

The rise of expressive negation in a proper noun: survey evidence from Catalan on *Rita**

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Abstract. This paper introduces a previously undescribed phenomenon in Catalan and Spanish: several proper nouns and person-referring DPs appear to have grammaticalised into negative indefinites with expressive functions – a phenomenon which I term here *Expressive Pseudo (Negative) Indefinites* (EPIs). I focus primarily on one such common EPI, the (originally) proper noun *RITA*, its morphosyntactic behaviour and its inter-speaker variation in Catalan. I present the results of a grammaticality judgement survey among 460 Catalan users of *RITA*, as well as supplementary consultation with individual speakers. The results reveal several morphosyntactic idiosyncrasies of *RITA*'s distribution, indicative of grammaticalisation. They furthermore establish (at least) 3 significant, thus-far unreported profiles of participants; these regard the distribution of *RITA* in (anti)veridical contexts. I argue for the significance of the group of speakers which accepts *RITA* in most/all of the antiveridical contexts presented. I compare *RITA*'s distribution to existing syntactic categories – NCIs, weak PIs, squativites, i.a. I show *RITA* (and other EPIs) patterns as a *syntactic class of its own* across all groups, only partly overlapping with existing categories. I also show that *RITA*, at least in more 'advanced' speakers, behaves unlike other EPIs in Catalan/Spanish, suggesting even more varied degrees of grammaticalisation/pragmaticalisation, this time across EPIs. I finish with a discussion of formal and diachronic implications of the phenomenon presented, such as for a typology of negative, polarity items and for the diachrony of negative indefinites and expressive material.

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1. Introduction

This paper describes a colloquial and widespread use of (a limited set of) proper nouns and person-referring expressions in Catalan and Spanish, with particular focus on the proper noun *Rita*. The main observation at stake is the phenomenon whereby some (proper) nouns can function as *apparent* negative indefinites, with additional expressive, speaker-attitude-oriented functions. The basic pattern is outlined in (1)¹.

(1)	Catalan							
	a.	<i>Això</i>	<i>s'ho</i>	<i>creurà</i>	<i>Rita.</i>			
		this	CL.REFL=CL.DO=	believe.FUT.3SG	EPI			
(1)	Spanish							
	b.	<i>Esto</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>lo</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>creer</i>	<i>Rita.</i>
		this	CL.REFL=	CL.DO=	go.3SG	to	believe.INF	EPI

‘Nobody is going to believe this / There’s no way I’m going to believe this.’ (lit. ‘Rita is going to believe this’).

For brevity, I will refer to person-referring nouns or DPs behaving (syntactically and/or interpretively) similarly to negative indefinites as *Expressive Pseudo (Negative) Indefinites* (EPIs). This term should be taken as descriptive, but nonetheless suggestive of a potential natural class (see §3); I will not commit to a specific formal analysis of EPIs here. Henceforth, too, when the EPI *Rita* is being discussed, it will be written in block capitals as *RITA*, to signal it is not being used as a canonical proper noun.

The paper is organised as follows. I will introduce the syntactic patterning and distribution of these thus-far undiscussed EPIs, centring on *RITA*, one of the most frequently used EPIs in these languages. Section 2 motivates the analysis in Section 3: it begins by discussing some general observations about *RITA* and EPIs as an empirical phenomenon in both Catalan and Spanish, their expressive content, as well as the grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation observed in light of their original source (proper nouns). I show that this phenomenon is broader, not restricted to *RITA*. I provide examples from other EPIs, such as *ta mare/tu madre* ‘your mother’, *Déu/Dios* ‘God’.

Taboo words and common nouns more broadly are well-studied as sources of expressive (grammaticalised) forms of negation (see, e.g., Horn 2001, and many sources since). However, literature on *proper nouns* and *person-referring* expressions similarly undergoing polarity- or negation-oriented grammaticalisation is, to the best of my knowledge, almost non-existent (though

¹ The judgements in this paper are from Central Catalan and Peninsular Spanish varieties, including, primarily, my own judgements, supplemented by consultation with other native speakers. Whenever examples/translations for the two languages are provided together separated by a slash, the Catalan item/expression is provided first, followed by the Spanish one. Finally, when *Rita* and other proper nouns are intended as negative-indefinite-like elements in the examples provided, they will be glossed as EPI, to indicate that they are not intended as proper nouns.

proper nouns are known to take on expressive, quasi-pronominal uses; see, e.g., Collins & Postal 2012, and subsequent work, and Song et al. 2023).

The contribution of this paper is thus an *empirical* and *descriptive* one: to provide one such case study of grammaticalised *proper* nouns resembling (expressive) negative indefinites. Sections 3 and 4 investigate the extent to which this is a productive parallel in (some) Catalan speakers: I introduce an in-depth analysis of, primarily, *RITA*'s syntactic distribution, focusing henceforth on Catalan only. I present the results of a grammaticality judgement survey among 460 Catalan users of *RITA* (out of 1,344 participant responses), and of consultation with individual speakers. The data analysis is two-part: (i) I outline the *syntactic constraints* and *distribution* of *RITA* that generally hold across speakers. I motivate a comparison of *RITA* with negative/polarity items (Negative Concord Items, Polarity Items, and squatives), and show how *RITA* only partly converges with existing syntactic categories (§3.2). Then, (ii) I unpack *inter-speaker variation* therein (§3.3). §3.3 establishes, via k-means clustering, three novel groups of participants with respect to the syntactic distribution of *RITA*. Specifically, I argue each of them potentially point to varied *degrees of grammaticalisation* of *RITA*, and argue for the significance of the most 'advanced' group: a group of Catalan speakers who display significant compatibility with antiveridicality in their use of *RITA*, but plausibly not with other EPIs. §3.4 compares *RITA* with the syntactic distribution of other EPIs in the language.

Section 4.1 summarises the data presented and discusses the theoretical significance of EPIs. Absent space for a theoretical account of these items, I conclude that EPIs' *sui generis*, yet *systematic*, distribution merits further scrutiny, in both Catalan (our focus) and Spanish. Section 4.2 offers a comparison with other crosslinguistic constructions that resemble Catalan and Spanish EPIs. Section 5 concludes.

