of the Holy Spirit's gifts without which one cannot under any circumstances at all reach eternal life" from: Tommaseo and Bellini (http://www.dizionario.org/)

More on Italian *niente* will follow in section 8 below.

lead to a satisfactory account.

2. English

Although examples with *nothing like that* appear to be very frequent, there is variation as one can see in the following two quotes from William Shakespeare and from Mark Twain.[4]

(14)   My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun
                        (William Shakespeare, Sonnet 130)

(15)   I pray thee of thy grace believe me, I did but speak the truth, most dread lord; for I am the meanest among thy subjects, being a pauper born, and 'tis by a sore mischance and accident I am here, albeit I was therein nothing blameful. I am but young to die, and thou canst save me with one little word. Oh speak it, sir!
                        (Mark Twain, *The Prince and the Pauper* Chapter 5)

The next examples show *nothing* in combination with the deverbal adjective *daunted* which means something like "discouraged".

(16)   After this the enchanted axe cut off my arms, one after the other; but, nothing daunted, I had them replaced with tin ones.
                        (Frank L. Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*)

(17)   Nothing daunted, Anne proceeded onward to the church alone.
                        (Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Anne Of Green Gables*)

(18)   But, *nothing* daunted, he jumped to his feet and cried ...
                        (Carlo Collodi, *The Adventures Of Pinocchio*)

In these quotations, *nothing daunted* means "not discouraged at all". According to the OED, there is an adverbial usage of *nothing* which is glossed as "not at all", "in no way", and is considered to be "now archaic". Nevertheless, the following internet finds with intransitive verbs are from speakers of contemporary English.

(19) sleep

    a.   Inside, Lizzette's mother, Rubi Soria, slept in a bedroom, exhausted from crying. "She has slept nothing all night," Alejandro Peña said.

    b.   Last 2 weeks I was everyday too late in my bed! All Vince's fault, and now I'm everly tired. See Monday and Tuesday I slept nothing, all because of him.

    c.   I have slept nothing for I've been thinking of you.

(20) dance
    cheers. actually I danced nothing. not that I didn't dance, but I did it in the manner of nothing. not in a good way though.

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[4] Thanks to Larry Horn (p.c.) for drawing my attention to the data in (14) through (18).

(21) complain / protest / lobby

    a.   I am staying here now..... AS and RA this place sucks! room upgrade to a business room nothing special.... I complained nothing, I even called London to complain to the RA service ...

    b.   Funny you would label me a protester when in fact I have protested nothing and am not advocating a withdrawal.

    c.   Bobby is a simple man. He has done nothing of great notoriety. He has penned no unforgettable lyrics, composed no music, erected no architecture, written no profound works, accumulated no wealth. He has protested nothing and lobbied nothing.

    d.   Christians have not stood up for evil. They have sat back and protested nothing.

The following examples of the use of work show that an NPI can still be added.

(22) work

    a.   the main USB hub worked nothing at all, though strangely other USB parts did.[5]

    b.   If I work nothing at all - for one week - I will receive $ 76 from unemployment.

    c.   Surface area is what makes intercoolers work, that tube is going to work nothing at all like an intercooler.

Uses of *nothing* which trigger an NPI-effect can also be found with predicative adjectives like *afraid, pleased, short of* etc.[6]

(23) afraid / pleased / short of

    a.   Liga (= a dog) is very delicate, adores children, is ready to play with them during all days. She is nothing afraid.

    b.   I am nothing pleased with inculcation or wresting-in of matters, ...

    c.   Most of their answers, and a number of the negotiations we have had with them, witness that they were nothing short of us, ...

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[5] Examples with VP-ellipsis like (22a) are highly informative as they show that both the neg-feature and the lexical part which gives rise to the NPI-interpretation must have disappeared from the semantic representation that substitutes the elided part at LF. Cf. Merchant (2000) for data and an account of antecedent-contained deletion in examples such as (i),
(i)   That boy won't [do a damn thing I ask him to [vp do]
as well as Weiß (2002b: 137).
[6] Further strengthening with *at all* would, of course, also be possible in these cases.

On the basis of such finding one can conclude that the "adverbial" usage of *nothing* that the OED mentions is still part of the productive part of the current system of negation in English, perhaps with a restriction to certain sociolinguistic registers. Importantly, this non-argumental use of a nominal appears to be confined to *nothing*. To my knowledge, there are no non-argumental occurrences of *nobody*. Given this, we arrive at the following generalizations.

(24) <u>Generalizations about English *nothing*</u>

    (i)   *Nothing* triggers an NPI-reading only in its adverbial usage.[7]
    (ii)   In its adverbial usage *nothing* encodes both (the feature of) sentential negation and an NPI.

In the next two sections, we will take a look at German and Dutch in order to explore whether the finding about non-argumental *nothing* is more than just an idiosyncrasy of English.

3. German

German *nicht* used to corresponds to English *nothing* in containing an *n*-morpheme of negation and a nominal part for "thing" – *wiht* – which unlike English *thing* can only be traced historically.[8] The contemporary indefinite pronominal *nichts* derives from the Middle High German (MHG) genitive form *nihtes*. The analysis as a genitive became obsolete in the 14th century, as a consequence of which *nichts* began to be used like a nominative or accusative NP. Paul (1919/1954: vol.III, 224) observes that the negator *nicht* has turned from its original nominal category in MHG into an adverb only after *nichts* has been established as a nomi-

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[7] One reviewer doubts that *nothing* is an NPI. The fact that we can add another NPI seems to nourish this doubt. On the other hand, adjunct *nothing* gives rise to strengthening even without such additions and without adding extra stress etc. Given that the class of so-called NPIs is far from homogeneous, the doubts may concern terminology more than the subject matter. Notice also that n-words have been identified in older stages of Germanic which can only be understood as NPIs. Hoeksema (1997) provides the following examples from Middle Dutch in which *nie* and *noit* cannot be sentential negators but make perfect NPIs.

    (i)   God die makere es   alre   dinc / dat nie   was of lijf ontfinc
                god who maker   is of every thing   that (n)ever was or life received
                "God who is the creator of all things that evere were or sprung to life"
    (ii)   dat hi die beste ridder was / die noit   quam in sconinx   hof
                that he the best knight was   that (n)ever came in the-king's court
                "that he was the best knight that ever came to the king's court"

Hoeksema argues that in the Middle Dutch period n-words must at least have been ambiguous between NQPs and existential QPs in the sense of NPIs. The following Old English example from Beowulf, taken trom Beukema and Tomic (1995), shows that the lexical element *wiht*, which is historically part of English *not* as well as of German *nicht*, appears in its bare form in a negated clause where it can hardly be anything else but an NPI.