2. *RITA* and EPIs in Catalan and Spanish: general observations

In this section, I introduce some general characteristics of the phenomenon, including, but not limited to, *RITA*. From this coarse-grained analysis, I point out *RITA* and EPIs already show some signs of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation, ultimately motivating a further, more in-depth analysis in §3. This section focuses on both Catalan and Spanish, before restricting inquiry to Catalan in §3.

The phenomenon in this paper is outlined again below. Broadly, we can observe that proper nouns and person-referring DPs, such as *Rita* or Cat. *ta mare* 'your mother' (a colloquial, contracted form of *la teva mare*, 'the.FEM your.FEM mother'), appear to receive a similar interpretation to negative indefinites like *nobody*. These items are generally used in main-clause contexts (2), often accompanied by the sentential negator and the Negative Concord Item *ni* ('not even'). More rarely, they can also be embedded (see 23 below).

(2)	Catalan				
	a.	<i>Si</i>	<i>segueixen</i>	<i>així</i>	<i>aprovarà Rita.</i>

		if	continue.3PL	like.this	pass.FUT.3SG	EPI
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‘If they continue like this, nobody will pass (the exam) / they won’t pass the exam.’

(2)	Spanish										
	b.	<i>Pues</i>	<i>vendrá</i>	<i>el</i>	<i>Papa</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>Roma</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>arreglar</i>	<i>las</i>	<i>cosas.</i>
		well	come.FUT.3SG	the	Pope	of	Rome	to	fix.INF	the	things

‘Well, nobody is going to come to fix this / ‘I’m not coming to fix this.’¹²

(2)	Catalan						
	c.	<i>Això</i>	<i>(no)</i>	<i>ho</i>	<i>farà</i>	<i>(ni)</i>	<i>Déu.</i>
		this	not	CL.DO=	do.FUT.3SG	not.even	God

‘Sorry, but I’m not doing these essays / no one is doing these essays.’¹³

There is a preference for EPIs to be subjects, as exemplified above. When they function as external arguments, EPIs are usually postverbal in both languages (note that Catalan and Spanish both readily allow VS orders; e.g., Ordóñez 1998, 2007, Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 2001). This is also the case because, often, other constituents will have been topicalised and will appear in sentence-initial position (2c). Pre-verbal subject EPIs face important restrictions. Nonetheless, EPIs can be used as internal arguments in some speakers, albeit much more marginally, as the next example shows. We turn to these observations in more detail in §3.

(3)	Catalan							
	?	<i>(No)</i>	<i>convidaré</i>	<i>(ni)</i>	<i>Rita</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>festa.</i>
		not	invite.FUT.1SG	not.even	EPI	to	the	party

‘I’m not inviting anyone to the party / There’s no way I’m inviting anyone/them to the party.’

It is worth pointing out that there is significant inter-speaker variation in grammatical judgements for *RITA* across different syntactic environments, including for the examples above. For now, I report what appears to be the majority pattern (as well as in §3.1). Inter-speaker variation is specifically addressed in §3.2.

EPIs are expressive, encoding the attitude of the speaker. They contribute an additional layer of expressive meaning and speaker attitude; specifically, they are epistemic: the speaker is emphasising a negative attitude or judgement towards the likelihood of what is conveyed in the proposition, cf. paraphrases like ‘There’s no way anyone/I’m doing this’ or ‘I’m not doing this’. It can also be interpreted as signalling a negative speaker attitude towards past events, e.g., Sp. *No se presentó ni Rita a la reunión* ‘(I’m criticising that) (absolutely) no one turned up to the meeting’. The following quote from the newspaper *La Razón* sheds some light on the origin of the expression and the ‘I’-centred nature of *RITA*:

¹² Retrieved 2 March 2024, from <https://x.com/LauritaRMadrid/status/185108997504909313?s=20>.

¹³ Retrieved 2 March 2024, from <https://x.com/AnaFerrerS/status/521411305102929920?s=20>.

The figure of *Rita la Cantaora* remained for posterity in Spanish popular culture, not so much for her work as a singer and dancer, but because of an expression that became a popular proverb. Apparently, her passion for the work was such that she was willing to perform wherever she was asked, regardless of the money she earned for performing, and even to perform additional shows, whether asked by the owner of a ‘tablao’ or the organizer of a private party. She was so famous that even her own colleagues recommended her services when they were not offered enough money to perform themselves. In this way, the expression *que lo haga Rita la Cantaora* ‘let Rita la Cantaora do it’ was coined to refer to all those occasions in which one is not willing to perform an action⁴.

EPIs can only make reference to a person, collective or animate being. Importantly, however, they have flexible person-indexing: the participants/agents involved in the action/event reported need not include the speaker and/or addressee and can refer to a 3rd person. This is observed in the translations provided here, which can involve all of 1st, 2nd or 3rd person subjects, even though the subject-verb agreement is always 3SG. What reading is obtained depends entirely on the context in which it is uttered and what the most likely reference of *RITA* is. Henceforth, then, any translations with, e.g., a 1st/2nd person pronoun should not be taken as unambiguous/definitive; they could also very often be translated with a 3rd person subject (and vice versa), if the context is appropriate. What is systematic in their interpretation is the negative *speaker*-oriented attitude conveyed with EPIs, which is absent in canonical negative indefinites like *nobody*.

The set of EPIs is crucially limited: the most common example is the proper noun *RITA* (referring to a 19th century Spanish flamenco singer also known as *Rita la Cantaora*), but other EPIs with similar behaviour are commonly found: *el Papa de Roma* (‘the Pope of Rome’), *Déu/Dios* (‘God’), *te/ta/la teva mare* and *tu madre* (‘your mother’), *el teu pare/tu padre* (‘your father’), among others. I restrict focus in this paper to *RITA*, but these are briefly discussed in §3.4. Importantly, not all (proper) nouns in these languages can function as negative indefinites in the way shown above: e.g., Sp. *Esto lo hará Juan* cannot read as ~ ‘Nobody will do this’, it can only be interpreted as ‘This, John will do it’. The availability of the expressive-negation-type reading is restricted to a limited set of proper nouns and person-referring DPs.