    (iii)   wihte   ne wene
                in-any-way not think-1SG
                "I don't think at all"

Similar usages of *wiht* exist in OHG as Helmut Weiß (p.c.) points out to me. Apart from this, there is a substantial part of theoretical research on negation which attributes NPI-status even to argumental NQPs which depend on a c-commanding neg-head. Thus there is no reason for an a priori exclusion of NQPs from the class of NPIs. We will return to the relation between NQP and NPI in section 7 below.

[8] The root appears in modern German in lexemes like *Wicht* (pejorative for "guy") and *Wichtel* ("gnome") and has cognates in various Old Germanic languages. See also the previous note.

nal.[9] Until the 19th century, *nicht* and *nichts* appear to some extent exchangeable as long as *nichts* would not replace a structural (accusative) object position. The adverbial use of *nichts* is reported in the Grimm dictionary where its status as an emphatic negation comparable to *durchaus nicht*, *gar nicht* ("not at all") is explicitly mentioned. The following examples are from Early New High German (ENHG) and were taken from the Grimm dictionary.

(25)   was got wol gefelt, das gefelt   den selbigen spöttern nichts
       what god well pleases that pleases these very   mockers nothing
       „What pleases god this does not please these mockers at all" (Keisersberg)

(26)   der glaube aber   zweifelt nichts   dran
       the faith   however   doubts   nothing there-at
       „however, faith does not cast any doubt on it" (Aventin)

(27)   als gehorten sie nichts zur   kirchen
       as belonged they nothing to-the church
       „as if they didn't belong to the church" (Aventin)

(28)   dasz er also sehr verblendet wäre,   dasz er der fünf bücher Mosi nichts   achtete
       that he so very misled   would-be that he the five books Mose nothing respected
       „that he would be so misled that he would not respect the five books of Mose"
       (Aventin)

(29)   dasz er doch hierab   nichts erschracke
       that he PRT *here-from nothing frightened-became*
       „that he did not really get frightened from this" (Ringwald)

(30)   ich frage nichts nach hohem pracht
       I   ask   nothing for high splendor
       "I am not looking for high splendor" (Neumark)

This usage continues for a long time in history. (31) is from Goethe, (32) from Achim v. Arnim.

(31)   mache was du willst, ich kann nichts   denken; aber folgen will ich
       do   what you want I   can   nothing think   but follow will I
       "Do wnat you want, I cannot think; but I will be obedient" (Goethe)

(32)   daß ihr Bruder sich gar   nichts um sie bekümmere
       that her brother REFL entirely nothing for her care
       "that her brother would absolutely not care for her" (v. Arnim)

Similar examples can be found in Paul (1919/1954: 224, vol.III). In all of them, *nichts* can be replaced by *nicht*, however the contexts suggest throughout an emphatic character in the sense of an NPI reading.

Modern Standard German retains adverbial *nichts* with certain predicates in the presence of which it can alternate with the standard negation *nicht*.

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[9] The nominal origin of *nicht* can still be seen in the predicate *zunichte machen* (to destroy) where *nicht* carries the parochial dative Case-marker *-e*. Cf. Jäger (2008) for a detailed description of the interlocked and overlapping changes that *nicht* and *nichts* underwent in the history of German.

(33)   a.   Karl hat nichts gearbeitet
               Karl has nothing worked

       b.   Karl hat nicht gearbeitet
               Karl has not   worked

The semantic difference is clear enough: While the unmarked negation in (33b) is well compatible with a situation in which Karl is an industrious man who happens to have stopped work for a certain period of time, (33a) implies that Karl was or is a sluggard. He did not work at all. A similar albeit somewhat weaker contrast can be observed in *Das hat ihn*$_{acc}$ {*nichts / nicht*} *gekümmert* ("This did not bother him") and in *Das hat ihm*$_{dat}$ {*nichts / nicht*} *geschadet* ("This did not harm him").

In German dialects as well as in colloquial language and informal registers adverbial *nichts* can be found with high regularity. (34) is a constructed examples of Bavarian which sounds perfectly natural to native speakers of the dialect.

(34)   Biaschal, do wead   fei   nix   radl g'foan!
       boy   here becomes PRT *nothing cycle ridden*
       „Hey guy, you cannot ride your bike here!"

(35), with the intransitive verb *greinen* ("to cry"), is from a Franconian dialect of Northern Bavaria, reported in Feller (1914: 14).

(35)   Brauchst nix   ze greina
       need-2SG nothing to cry
       "You don't need to cry"

Given the deontic usages of the verbs *werden* and *brauchen* which hold in these examples, the emphatic interpretation of *nichts* is quite naturally suggested in both of these cases.

In the following, examples of non-argumental *nichts* are presented as they can be found on the internet.[10] They are slightly substandard but clearly grammatical. Native speakers of German, including linguists, sometimes reject such examples spontaneously. In my view this is an experimental artifact of the metalinguistic task of judging grammaticality. There is a general tendency for speakers to be far more normative in metalinguistic tasks than in their spontaneous language production and comprehension. This is the main reason for relying almost exclusively on attested data in the present study. The examples below are fully within the range of colloquial spoken German.

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[10] As a methodological caveat one has to be aware that examples from the internet may be contaminated. The authors may not be fully competent in the language they are using, they may be engaged in making linguistic jokes, they may use a fabricated insider language etc. Nevertheless, if certain pattern recur frequently, one should be confident that such artifacts do not play a role, and that the data are truly representative of the native speaker's linguistic competence. To the best of my knowledge, artifacts can be excluded from the data that are being reported in the present study.

(36) lügen ("to lie")

Da   wird   nichts gelogen
there becomes nothing lied
„There will/must be no lying"

(37) weinen / jammern ("to cry", "to lament")[11]

Mausi war voll tapfer... nichts   geweint, nichts gejammert
Mausi was fully brave   nothing crying   nothing lamenting
„Mausi was really brave ... no crying, no whining"

(38) herumspielen ("play around")

Ich habe aber   außer dem SuperDrive an der Hardware nichts   herumgespielt
I   have however except the S.D.   at the hardware nothing around-played
„But with the exception of the super drive I have not played around with the   hard-
ware"

(39) schlafen ("to sleep")

Von Freitag auf Samstag hab ich aber   fast   nichts geschlafen
from Friday to Saturday have I   however almost nothing slept
„However, between Friday and Saturday I hardly slept"

(40) lachen ("to laugh")

    a. Ich habe nichts   gegessen nichts   gelacht nur in meinem zimmer gehockt
       I   have nothing eaten   nothing laughed only in my   room   sat
       und geheult
       and cried
       "I stopped eating and laughing. In only sat in my room and cried"

    b. In den letzten tagen hab ich fast   nichts   gelacht, und jeder der mich
        in the last   days have I   almost nothing laughed and everyone who me
        kennt weiss dass ich sonst   immer fröhlich bin und lache.
        knows knows that I   usually always happy   am and laugh
        „In the last few days I almost didn't laugh at all, and everybody who knows me
        knows that I am usually happy and laugh a lot"

(41) schwindeln ("to cheat")

Ich habe nichts   geschwindelt, ich habe nichts   getan. Ich musste bloß
I   have nothing cheated   I   have nothing done I   must   only
 immer bezahlen
always pay
„I didn't cheat, I did nothing. I only had to pay all the time"

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[11] Cf. Jäger (2008: 103f.) for an OHG example involving *weinen*.