An alternative (more literal) reading of the sentences above, where each of these DPs/nouns refers to a specific person (e.g., *Rita* referring to a person with this name), is nonetheless possible⁵. Generally, the felicity of the possible readings (literal and EPI) is determined by both context and intonation (e.g., emphasis; see §3).

Overall, *RITA*’s linguistic status appears unlike canonical proper nouns in Catalan and Spanish. The divergences observed already point to grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation in

⁴ My own translation. Source: <https://www.larazon.es/cultura/historia/quien-fue-rita-cantaora-que-mencionamos-cuando-trabajo-nos-gusta2024012865b5fca3c3cb30000108c092.html>. Retrieved 2 March 2024.

⁵ In Catalan the proper noun reading is harder to obtain for *Rita* as the personal article that accompanies proper nouns in the language is, for most varieties, systematically absent when *RITA* is used as an EPI.

various ways: on the one hand, *RITA* is taking on grammatical functions, namely an apparent rise in more pronominal and negative/quantificational interpretations. Its original reference (an individual named *Rita*) has thus also been bleached, and it is losing syntactic attributes associated with more lexical categories (e.g., nouns). The latter point is exemplified by the loss in Catalan of the personal article before *RITA*. Its loss is significant in signalling some grammaticalisation: proper nouns *mandate* a preceding personal article in Catalan (but not in Spanish), either *en/el* (masculine) or *la/na* (feminine), e.g., *la Rita*. The EPI *Rita*, on the other hand, cannot take an accompanying personal article in most varieties⁶. At the same time, the acquisition of expressive functions, indicated via the encoding negative speaker-attitude and epistemicity towards the proposition, is indicative of pragmaticalisation (see Traugott 1989, on (inter)subjectification). Altogether, these divergences from canonical proper nouns invite a finer-grained study of *RITA*'s syntactic distribution, to establish the extent to which EPIs find parallels in independently-proposed categories crosslinguistically. And, indeed, whether this preliminary class of EPIs is homogenous. This is the aim of Section 3. In this latter section, I bring in novel survey data from Catalan to describe *RITA*'s specific syntactic behaviour. I also motivate the need for further exploration of its *negation*-related properties, after establishing that a subset of speakers *sanction RITA* with an accompanying sentential negator and without the NCI *ni*.

3. Describing *RITA* in Catalan: the data

3.1. Methodology: grammaticality judgement task

1,344 native Catalan speakers took part in the grammaticality judgement task, which contained 46 utterances with the EPI *RITA* to be judged. The survey was distributed via social media, as well as through the friend-of-a-friend approach (Milroy 1980). Participants from any Catalan-speaking regions were considered; this encompassed, therefore, Catalonia, the region of Valencia, and the Balearic Islands. Table 1 breaks down the proportion of participants from each of these regions:

Table 1. Proportion of participants by Catalan-speaking regions.

Region	Number of participants
Catalonia	437 (95%)
Valencian Country	21 (4.6%)
Balearic Islands	1 (0.2%)
Other	1 (0.2%)

⁶ A minority consultants of Central and Valencian varieties reported that *RITA* must still retain the personal article *la* (or *na*, in Valencian Catalan) in their varieties. It is worth noting that inter-item variation across EPIs exists as well, suggesting all EPIs may not be grammaticalised to the same extent (I take this up again in §3.3). In contrast to *RITA*, EPIs such as Cat. *en Pere Vamba* (§3.4), *do* take the personal article and furthermore cannot drop it, even if used in this expressive, negative-related construction.

After collecting demographic information, the survey asked speakers to self-report whether they use *RITA* in contexts like the examples presented. Out of the 1,344 native speakers, 460 (~30%) self-reported using the expression; only these participants were directed to complete the full survey, and they are the focus of this paper.

The aim of the study was to corroborate intuitions from my own judgements and consultants' judgements, some described in §3.2. Specifically, we designed a survey to test the acceptability of *RITA* in the following contexts: affirmative clauses with post-verbal *RITA*, with a range of argument structural frames (transitive, unergative, unaccusative, *RITA* as direct object); pre-verbal *RITA* (with and without focalisation). The primary focus was on the behaviour of *RITA* with sentential negation and with/without an accompanying NCI *ni*; as well as in a range of antiveridical contexts (negative-raising, negative spread, *without*-clauses). The investigation of *RITA*'s compatibility with antiveridicality will be motivated in the following sections.

Table 2 illustrates some of the examples used for each of the points above. All stimuli provided were *audio* stimuli and their order of presentation was randomised.

Table 2. Examples of the utterance types presented in the survey.

Construction type	Example
1. Affirmatives 16 examples, 4 per subtype	1a. Transitive: <i>El farà Rita aquest examen</i> (lit. 'Rita is going to do this exam') 1b. Unergative: <i>Estem a 35 graus i l'aire condicionat de l'oficina no va. Avui treballarà Rita.</i> (lit. 'It's 35 degrees and the air-conditioning in the office isn't working. Rita is going to work today') 1c. Unaccusative: <i>Ha vingut Rita! I deien que l'exposició seria un èxit...</i> (lit. 'Rita has come! And (everyone) was saying that the exhibition would be a success...') 1d. Direct Object: <i>Es va creuar amb els seus amics de l'escola i va saludar a Rita!</i> (lit. 'He/she walked past his Friends from school and he said 'hello' to Rita!')
2. Pre-verbal (with/without focalisation) 4 examples, 2 focalised and 2 non-focalised	RITA/Rita trobarà feina aquí (lit. 'RITA/Rita is going to find a job here')
3. Sentential negation with and without NCI <i>ni</i> 16 examples, 4 per subtype	<i>No s'aixecarà (ni) Rita demà</i> (lit. '(Not even) Rita is (not) going to wake up tomorrow').
4. Negative-raising 4 examples, 2 neg-raising predicates and 2 non-neg-raising predicates	Neg-raising predicate: <i>No crec que es presenti Rita</i> (lit. 'I don't think that Rita is going to turn up') Non-neg-raising predicate: <i>No dic que vingui Rita</i> (lit. 'I don't say that Rita is going to turn up')
5. Negative spread preverbally (with/without focalisation)	<i>A aquest ritme, RITA/Rita aprovarà cap examen.</i> (lit. 'At this rate, RITA/Rita is going to pass any exam')

4 examples, 2 focalised and 2 non-focalised

6. *Without*-clauses

See (28) below.