(42)   herumfummeln ("to fumble around")

        Nein an der XLL hab' ich nichts   herumgefummelt
        no   at the XLL have I   nothing around-fumbled
        No, I didn't fumble around with the XLL"

Relevant examples with predicative adjectives, comparable to those in (23), are not frequent, but they do occur. *Die Welt ist nichts nett* ("The world is not nice at all"), *Aber ich war nichts zufrieden* ("But I wasn't satisfied at all"), *Andere Wiedererweckte sind nichts freundlich* ("Other reawaked ones are not friendly at all") are examples from reliable sources found on the internet.

Given the data from ENHG which have been reported above and the continuation of the use of *nichts* as an adjunct in non-normative varieties of German, there can be no doubt that the generalization about English *nothing* in (24) can be extended to German. Just like *nothing*, the nominal NQP *nichts* shows up in non-argument positions where it systematically yields a negative polarity effect.

4. Dutch

As can be expected, a similar situation may be found in Dutch. Hoeksema (1994) provides the following data.

(43)   Dat kan me {niet / niets   / niet veel   / weinig / geen bal} schelen
        that can me   not / nothing / not much / little   / no ball   differ
        "It makes no/no big etc difference to me"

The version with *niet* represents simplex negation. Those with *niet veel* and *weinig* are negative sentences due to a negative measure phrase. As Hoeksema observes, the version with *niets* appears to be on a par with the genuine NPI (*geen*) *bal* (actually "testicle"). The following examples, provided by Jack Hoeksema (p.c.) confirm that the use of *niets* in non-argument position gives rise to an NPI-interpretation. The examples are said to be slightly substandard but grammatical.

(44)   Je bent niets   beter dan je   vader.
        you are nothing better than your father
        „You aren't any better than your father"

(45)   Je bent niks   aardig
        you are nothing nice
        "You are not nice at all"

(46)   Je bent niks   niet lief
        you are nothing not nice
        "You are not nice at all"

(46) is of special interest as it shows negative concord (NC). *Niets* appears together with (and is arguably in the scope of) *niet*. Given that Dutch is head-final, *niet* must be the carrier of

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sentential negation here while *niks* is the dependent (and to-be-checked) element. It is likely to be in the specifier of *niet*.[12]

Let me provide naturalistic data, again drawn from the internet, in order to show that the phenomenon cannot be considered a rare issue in Dutch, at least not if one is willing to pay attention to informal and colloquial registers.

(47)   <u>slapen ("to sleep")</u>

    a. vandaag is het ondertussen weer bijna   4 uur   en   heb   weer nog   niets   geslapen
    today   is it   meanwhile   again almost 4 o'clock and have again yet nothing slept
    „today it is meanwhile 4 o'clock, and I have again not slept yet at all"

    b. Ik heb   bijna   niets   geslapen, ...
    I   have almost nothing slept
    „I have almost not slept at all"

    c. Ik heb dus   bijna   niets   geslapen, steeds maar herhaald in mijn hoofd wat er
    I   have thus almost nothing slept   always but   repeated in   my   head   what there
    gezegd was
    said was
    „Thus I did almost not sleep at all, but always repeated in my mind what had been said"

(48)   <u>fietsen ("to cycle")</u>

    a. We hebben nog niets   gefietst want   we hadden een beetje rust nodig,
    we have   yet nothing cycled because we had   a   little   rest   necessary
    vooral   de knieën
    foremost the knees
    „We hadn't cycled yet as we had to take a little rest, most of all the knees"

    b. Niks   gefietst vandaag, veel   te   lui voor
    nothing cycled   today   much too lazy for
    „Not cycled today, much too lazy for it"

(49)   <u>huilen ("to cry") / protesteren ("to protest")</u>

    a. want   hij is de hele   tijd braaf   geweest en   heeft niets   gehuild
    because he is the whole time well-behaved been   and has   nothing cried
    of geprotesteerd
    or protested
    "since he was always well-behaved and neither cried nor protested"

    b. Ik heb   een spuitje   gehad en   ik heb   niets   gehuild! Flink he!
    I   have an injection had   and I   have nothing cried   tough   isn't it
    „I got an injection, and I didn't cry at all. Tough, isn't it?"

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[12] We will return to NC in section 8.

    c.   Ik ben gedurende de vlucht een superbrave meid geweest en heb niets   gehuild
       I have during   the flight a   super-brave girl   been   and have nothing cried
       „During the flight I was a super brave girl and didn't cry at all"

The occurrence of the NQP in non-argument position which triggers the NPI-effect is obviously not unconstrained. In the next section we will take a look at the lexico-syntactic environment in which NQPs in this function occur and try to find a generalization about the argument structures involved.

5. Argument structure[13]

The majority of uses of adjunct *nothing* which trigger an NPI-interpretation are confined to intransitive verbs or verbs with a selected PP. For English, a cursory search for transitive verbs yielded results for the verbs *help* and *bother*, the example in (50f) being from an 18th century text.

(50)   a.   But all his sorrowing helped him nothing
       b.   but it helped him nothing at all
       c   The small glass of cognac before him helped him nothing
       d.   Her conversion and sincereity helped her nothing, she was executed when
               Britain failed to accede to demands that British Forces be withdrawn.
       e.   Mrs. Yaverland turned on Ellen a glance which recognised her quality as queer
               and precious, yet was not endearing and helped her nothing in the girl's heart.
       f.   Last year I saw with my own eyes that an Indian killed his own wife in broad
               daylight in the street here in Philadelphia, and that bothered him nothing.

                                                (Gustavus Hesselius, 1714)

Typically, *help* is only used non-agentively, *bother* as a psych-verb. Among the German examples above, *gefallen* in (25) is a psych-verb with DAT < NOM; *achten* in (28) is agentive but with a NOM < GEN Case frame. Examples can also be found with psych-verbs like *stören* and *kümmern*.[14]

(51)   obwohl   mich das nichts   stört
      although me   this nothing disturbs
      "although I am not at all disturbed by that"

(52)   In meiner Branche gibt es   allerdings etliche Händler, die das nichts   kümmert
      in my   branch are there however certain dealer   who that nothing bothers
      "In my field there are, however, certain dealers who are not worried by this
      in the least"

For the verb *helfen*, only occurrences with a non-agentive subject were found, in agreement with the English data in (50).

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[13] Special thanks to Cecilia Poletto (p.c.) for discussing relevant aspects of argument structure with me.

[14] One reviewer feels that in (51) *nichts* could be an argument. I am not aware of any use in which *stören* could be a 3-place verb though.

(53)   a.   aber das hat mir nichts   geholfen
               but   that has me nothing helped
               „but this didn't help me"

       b.   Ich kenne mich dort   nicht aus, hatte sogar einen Stadtplan dabei. -
               I   know REFL there not   out had even   a   city-map along
               Aber der hat mir nichts   geholfen
               but   this has me nothing helped
               „I don't know the area there, I even had a city map with me, but it was
               not of much help"

       c.   ... ist die Wahrheit, aber sie hilft   mir nichts!
                is the truth   but it helps me nothing
               „is the truth, but it (=the truth) is of no help for me"

The Dutch example in (43) shows the psych-verb *schelen* which has an ACC/DAT < NOM
Case frame. Verbs in the passive voice are usually impersonal passives as in (34), (36) and (in
all likelihood) in the following example from the internet.

(54)   Altes auf neues Radlager   ergibt schön gleichmäßige Ansatzfläche, es wird
       old   on new   wheel bearing yields nicely even   contact-area it becomes
       nichts   geschlagen, ...
       nothing hammered
       „Old on new wheel bearing results in a highly even contact area. No hammering is
       necessary"

German has a small class of NPIs which arise without a visible trigger. The accusative mini-
mizer *einen Dreck* („a dirt", in the sense of „a damn") is such an item. It seems that non-
argumental *nichts* and *einen Dreck* are often interchangeable. In the following examples those
in a. were found on the internet. The versions in b. are constructed but sufficiently plausible
alternatives.

(55) a. dann wird es sie   einen Dreck interessieren, ob   ihr weiterspielt oder nicht
        then will it them a   dirt   interest   whether you on-play   or   not
        „then it will interest them a damn whether you guys keep playing or not"

    b. dann wird es sie nichts interessieren, ob ihr weiterspielt oder nicht

(56) a. und es dann so aussieht, als ob es ihn einen Dreck kümmern würde, was
        and it then so appears as if it him a   dirt   bother   would what
        aus ihr wird
        of her becomes
        „and it appears as if he gave a damn about what will become of her"

    b. und es dann so aussieht, als ob es ihn nichts kümmern würde, was aus ihr wird

Nevertheless, examples with the NPI *einen Dreck* can also be found with transitive agentive
verbs in which *nichts* would be inappropriate.

(57) a. Das Sozialamt   hilft uns einen Dreck da   sie   noch verheiratet sind
 the social security office helps us a   dirt   because they still married   are
 „The social security office does not help us at all because they (= the speaker's
 parents) are still married"

  b. (*)Das Sozialamt hilft uns nichts da sie noch verheiratet sind

While the subject in (57a) is understood as an agent, the subject in (57b) can only be under-
stood as an instrument or stimulus. With an agentive interpretation, the example is ungram-
matical. Example (58a) is from the internet. If we replace the NPI *einen Dreck* by *nichts* as in
(58b), the result is ungrammatical.

(58) a. Der wird einen Dreck jemanden umbringen, der wird genau   niemanden umbringen.
 he   will a   dirt   someone kill   he   will exactly nobody   kill
 „He will not kill someone at all, he will clearly nobody"

  b. *Der wird ihn nichts   umbringen,
 he   will him nothing kill

This suggests that non-argumental *nichts* is in competition with an object position that is
induced by the agentive subject. Recall that emphatic *nichts* was found only in impersonal
passives. Again it turns out to be ill-placed in unaccusative passives whereas the NPI *einen
Dreck* is compatible with them.

(59) a. Der Fritz wird   einen Dreck eingesperrt
 the Fritz becomes a   dirt   imprisoned
 „Fritz will under no circumstances be imprisoned"

  b. *Der Fritz wird nichts eingesperrt

The same contrast can be observed in connection with unaccusative verbs with or without the
reflexive *sich*.

(60) a. Dieser Safe wird sich einen Dreck őffnen
 this   safe will REF a   dirt   open
 „This safe will not open at all"

  b. *Dieser Safe wird sich nichts őffnen

(61) a. Der Bodensee   friert   diesen Winter einen Dreck zu
 the Lake-Constance freezes this   winter a   dirt   close
 „Lake Constance will not freeze this winter at all"

  b. *Der Bodensee friert diesen Winter nichts zu

Although compiling the amount of data that would have to be explored to reach a firm con-
clusion is beyond the scope of the present investigation, here is a first characterization of the
environment in which non-argumental *nothing/nichts* appears to be licensed.[15]

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[15] In the absence of field work on Dutch, I must limit myself here to English and German.

(62) <u>Generalization about the attachment of non-argumental NQP</u>

   The non-argumental NQP *nothing/nichts* is merged in the structural
   object position of a predicate to which no theta-role has been assigned.[16]

It is unfortunately not entirely clear what counts as the structural object position. The uncontroversial case is the prototypical object of an agentive verb, cf. Dowty (1991). An accusative experiencer as in German *Das Buch*$_{NOM}$ *interessiert ihn*$_{ACC}$ *nicht* („the book does not interest him") is certainly different as seen by the inability to passivize (**Er wird nicht von dem Buch interessiert*) or to form the middle (**Er interessiert sich leicht durch solche Bücher*). German datives are distinct from structural objects. Why they appear to reject merger of the NQP in the context of an agentive subject (cf. (57b)) but not in the context of an instrumental subject is not entirely clear at the moment. The reason could be that in the latter case the argument structure is reversed according to the animacy hierarchy which introduces the (animate) experiencer as the external argument leaving the stimulus/instrumental argument in the VP. As this argument receives nominative Case, the structural object position is free.[17] Intransitives with an agentive subject (unergatives) obviously have a non-argumental structural object position in which they can license NQPs while unaccusatives do not. Another class of verbs which appear with NQPs that give rise to an NPI-interpretation are meteorological verbs. The following English and German examples were found on the internet.

(63) <u>rain, snow</u>

   a.   "TYPICAL Windhoek. Either it rains nothing or it all comes pouring down at
         once," said ex-Miss Namibia finalist Chantal van Taak yesterday morning ...

   b.   It has snowed nothing here

   c.   I live in England, it snowed nothing today! And we got 0 inches!

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[16] Non-isomorphy of theta position and Case position is most common as function-changing operations show. Staudinger (1997: 168ff), who an anonymous reviewer drew my attention to, discusses resultative constructions in German such as *Peter hat seine Partnerin müde getanzt* ("Peter danced his partner tired") with the question how the object licensed by the result predicate, *seine Partnerin*, could ever receive accusative Case if not from the verb *tanzen* which, however, is intransitive. Straightforward examples are also cognate objects, which are Case-licensed without having argument status.