2 examples, with background context

We also considered negative fragments answers with *RITA*, but only as part of individual consultation with several native speakers. This survey did not include them in the audio stimuli; this remains a limitation, and must be corrected in follow-up studies. Nonetheless, significant trends emerge in the consultants' judgements for negative fragments with *RITA*, which we discuss at various points in §3.

Before the task, participants were asked to provide information about their sociolinguistic background, including age, place of birth and residence, other languages spoken, among others. Then, participants were asked to give Lickert scale (1-5) judgements. For trials contingent on focalisation (2 and 4), they were presented with two near-identical versions of the utterances, with the only difference being whether *RITA* was focalised preverbally. Participants had to choose between four options: 'Both versions sound good', 'Only the first (non-focalised) version sounds good', 'Only the second (focalised) version sounds good', 'Both versions sound bad'. Finally, at the end of the survey, they were asked to note if they knew the origin of the expression and where they think they learned it.

The next sections focus on the key quantitative and qualitative results obtained.

3.2. *RITA at large*: initial comparison with negative and polarity items

I now introduce the first set of survey and consultation data: this data, firstly, discusses broad trends of syntactic patterning shared across the majority of consultants⁷ and survey participants. §3.3 focuses on inter-speaker variation. Secondly, the data illuminates the extent to which *RITA* shows idiosyncratic, but syntactically predictable behaviour. To facilitate this discussion, I compare *RITA* in what follows to relevant classes of negation/polarity, namely NCIs (particularly), PIs and squatives, showing *RITA* only partly overlaps with these.

3.2.1. *RITA and NCIs*

I begin with NCIs. In this subsection, I discuss *RITA*'s behaviour with/without sentential negation, negative fragments, *absolutely*-modification – three of several diagnostics for NCIs (further NCI diagnostics are covered in §3.3, once inter-speaker variation is factored in). Then, I introduce idiosyncratic restrictions on *RITA*, namely argument structure and focalisation restrictions.

⁷ This includes my own native-speaker judgements, which are from a Central Catalan variety, primarily influenced by the region of *el Ripollès* (province of Girona), a transition area between Central Catalan and Northern Catalan (Rosellonese), but also influenced by the more central Osona region (province of Barcelona). All consultants were from Central Catalan varieties.

Negative dependents, as summarised by Giannakidou & Zeijlstra (2017), can be categorised in at least two ways: ‘strong’ NPIs, and ‘weak’ NPIs, to be defined below. I begin by outlining why EPIs are *not* NCIs or ‘n-words’, a subset of strong NPIs (Laka 1990), despite sharing several distributional patterns with them. The following definition of NCIs from Giannakidou & Zeijlstra (2017:7) forms our starting point:

- (4) N-words (or Negative Concord Items): an expression α is an n-word iff:
- a. α can be used in structures that contain sentential negation or another α -expression, yielding a reading equivalent to one logical negation; and
 - b. α can provide a negative fragment answer (i.e., without the overt presence of negation).

The above summarises how n-words are licensed in so-called *antiveridical* contexts, namely negative contexts. Weak Polarity Items (such as English *anything*), on the other hand, occur in *non-veridical* contexts. These include antiveridical (i.e., negative) contexts and additionally, contexts with questions, conditionals, modal verbs, imperatives, generics, habituais and disjunctions (see Giannakidou 2002:33, for further details).

For now, I will limit discussion of *RITA*’s grammaticality to three antiveridical contexts, sentential negation (4a), fragment answers (4b), and *absolutely*-modification. This, along with other syntactic contexts, unrelated to antiveridicality, will be sufficient to establish that *RITA* is (at least partly) unlike NCIs.

The first relevant data comes from sentential negation. Before that, consider the interplay between NCIs and negation in Catalan and Spanish (5). Both are so-called non-strict Negative Concord languages. This means their NCIs do not always co-occur with the negative marker; whether they do is conditioned by the position of NCIs: postverbal NCIs *must* co-occur with a preceding negative marker in both languages (5a). Pre-verbal NCIs *cannot* co-occur with sentential negation in Spanish (5b); in Catalan, they need not, but they optionally can (5c) (see also Giannakidou & Zeijlstra 2017, for a review on Negative Concord languages).

(5)	Spanish, negative doubling			
	a.	*(<i>No</i>)	<i>vino</i>	<i>nadie</i> .
		not	come.PST.3SG	nobody

‘Nobody came.’

(5)	No negation with pre-verbal NCIs			
	b.	<i>Nadie</i>	(<i>*no</i>)	<i>vino</i> .
		nobody	not	come.PST.3SG

‘Nobody came.’

(5)	Catalan, optional negation with pre-verbal NCIs			
	c.	<i>Ningú</i>	(<i>no</i>)	<i>menja</i> .

		nobody	not	eat..3SG
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‘Nobody eats.’

Then, contrasting this with *RITA*, we noted earlier (§3) that *RITA* is most commonly used *without* sentential negation, even if postverbal, or with sentential negation but preceded by the NCI *ni*. The latter is not surprising and stands to reason: the minimiser *ni* ‘not even’ behaves like an NCI in Catalan, and so is licensed by the negative marker (Tubau, 2020; Espinal & Llop 2022). Some contexts in which *RITA* would be very natural are given below:

(6)	Catalan							
	a.	<i>N'estic</i>	<i>farta.</i>	<i>El</i>	<i>farà</i>	<i>Rita</i>	<i>aquest</i>	<i>projecte.</i>
		CL.REFL=be.1SG	fed.up.FEM	CL.DO=	do.FUT.3SG	EPI	this	project

‘I’m fed up. I’m not doing this project / there’s no way I’m finishing this project.’

(6)	Spanish											
	b.	<i>Los</i>	<i>perros</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>los</i>	<i>vecinos</i>	<i>solo</i>	<i>hacían</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>ladrar</i>	<i>esta</i>	<i>noche.</i>
		the	dogs	of	the	neighbours	only	do.IMPF.3SG	that	bark.INF	this	night
		<i>Evidentemente,</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>dormido</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>Rita</i>					
		obviously	not	AUX.HAVE.3SG	sleep.PTCP	not.even	EPI					

‘The neighbours’ dogs were barking constantly last night. Obviously, we couldn’t sleep at all.’

The first important observation from the survey data, however, is that *RITA* is *compatible* with negation (and without *ni*) for a subset of speakers. Figure 1 illustrates the proportions of participants who rated sentential negation with *RITA* as good (green) or very good (blue), across the 4 trials presented. Variables ‘Neg1-4’ below represent the four trials participants answered where *RITA* was accompanied by sentential negation only; ‘Ni1-4’ are the answers for the four trials where *RITA* co-occurred with both sentential negation and the NCI *ni* (recall Table 2).

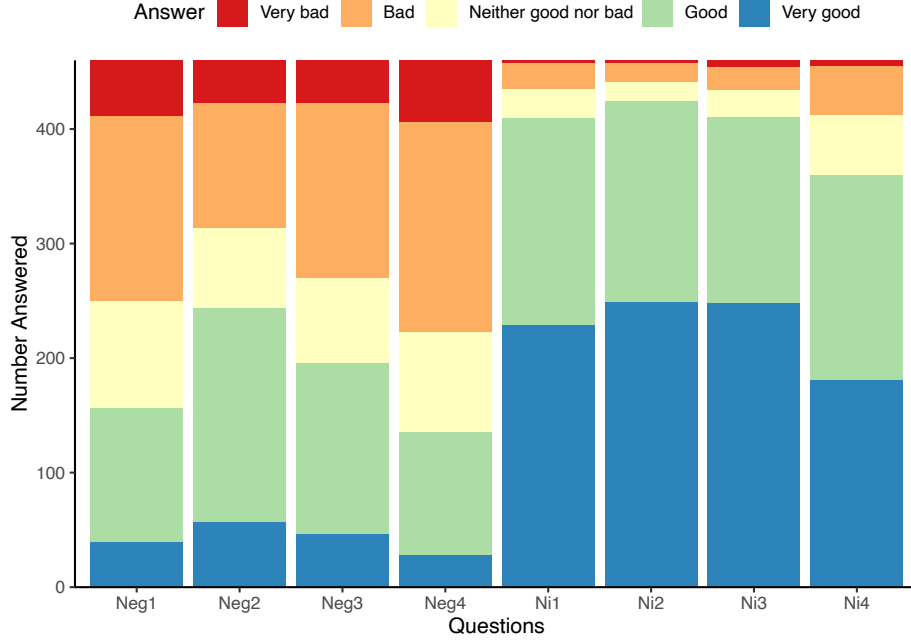


Figure 1. Responses with sentential negation and/or NCI *ni*

Whilst a highly statistically significant difference exists between the acceptability of clauses with sentential negation only vs *ni*-accompanied *RITA* ($W = 26386$, $p < .0001$), a significant proportion of speakers accepts *RITA* with negation (with single-negation readings). This observation will form the central basis of the inter-speaker analysis in §3.3, where a much wider range of antiveridical contexts will be examined. Some examples of these utterances included the following (where these are not obtained from social media, they reflect my intuitions):

(7)	Catalan				
	a.	No	s'aixecarà	<i>Rita</i>	demà.
		not	CL.REFL=wake.up.FUT.3SG	EPI	tomorrow

'There's no way we're waking up (on time) tomorrow.'

(7)	b.	No	vindrà	<i>Rita</i>	Al	gimnàs.
		not	CL.REFL=wake.up.FUT.3SG	EPI	tomorrow	

'Nobody is going to come to the gym / I'm not coming to the gym!'

(7)	Spanish									
	c.	Lo	de	la	multa	no	se	lo	cree	<i>Rita la Cantaora.</i>
		the	of	the	fine	not	CL.REFL=	CL.DO=	believe.INF	EPI

'As for the fine, nobody is believing this / I'm not going to believe this.'⁸

At this point, then, I will note that sentential negation and *RITA* can co-occur in some speakers, raising the tantalising question of how these participants behave in other antiveridical contexts; I leave it to §3.3 to establish their profile. Here, I simply remark that this patterning is already distinct

⁸ Retrieved 2 March 2024, from <https://x.com/AgoneyCarmel/status/1326535312193937409?s=20>.

from NCIs, irrespective of participants consulted: *RITA* is accepted without negation by many speakers that allow its expressive use (see §3.3 later). It also most naturally occurs without the sentential negation marker or with sentential negation and the NCI *ni*, even in its most common postverbal position. This is clearly different from NCIs, which *require* negation postverbally.

The second important point in the definition of NCIs in (4) is their ability to provide negative fragment answers. *RITA* appears to be able to function as negative fragment answers, given appropriate contexts (8), in at least some of the consultants studied. This patterns with Catalan/Spanish NCIs, which can serve as negative fragments, e.g., Cat. *Qui s'ha menjat el pastís? Ningú* 'Who ate the cake? Nobody'. (Weak) NPIs, on the other hand, cannot, cf. English *Who did you talk to? *Anybody*. Other consultants reject negative fragments with *RITA*, however, hence confirming that *RITA* is also unlike NCIs for these speakers. This is suggestive of inter-speaker variation in both availability of sentential negation and fragments, which we return to in §3.3.

(8)	Isolated answer				
	A:	<i>Qui</i>	<i>vindrà</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>córrer?</i>
		who	come.FUT.3SG	to	run.INF

'Who is going running (with me)?'

	B:	<i>Rita!</i>	<i>(Amb aquesta calor...)</i>
		EPI	with this heat

'Nobody! / I'm not coming! (given this heat...).'