[17] An indication of what is going on may be that even in English (where "datives" usually can undergo NP-movement), the object of *help* rejects NP-movement in cases with an instrumental subject: **John was helped by {Mary / *this medicine}*. Kratzer (1996) develops argument structure in a now widely accepted way by introducing the external argument via a Voice-head (or little *v*) which is projected above VP and licenses an agentive subject if V assigns (or potentially assigns) accusative Case. The examples in (i) and (ii) show that in German it might be the direct object position per se that is relevant rather than the position which accusative Case is assigned to.

   (i)   *Ich habe meiner Frau (beim Abwasch)   nichts   geholfen
           I$_{NOM}$ *have my   wife*$_{DAT}$ *at- the dish-washing nothing helped*
   (ii)   Der Schutzanzug   hat mir (bei der Kernschmelze) nichts   geholfen
           the protective-suit$_{NOM}$ *has me*$_{DAT}$ *at the meltdown   nothing helped*

Folli and Harley (2007) adjust phrase structure with *v* to the distinction of human (volitional) versus non-human/inanimate (non-volitional) causers: *John ate the sandwich* vs. *The sea ate the beach away*. Placement of the adjunct NQP is in both cases equally impossible. What matters is obviously nothing but the structural object position for which the NQP competes.

(64) regnen („to rain"), schneien ("to snow"), blitzen ("to lighten"), donnern ("to thunder")

    a.   Bei uns, am   Rande der Cevennen in Südfrankreich, hat es in
            at us at-the border the C.   in South-France has it in
            den vergangenen neun Monaten praktisch   nichts geregnet
            the past   nine months practically nothing rained
            "In our area at the border of the Cevennes in Southern France during the past nine months it has practically not rained at all"

    b.   In der Rhön hat es in dieser Saison bislang fast   nichts   geschneit
            in the Rhoen has it in this   season sofar   almost nothing snowed
            "In the Rhoen, it almost didn't snow at all in this season so far"

    c.   Es blitzt   und donnert nichts, weil   es keine Gewitter gibt
            it lightens and thunders nothing because it no   storms   gives
            "There is neither lightening nor thunder because there are no storms"

While in these constructions the NQP must be seen as unlicensed by argument structure, in other contexts some such verbs may in fact appear with an object, a fact which suggests that these meteorological verbs in principle leave room for a direct object.

(65) a.   the year it rained money
      b.   Damn, I just wish it snowed money

(66) a.   ... der einzige Tag in der Woche war, an dem   es kein Manna regnete
            the only   day in the week   was on which it no   manna rained
            "was the only day in the week on which it did not rain manna"

      b.   dass es zu Weihnachten wieder ordentlich Geschenke schneit
            that it at Christmas   again   properly   gifts   snows
            "that it will again properly snow down gifts at Christmas"

In the next section we will explore how the insertion of the NQP can yield sentential negation while simultaneously giving rise to the NPI-effect that has been observed in the data throughout.
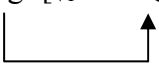

6. Accounting for the NPI-effect

In order to understand the NPI-effect that emerges as soon as *nothing* etc. is merged as a non-argument it is important to know (i) that in the cases considered so far, the NQP activates sentential negation, and (ii) that the NQP *nothing* itself includes the lexical structure that triggers the NPI-interpretation. In other words, *nothing* is special as it fulfils two jobs at once, the establishment of negation and NPI-licensing. This is possible if we follow one of the standard assumptions about the syntax of negation, namely that there is a Negation Phrase (NegP) whose head is either overtly a morpheme of negation or is covertly identified as such. Identification of the NegP by NQP seems to be natural because negation has to be signaled somehow.[18] Thinking first about argumental NQP, the NQP may be merged into the direct object

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[18] Cf. Acquaviva (1993: 42) who referred in the wake of Pollock (1989) to the role of an operator in the specifier of NegP. Together with Ladusaw (1992), Acquaviva was one of the first to notice that NQPs must ultimately

position and will be licensed as a negative element as soon as merger to VP creates a neg-head which can value the unvalued neg-feature inherent in the NQP, <uNeg>. I assume for concreteness that in a language without NC such as the standard varieties of Dutch, English and German a silent Neg-head will be merged to VP which engages in a probe/goal agreement relation with the locally accessible NQP. (67) demonstrates how NQP can license sentence negation according to a minimalist view of feature valuation.[19]

(67)   Neg° [$_{VP}$ ... NQP$_{<uNeg>}$] $\Rightarrow$ Neg° [$_{VP}$ ... NQP$_{<uNeg>}$]

AGREE

A sentence like *She ate nothing* will turn into a structure in which the NQP has been stripped of its neg-feature while the semantically relevant negation now rests solely in the head of NegP, i.e. the sentence reads as „It is not the case that I ate something".[20] The abstract presence of sentential negation is shown by tag tests as in *She ate nothing, and HE didn't either*. The residue of *nothing* that remains after feature valuation is the existentially bound restricted variable as seen in (2) above. To be sure, the residue which is handed over to semantics proper is not a negative expression any longer. Neg° could also have an EPP-feature in which case NQP would undergo overt movement to SpecNegP and engage in feature valuation under what is known as spec-head agreement. This is now standardly assumed for Bavarian NC-construction where NQPs raise to SpecNegP.

To return to the core issue of this article, namely the nominal NQP as an adjunct, assume now that the NQP can freely be merged into a virtual DO-position even if there is no argument structure which would lexically demand such a position. Although we must leave the exact reason for this possibility open, the available data and the considerations in the previous section suggest that merger of the NQP has something to do with structural Case assignment. Since *nothing, nichts, niets* are NPs, they need to have Case. German provides evidence that *nichts* (together with a class of other bare indefinite nominals) lacks a morphological Case paradigm and can as such only be structurally Case-licensed.[21] This distinguishes the NQP

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turn into indefinites in the scope of negation. The operator in SpecNegP was responsible for that. Since then, the technical implementations in terms of copy movement and agreement at a distance have changed, but the original insight remains unchallenged.

[19] It is important to notice here that I deviate from the Chomskyan standard theory by assuming an uninterpretable neg-feature in the goal and an interpretable neg-feature in the probe, exactly the opposite of what the standard theory proposes. A strong motivation to do so comes from NC. NC may affect an unlimited number of NQPs which in the process of feature valuation get rid of their neg-feature. In all the cases in which a positionally fixed neg-head (head of NegP) can be found, it is the NQP's neg-feature that disappears, and not the neg-feature of the head. This is exactly what Weiß (2002a) assumes for NC in Bavarian, and Penka and von Stechow (2001) for Standard German. For a theory of agreement in terms of feature sharing which remains neutral w.r.t. the locus of feature deletion cf. Pesetsky and Torrego (2007) and Brody's (1997) proposal of Radical Interpretability.

[20] There are, of course, technical alternatives. There could be LF-movement of *nothing*, there could be feature-movement of the relevant substructure of the NQP, and there could be overt movement of the NQP to SpecNegP followed by remnant movement which obscures the actual positioning of the NQP as in Kayne's (1998) account. I will follow the minimalist proposal without discussion of these issues as they are outside the scope of this article.

[21] For example, *nichts* cannot be merged as an object of a verb that requires dative Case such as *ähneln* ("to resemble"). This can be seen in the contrast between (i) and (ii) where only the full DP is overtly Case marked.
(i)   *Dieses Objekt ähnelt   nichts
         this   object resembles nothing
(ii)   Dieses Objekt ähnelt   kein-**em**   Würfel
         this   object resembles no -DAT cube

from overtly Case-marked DPs ("free" accusatives) such as *den ganzen Tag* („the whole day") or *einen Dreck* („a dirt") which are licensed outside the system of structural Case and may thus be considered to have lexical Case. If the NQP is merged in a structural Case position without the license of argument structure, the same valuation process as in (67) will apply, though with one noticeable side effect: the semantic remnant of *nothing*, „thing", will survive in core syntax as shown in (68b).

(68) a.   She ate nothing $\Rightarrow$ She NOT ate ~~no~~thing   +OBJECT
      b.   She slept nothing $\Rightarrow$ She NOT slept ~~no~~thing   −OBJECT

It does not require much fantasy to see that the seemingly superfluous element THING is the element that triggers the NPI-effect. In (68a) the standard interpretation can apply according to which THING is the minimal (and perhaps contextually enriched) restrictor of a variable x that will by default be bound by an existential operator. An anonymous reviewer suspects that (68b) should be interpreted accordingly. But for this to be possible, THING has to be the restrictor of a variable. Given that the argument structure of *sleep* does not provide an internal argument, there can be no variable and no related existential stipulation.[22] Viewing it from a different perspective, the status of THING as a semantic restrictor would be equally unclear. Things which are eaten are likely to be edibles. What would things be which are being slept?

It is certainly not an accident that the expression *a thing* is one of the NPIs that occur in the English language. A viable alternative to (68b) would be (69).

(69)   She didn't sleep a thing

Examples from the internet with the NPI *a thing* are given in (70).

(70) a.   I rode that trail on my hardtail and didn't walk a thing
      b.   I didn't talk a thing about work
      c.   They don't talk a thing about general Musharaf at all, they just talk about political parties
      d.   My level didn't help me a thing
      e.   It don't interest me a thing to show my picture at 61
      f.   Durza cuts Eragon in the back, but somehow it doesn't bother him a thing

In all these examples semantic composition would run into serious problems if THING would be taken to restrict a variable as introduced by the verb's argument structure. On the other hand, the morphological structure of the NQP that allows the parse neg+thing maps in a rather direct way into the syntactic structure according to which an NQP must be decomposed so as to fulfill the double duty of identifying a neg-head (and become a target for neg-feature valuation) and satisfy argument structure. The specialty of non-argumental NQP is that the orphanized element THING gives rise to the interpretation of "strengthened" negation that is typical for negative sentences with NPIs.

My prediction is that the NQP as such triggers an NPI-effect only in contexts where THING does not fill an A-position as provided by argument structure, i.e. where THING is indeed orphanized. NQP in an A-position as provided by argument structure is not sufficient to invoke

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For relevant discussion of structural versus morphologically expressed Case in German cf. Bayer, Bader and Meng (2001) as well as Bayer and Bader (2007).

[22] Of course, it is equally impossible to associate *nothing* in this case with a referential adjunct in the sense of Davidsonian event semantics.

the NPI-effect because THING is a proper restrictor that identifies the required argument. An NPI-effect can in this case only be achieved by additional means such as extra stress or by the attachment of an independent NPI as seen in (71).

(71)   a.   She ate nothing at all
        b.   She ate nothing whatsoever

One may ask what my account predicts for cases in which the NPI *a thing* is merged into the direct object position. This NPI is in need of an overt signal of non-veridicality as in (72).

(72)   a.   At the dinner last night she didn't eat a thing
        b.   Who would eat a thing in this restaurant?
        c.   In this restaurant, did she eat a thing?
        d.   I would be happy if she (only) ate a thing

(72a) clearly has an NPI-interpretation, unlike *At the dinner last night she ate nothing*. We must conclude that the very form of *a thing* as provided by the lexicon is distinct from the element that equals the restrictor part after the decomposition of *nothing*. Only the former is explicitly listed as an NPI. Given this, it is all the more remarkable that the NPI-interpretation is conditioned by the lack of an argument license of the bare NQP.

In the next section it will be shown that my explanation of the NPI-effect at hand fits rather naturally into the diachronic development of negation.

7. Diachrony

Modern English overtly shows that the lexical part *thing* inherent in the NQP *nothing* is also part of the NPI *a thing*. Although German *nichts* is lexically less transparent, the same organi-zation as in English is at work, as shown by the diachronic development of negation in this language.[23] As Jespersen (1917) and much following work could determine, the older carrier of sentential negation was a verbal prefix, in OHG *ni*, later also *en*. Negation could be "strengthened" – among other strategies – by insertion of the complex element *ni-wiht* or also, with the generalizing particle *-io*, *ni-o-wiht* ("no-thing", "no-whatever-thing").[24] This is at-tested in forms like *ih enweiz niht* ... (I neg-know neg-thing, "I don't know ..."). According to Jespersen's Cycle, *niwiht*, which became opaque by changing into *niht*, became at some stage obligatory and the negative prefix gradually disappeared.[25] Next to *niwiht* also other neg-dependent elements were in play, e.g. *nihhein* ("not-one") which changed ultimately into the negative determiner *kein* ("no"), another lexical element which establishes an NQP in modern German without being an NPI. However, as Donhauser (1996) points out, *kein* also survived the disappearance of the prefix *ni/en* as a „positive" indefinite for a long time.[26] (73a) is from a MHG text, (73b) is ENHG.

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[23] For more recent overviews see among others Zinsmeister (2003) and Jäger (2005; 2008).

[24] For various lexical details and precise periodization cf. Jäger (2008).

[25] As Haegeman (1995) and Haegeman and Zanuttini (1991) show, West-Flemish retains optional *en* in nega-tive sentences until today, as in:
(i)   da   Valère niemand (en-) kent
       that Valère nobody (not) knows
       "that Valère does not know anyone"

[26] Also cf. note 7 above for data from Middle Dutch.