Additionally, NCIs in various Romance languages permit *absolutely/almost* modification under negation (see Quer 1993; Giannakidou 2000). This does not carry over to *RITA*, with or without sentential negation. Contrast (9) and (10).

(9)	<i>No</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>vist</i>	<i>absolutament/quasi</i>	<i>ningú.</i>
	not	AUX.HAVE.1SG	see.PTCP	absolutely/almost	no-one

'I have seen absolutely/almost no-one.'

(10)						
	a.	*	<i>No</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>vist</i>	<i>absolutament/quasi Rita.</i>
			not	AUX.HAVE.1SG	see.PTCP	absolutely/almost EPI
	b.		<i>He</i>	<i>vist</i>	<i>absolutament/quasi</i>	<i>Rita.</i>
			AUX.HAVE.1SG	see.PTCP	absolutely/almost	EPI

Intended: ~ 'I have seen absolutely/almost no-one.'

I now turn to two seemingly idiosyncratic syntactic *restrictions* on *RITA*'s distribution: argument structure and focalisation restrictions. These constitute two further points of divergence with NCIs.

The acceptability of *RITA* appears to be contingent on argument structural frames; the acceptability of these is in turn conditioned by the presence/absence of *ni*. If *RITA* is used

postverbally and without sentential negation and *ni*, transitive and unergative frames are strongly preferred (11a-b), relative to unaccusatives (11c), which are themselves judged higher than *RITA* as a direct object (11d). On the other hand, when sentential negation with the NCI *ni* is introduced, these differences crucially disappear (Figure 2). The only contrast that persists is one between all frames compared to *RITA* as a direct object, suggesting that the broad subject/agent-preference noted in §3.2 is independent of syntactic configuration.

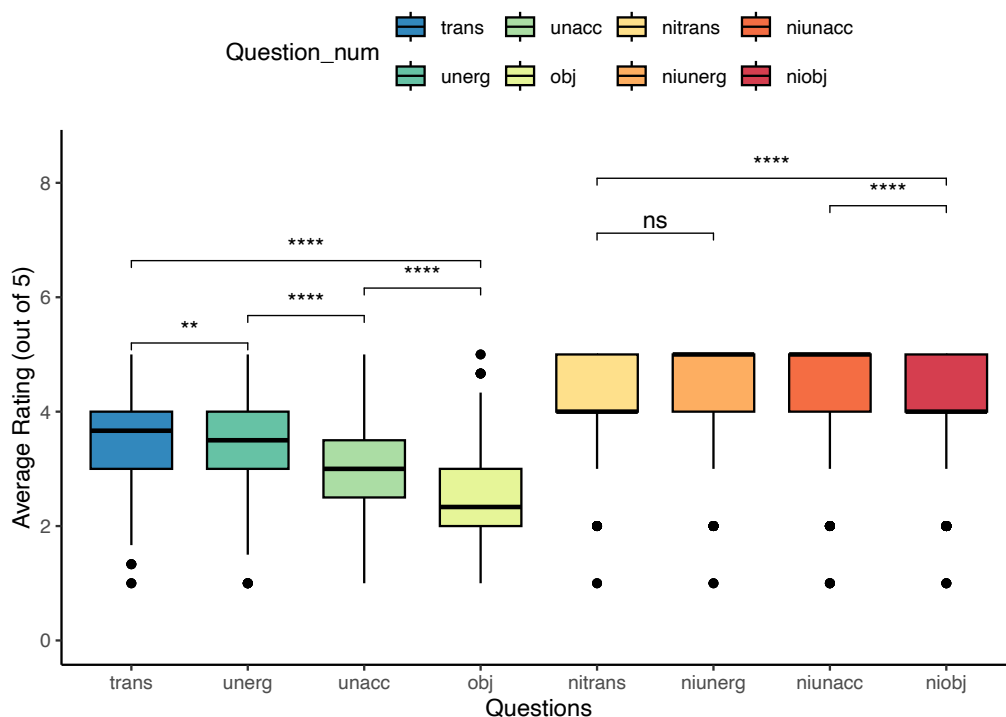


Figure 2. Responses with verbs with different argument structure and with/without NCI *ni*.

Examples for each frame are given below:

(11)	a.	<i>El</i>	<i>farà</i>	<i>Rita</i>	<i>aquest</i>	<i>examen.</i>
		CL.DO=	do.3SG.FUT	EPI	this	exam

'There's no way we're/I'm doing this exam.'

(11)	b.	<i>L'aire</i>	<i>condicionat</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>va.</i>	<i>Treballarà</i>	<i>Rita.</i>
		the-air	conditioned	not	work.3SG	work.FUT.3SG	EPI

'The air-con isn't working. I'm not working today!/There's no way we can work today!'

(11)	c.	<i>Mira</i>	<i>quina</i>	<i>cua</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>cotxes.</i>	<i>Arribarà</i>	<i>Rita</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>temps!</i>
		look.IMP	what	queue	of	cars	arrive.3SG.FUT	EPI	on	time

'Look at the car queue! There's no way we're arriving on time.'

(11)	d.	??	<i>Trucaré</i>	<i>(a)</i>	<i>Rita,</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>estic</i>	<i>d'humor!</i>
			call.1SG.FUT	DOM	EPI	not	be.1SG	of-mood

'I'm not going to call anyone/them/him, I'm not in a good mood!'

These restrictions straightforwardly do not carry over to NCIs; all frames are acceptable with NCIs, including direct object contexts, provided they co-occur with negation if postverbal.

Secondly, *RITA* is subject to positional restrictions which do not apply to Catalan NCIs. *RITA* is preferably postverbal and, if preverbal, it must be focalised and receive emphatic prosody (12). As (12b) shows, this latter option is also available to non-EPI *RITA*, i.e. a structure with focalised preverbal *RITA* could also be concerned with an individual named Rita.

(12)	a.	*?	<i>Rita</i>	<i>trobarà</i>	<i>feina</i>	<i>aquí.</i>
			EPI	find.FUT.3SG	work	here

Intended: ‘Nobody will find a job here’ (alternative reading: ‘Rita will find a job here’⁹).