(73) a.   wär   er mir   keine wile   bi,   er lieze   sine untugend
                be$_{SUBJ}$ *he me*$_{DAT}$ *no*   *while near*   *he let*$_{SUBJ}$ *his*   *vice*
                "Would he be near me, he would give up his vice" (Tristan)

     b.   mein gotlich hertze ist mer   zu dir   geneigt denn zu keinem Menschen
                my   *divine*   *heart is more to you directed than to no*   *man*
                "My divine heart loves you more than anyone else"

Typically, the negative determiner is licensed in a non-veridical context like in a conditional clause (73a) or a comparative construction (73b). Examples can be found as late as in the language of Goethe where *kein* was long established as a negative determiner. (74) shows the licensing of *kein* in a privative context.

(74)   ... und es besteht ein Verbot,   keine Kühe und Kälber zu schlachten
         and it exists   *a*   *prohibition no*   *cows and calves to butcher*
         "... and there is a prohibition of butchering any cows or calves"
                                                    (Goethe, *Italienische Reise*)

A parallel example with *nicht*s from the same source by Goethe is shown in (75).

(75)   Nun ist es zwar   bei großer Strafe   verboten, nichts   in die canäle
       now is it however at great   *punishment prohibited nothing in the canals*
       zu schütten noch Kehricht hineinzuwerfen; einem schnell einfallenden
       to pour   *nor waste*   *in-to-throw*   *a*   *quickly approaching*
       Regenguß   aber   ist's nicht untersagt, ...
       rain-shower$_{DAT}$ *however is-it*   *not*   *forbidden*
       "It is at the risk of severe punishment forbidden to pour anything into the canals or to throw in waste, although a quickly approaching rain shower cannot be prevented to ..."
                                                (Goethe, *Italienische Reise*)

The emergence of *nichts* from the neg-licensed *niwiht* and the continuation of its development in later stages as seen in these examples suggests that this item started out as an NPI. Prefixal negation having disappeared, NQPs superficially appear to be the primary carriers of clausal negation. The fact that NQPs come in different shapes and can be variably placed in the clause like DPs, makes this rather implausible, though. NQPs seem to be rather dependent on an abstract functional head which may be "identified" by the NQP but is nevertheless responsible for the valuation of the neg-feature that inheres the NQP.[27] If this interpretation of the diachrony of negation is correct, the simultaneous existence of NQP as an identifier of sentential negation and as an NPI is expected.

Without trying to give a realistic periodization, the structural changes in the diachrony of negation in German can be structurally characterized by the following (possibly overlapping) stages.

Stage 1: The verb carries a negative morpheme which licenses a negative-marked nominal element such as *nothing* or *niowiht* (e.g. in direct object position). This nominal can be inflected for Case, allowing in German for the genitive Case *niowihtes*.[28] The non-negative part

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[27] Cf. Penka and von Stechow (2001)

[28] Genitive Case would be compatible with involvement of an elliptic DP and thus explain frequency that exceeds contexts of verbal assignment of genitive.

of the NQP (perhaps among other lexemes) is used to strengthen negation in the sense of an NPI.

Stage 2: While still being used as an argument, *niowiht* is reanalyzed/grammaticalized as an adverb which, being the least marked element, takes over the role of the verbal neg-morpheme. Later the genitive form *niowihtes* is reanalyzed as an uninflected bare nominal. The preverbal neg-morpheme is eventually lost. ("Jespersen's cycle").

Stage 3: NQPs either co-exist with the adverbial negator ("negative concord" as presently seen in Bavarian) or identify sentential negation by being in construction with an empty neg-head. Although they normally do not evoke emphatic readings, their potential of serving as a strengthener of negation and as such as an NPI is kept alive (as I have shown so far).

8. Negative concord

The Dutch example in (46), *Je bent niks niet lief* (literally, "you are nothing not nice") shows that in varieties which admit NC, non-argumental NQPs can arise together with an overt carrier of clausal negation, here *niet* (not). In languages in which NC is either optional or completely banned for prescriptive reasons one finds occasionally NPIs without an overt licenser. We have seen German examples involving the minimizer NPI *einen Dreck* („a dirt") in (55)-(61). Similar ones appear in the following examples.[29]

(76)   Das geht dich einen feuchten Kehricht an
        this goes you a   humid   refuse   at
        „This is none of your business"

(77)   Grimgerde interessiert sich   einen Pfeifendeckel für deine Oper
        Grimgerde interests   REFL a   pipe-lid   for your opera
        „Grimgerde does not care for your opera at all"

(78)   ?Karlfried hat doch die Bohne Ahnung von Kategorialgrammatik
        Karlfried. has PRT the bean idea   of categorial-grammar
        „Karlfried doesn't have the slightest idea of categorial grammar"

Unless we want to say that expressions of small quantities or despicable elements such as *Dreck, feuchter Kehricht, Pfeifendeckel* and *Bohnen* are themselves carriers of negation – which is at this point not supported by anything – there must be an abstract licenser in the clause. If such a licenser is available, however, we support our conclusion that the NPI-interpretation of non-argumental NQP arises as a consequence of neg-feature valuation and the orphanization of THING. The important difference between NQP and minimizers such as those in (55)-(61) and (76)-(78) is that NQPs carry the feature <neg> and are thus able to engage in NC. Minimizer NPIs are different.[30] We have already shown in section 5 that they

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[29] (78) is usually not accepted without an overt *nicht* but appears to me more or less acceptable even without overt negation. (76) and (77) show the standard case without overt negation, but the NPIs involved can also be found with "fused" negation, namely with the determiner kein (neg+D, "no"). A similar item in English is *squat*, cf. Horn (2001), which appears with verbs like *sleep, work* etc. and can be found with or without overt negation.

[30] This is also Jäger's (2005) conclusion. Penka and von Stechow (2001) argue strongly in favor of abstract negation. According to them, negative indefinites (NQPs) are NPIs albeit special ones. In the absence of an NQP, sentential negation is expressed by *nicht*. Ignoring questions of movement to SpecNegP or neg-feature

are rather independent of argument structure. In fact, if they are inserted as a direct object of a transitive verb, the NPI reading fades away giving rise to a literal and therefore often awkward interpretation, indicated with %.

(79)   %Gernot hat sich   einen feuchten Kehricht gekauft
        Gernot has REFL a   humid   refuse   bought
        "Gernot bought for himself humid refuse"

(80)   %Grimgerde schuldet Gernot   einen Pfeifendeckel
        *Grimgerde ows   Gernot*_{DAT} *a   pipe-lid*
        "Grimgerde ows a pipe lid to Gernot"

(79) has a prevalent reading according to which the object of Gernot's buying is indeed humid waste, and (80) suggests that what Grimgerde ows to Gernot is exactly the lid of a pipe. One expectation from these findings is that in a language with obligatory NC non-argumental NQPs should show the regular appearance with an overt carrier of negation, in all likelihood the head of NegP, and give rise to an NPI interpretation. As pointed out by Cecilia Poletto (p.c.), this is true for various varieties of Italian. Old Italian *niente così* (nothing such) has the same distribution as English *nothing like that*, and was only used with the distribution of an adverb, whereas *niente* as such can either be the regular NQP-object of a transitive verb or – if used in the direct object position of an intransitive verb – elicit the NPI-effect. The latter is seen in (81).