(12)	b.	<i>RITA</i>	<i>trobarà</i>	<i>feina</i>	<i>aquí.</i>
		EPI	find.FUT.3SG	work	here

‘NOBODY will find a job here / There’s no way I’ll find a job here’ OR ‘RITA will find job here (not someone else).’

The survey data again corroborates this. Although not absolute, there is a statistically significantly higher proportion of acceptability of *RITA* when focalised preverbally ($\chi^2(1) = 5.8359$, $p = .016$).

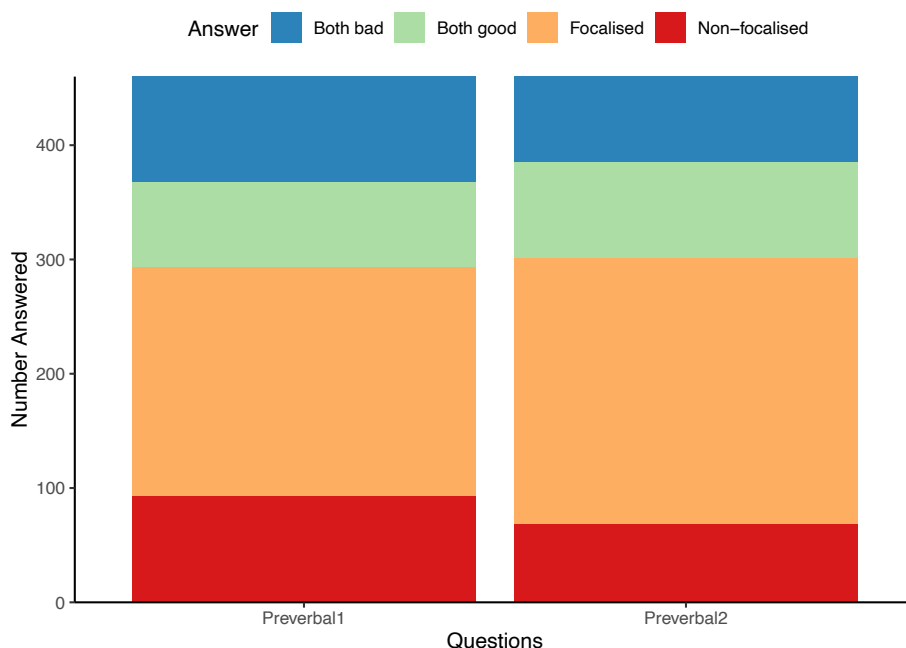


Figure 3. *RITA* with and without focalisation.

At least in Catalan and Spanish, NCIs generally do not mandate focalisation in preverbal position (cf. Giannakidou 2001, on the emphatic NCIs *TIPOTAS* and *KANENAS* in Greek). Compare, for example, the sentences below, which can be uttered with neutral prosody, but are not natural with initial focus.

⁹ Although odd and only marginally acceptable in Catalan because of the lack of personal article. The same holds for (8b).

(13)	a.	Catalan								
		<i>Cap/??CAP</i>	<i>dels</i>	<i>estudiants</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>presentar</i>	<i>els</i>	<i>deures</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>l'hora</i>
		none	of.the	students	AUX.PST.3SG	hand.in.INF	the	homework	at	the-hour

'None of the students handed in the homework on time.'

(13)	b.	<i>Nadie/??NADIE</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>podía</i>	<i>creer</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>las</i>	<i>medusas</i>
		no-one	CL.REFL=	can.IMPF.3SG	believe.INF	that	the	jellyfish
		<i>immortales</i>	<i>existieran</i>					
		immortal	exist.SBJV.IMPF.3SG					

'No one could believe that immortal jellyfish existed.'

Postverbal subjects are known to display focal properties in both languages (i.a., Belletti, 2004; Ortega-Santos, 2008; Etxepare and Uribe-Etxebarria, 2008; Forcadell, 2013); the above suggests preverbal *RITA* appears to have *retained* this requirement, unlike canonical preverbal (topical) subjects in these languages. Plausibly, then, *RITA*'s mandatory focus position is indicative of its interaction with discourse features and the left periphery, a common characteristic of expressive items (see, e.g., neo-performative work since Ross 1970).

Finally, I point out a syntactic context neglected by the survey conducted¹⁰. *RITA* also appears to be subject to some tense and/or aspectual restrictions. I illustrate them below, following mine and other consultants' judgements. Broadly, it appears that future tense is most clearly favoured, as well as present tense, particularly if it has future reference. Past tense, on the other hand, is more degraded. I leave it to future work to establish the form of this additional constraint.

(14)	a.	<i>A</i>	<i>aquest</i>	<i>ritme,</i>	<i>aprovarà</i>	<i>Rita</i>	<i>l'examen.</i>
		at	this	rate	pass.FUT.3SG	EPI	the-exam

'At this rate, no one is going to pass the exam.'

(14)	b.	<i>A</i>	<i>aquest</i>	<i>ritme,</i>	<i>aprova</i>	<i>Rita</i>	<i>l'examen.</i>
		at	this	rate	pass.3SG	EPI	the-exam

'At this rate, no one is going to pass the exam.'

(14)	c.	?	<i>Va</i>	<i>aprovar</i>	<i>Rita</i>	<i>l'examen.</i>
			AUX.PST.3SG	pass.INF	EPI	the-exam

'(Of course) no one passed the exam!'

In sum, *RITA* diverges from canonical NCIs in Catalan in several respects; these themselves reveal important aspects of the nature of *RITA*, such as its subject/agentive-preference as well as focalisation requirement. However, we noted tentatively that there is a subset of speakers for whom sentential negation is accepted. We address a further question that arises from this in §3.3, namely whether the speakers who sanction negation with *RITA* also exhibit compatibility with (at least

¹⁰ These contexts were not included in the survey questions. Thank you to Laia Mayol and attendees of the UAB's workshop on *Functional Categories, Dimensions of Meaning, and Expletiveness*, for reminding me of this.

some) other antiveridical contexts. There we illustrate significant points of *converge* with NCIs for some speakers.