(81)   e non dormono niente
        an not sleep-3pl nothing
        "and they don't sleep at all"   (Bono Giamboni, 1240 – ca. 1292)

This kind of NPI-licensing with the NQP corresponding to *nothing* is retained in Veneziano, the dialect of Venice.[31]

(82)   a.   Nol   me piaze gnente
                not-it me likes nothing
                "I don't like it at all"

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checking under probe/goal agreement, their proposal is not far from the standard idea of a NegP with spec-head agreement.

One reviewer speculates that the minimizers *Dreck, feuchter Kehricht* and *Pfeifendeckel* may indeed have changed into the class of n-words, similarly to the French minimizer *pas* ("step"). That this is quite unlikely is shown by the impossibility of using them in the specifier of overt negation in the NC-language Bavarian.
(i)   D' Anna hot-se {an Dre:k / an Pfeifadeggl } (*ned) fia-n   Gustl interessiert
        the Anna has-REF a dirt   a pipelid   not for-the Gustl interested
        "Anna was not in the least interested in August"

[31] According to Cecilia Poletto (p.c.) many Northern Italian dialects have a sentential negative marker which corresponds etymologically to the NQP *nothing*. This is also true for Rhaeto-Romance where *nia* can be both the simplex negation as in (i) or an NQP-object.
(i)   I mangi nia soni
        I eat   not potatoes   "I do not eat potatoes"
(ii)   I mangi nia
        I eat   nothing   "I do not eat anything"
No NQP other than *nothing* shows an ambiguity between simplex negator, NQP-argument and NPI-adjunct. The case seems to be comparable to the wh-element *what* which also appears in various functions. Cf. Jäger (2000) on German *was* and Westergaard (this issue) on Norwegian.

b.   Nol   me piaze miga
not-it me likes not
"I don't like it at all"

Given that the clitics *–l* and *me* close the open argument positions of *piaze*, notice that both *gnente* and *miga* must be non-argumental. However, *gnente* is nominal, and *miga* being a minimizer, deriving from the word for "crumb", might be too. The correspondence to the Germanic examples seems to be more than accidental. Interestingly, the correspondence goes even further than that. According to Poletto (2008; p.c.)*,* *gnente* can only be used with psych-verbs or intransitives, while it is ungrammatical with transitive and unaccusative verbs. Compare (83) with (84).

(83)   a   Nol   lavora gnente
            not-he works nothing
            "He doesn't work at all"

       b   Nol   dorme gnente
            not-he sleeps nothing
            "He doesn't sleep at all"

(84)   a.   *Nol leze   gnente libri
            not-he reads   nothing books
            "He doesn't read books at all"

       b.   *Nol magna gnente la   roba dolse
            not-he eats   nothing the stuff sweet
            "He doesn't eat sweets at all"

       c.   *Nol vien   gnente
            not-he comes nothing
            "He doesn't come at all"

It appears that non-argumental *gnente* must be merged into the structural object position. The strong parallelism between Germanic and Romance suggests a non-trivial common feature in the syntax of negation that has to my knowledge not played a role in comparative syntax so far.

What the Italian varieties considered above show is that the NQP *niente/gnente* in its non-argumental usage behaves in full analogy to an argumental NQP. It appears in post-verbal position and is in construction with an overt neg-head. I take this as support for the view that in the Germanic varieties from English, German and Dutch considered above there is likewise a locus of clausal negation which, however, remains silent as long as we are dealing with varieties in which NC is missing for one reason or the other. We have also seen that lexical NPIs (minimizers with descriptive content) behave differently. This suggests that *nothing* and its equivalents in other languages are special in displaying the NPI-effect only as a side effect of being orphanized by argument structure. If my interpretation is tenable, this indicates that the function of a particular lexical element as an NPI can survive 1000 years, and that it can do so even if the responsible lexical element – in English *thing*, in German *wiht*
– has long been adopted into the functional vocabulary of the language.

Corblin, Depréz, de Swart and Tovena (2004) argue that n-words are quantifiers, and that all an n-word in English can do is act as a quantifier. This is in their view the reason for the absence of doubling. Considering French, they notice that *personne* can be seen as introducing negation on its own or as a variable related to a variable that is licensed from elsewhere. Their conclusion about n-words is, however, that they "have lost the ability to be licensed as negative polarity items by negation" (p. 437). What we see in English, German and Dutch as well as in Italian confirms this general impression but differs in one important aspect. The quote from Corblin et al. suggests that n-words have started their life as NPIs and have later given up this function thus turning themselves into carriers of negation. What we have seen here is that the original function of n-words as NPIs is still alive in the grammars of the languages under investigation, and that in spite of their lexical opacity this function is invoked in those cases in which the syntax does not integrate the restrictive part of the NQP – usually THING – as an argument.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of *nothing, nichts, niets, niente* as a trigger of a NPI interpretation that has been presented in this article certainly contains some loose ends. What is certain, however, is that the observed effect is highly stable across constructions and languages.[32] It arises with high reliability in contexts in which this most unmarked NQP appears in a potential (structural) object position while being unlicensed as a thematic object by argument structure. *Nothing* and its correspondents have in all likelihood started their life as NPIs but have given up this function in the course of the development of the syntax of negation in the relevant languages. NQPs have been fully integrated into the system of sentential negation. Genuine NPIs are distinct; in many cases they are minimizers. It could be shown that these NPIs are subject to more liberal licensing conditions. They appear to be on a par with adverbial accusatives such as German *den ganzen Tag* ("the whole day"). The hidden NPI-nature of *nothing* and partners comes to light as soon as their neg-feature has been valued by sentential negation (Neg°) and the restrictor (THING) remains in core syntax up to semantic interpretation. We have argued that it is the orphanized restrictor that gives rise to the NPI reading.

It is my hope that the present or a superior account of this phenomenon will enhance our understanding of negative polarity and negation in natural language in general.[33]

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[32] Ernestina Carrilho (p.c.) informs me that the effect described here can also be found with *nada* ("nothing") in Portuguese.

[33] As Richard Kayne (p.c.) points out, the phenomenon described here may in the end be part of a larger class of phenomena in which Case-bearing nominals appear in quasi-adjunct position. He points to examples like

    (i)   She looks something like her mother
    (ii)   She looks something between 25 and 30 etc. (cf. Kayne (2005)

One difference between these and *nothing* is that they appear to be independent of the structural object status as (iii) shows and thus seem to be on a par with adverbial accusatives.

    (iii)   She loved her something like her mother

Integrating these cases would clearly go far beyond the scope of the present article.

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