3.2.2. *RITA and Polarity Items*

Having established in the previous section that EPIs are not strong NPIs (of the n-word kind), I briefly turn to *RITA*'s status relative to (weaker) Polarity Items (PIs) and its acceptability in non-veridical contexts. A broad definition of PIs (encompassing strong and weak) is given below (Giannakidou 2001:669).

(15) A linguistic expression α is a polarity item iff:

- a. The distribution of α is limited by sensitivity to some semantic property β of the context of appearance; and
- b. β is (non)veridicality, or a subproperty thereof: $\beta \in \{\text{veridicality, non-veridicality, antiveridicality, modality, intensionality, extensionality, episodicity, downward entailingness}\}$.

As discussed until now, strong NPIs appear with antiveridical contexts, whilst weak NPIs appear in a wider array of non-veridical and non-negative contexts. *RITA* does not fit the typology of weak PIs; the reason being simple, it is not licit in non-veridical contexts. Consider the examples below as non-veridical contexts where PIs are licensed in Catalan¹¹:

(16)	a.	Conditional							
		<i>Si</i>	<i>tens</i>	<i>cap</i>	<i>problema,</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>us</i>	<i>plau</i>	<i>truca'm.</i>
		if	have.2SG	any	issue	if	CL.DO=	please.3SG	call.IMP=CL.IO

'If you have any issues, please call me.'

(16)	b.	Interrogative		
		<i>Que</i>	<i>vol</i>	<i>res?</i>
		that.INT	want.3SG	anything

'Does s/he want anything?'

(16)	c.	Before							
		<i>Ho</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>veure</i>	<i>abans</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>ningú</i>	<i>ho</i>	<i>veiés.</i>
		CL.DO=	AUX.PST.3SG	see.INF	before	that	anybody	CL.DO=	see.SBJV.3SG

¹¹ The items given as PI examples above are the same as the NCIs discussed so far (e.g., Cat. *ningú*, *res*). See Espinal & Tubau (2016) and Tubau et al. (2023) on this point: they analyse Catalan items like *ningú* as cases of lexical ambiguity/homophony between two separate items, an NCI and a PI (see also Garzonio & Poletto 2023, who treat similar NCIs in Italo-Romance as non-homophonous items with a wider range of licensing environments).

Crucially, EPIs do not overlap with PIs in any of these contexts, as they are ungrammatical (see 17 on *RITA*).

(17)	a.	Conditional				
		*	<i>Si</i>	<i>truca</i>	<i>Rita</i> ,	<i>avisa'm.</i>
			if	call.3SG	EPI	warn.IMP=CL.DO

Intended: 'If anyone/nobody calls, let me know.'

(17)	b.	Interrogative			
		*	<i>Que</i>	<i>vindrà</i>	<i>Rita?</i>
			if.INT	call.3SG	EPI

Intended: 'Is anyone/nobody coming?'

(17)	c.	Before								
		*	<i>Ho</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>veure</i>	<i>abans</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>n'adonés</i>	<i>Rita.</i>
			CL.DO=	AUX.PST.3SG	see.INF	before	that	CL.REFL=	CL.DO=realise.SBJV.IMPF.3SG	EPI

'S/he saw it before anybody realised.'

Therefore, *RITA* is not licensed under non-veridical contexts, in contrast to PIs. This then disqualifies *RITA* as a subclass of the definition in (14).

3.2.3. *Rita* and *squatitives*

The last categorial comparison we consider is *RITA*'s behaviour relative to other *expressive* forms of negation/polarity items, specifically to so-called *squatitives* (Horn 2001). These are English expressions of scatological origin (*jackshit*, (*diddly*) *squat*, *fuck-all*, etc.). They have taken on negative force via Jespersen's Cycle, a diachronic cycle whereby the original (single) marker of negation (often weakened) is strengthened through some additional word (e.g., minimisers such as *a drop*, *a crumb*). This new reinforcer can in turn take over as the negative marker proper, leading to the loss of the original negative marker. *Squatitives* are thought to be undergoing the cycle at present, given they can appear both in the presence of sentential negation (as reinforcers) or in its absence (as the main marker of negation), without interpretive differences, as shown in (18):

- (18)
- I didn't sleep **squat** last night.
 - There have been a couple of veterans who have done **squat** since they've been here.
- (Horn 2001:186)

In the first case (18a), *squatitives* behave like NPIs (e.g., English *anything*). In the second (18b), they bring their own negative force, behaving more like negative quantifiers (e.g., *nothing*).

Squatitives are licensed in antiveridical contexts, like NCIs. Examples in (19-21), from Thoms et al. (2017), illustrate their behaviour with sentential negation, neg-raising and negative spread:

(19) Sentential negation

- a. He doesn't know **jackshit/fuck all**.
- b. He knows **jackshit/fuck all**.

(20)

- a. Neg-raising predicate
I don't think he brought **jackshit**.
- b. Non-neg-raising predicate
*I didn't say he brought **jackshit**.

(21) Negative spread

Nobody said **fuck all**.

(Thoms et al. 2017)

On the other hand, squatitives cannot be licensed in non-veridical and non-negative contexts on an NPI reading (e.g., *anything, anyone*) or PI reading (e.g., *something, someone*):

(22)

- a. *Did he say **fuck all**?
- b. *The last person to say **fuck all** was John.

(Thoms et al. 2017)

The squatitives in (22) are only grammatical if intended as negative quantifiers (e.g., English *nobody*), in which case uses such as those above are licit.

The foregoing is sufficient to probe the extent to which squatitives pattern like *RITA*, both in English and Catalan. Again, *RITA* only partly overlaps with squatitives. On the one hand, squatitives are licensed in antiveridical contexts (see 19), as also seems to be the case for *RITA* for the Cat./Sp. varieties considered here. The Janus-nature of squatitives (allowing both absence and presence of preceding negators) is shared with some Catalan/Spanish speakers, as is the inter-speaker variability with respect to the presence/absence of negation¹².

However, squatitives are not person-referring, whilst EPIs do necessarily refer to a person/human collective. Squatitives can surface in non-veridical contexts with a negative quantifier (NQ) reading (but *not* on an NPI/PI-reading). This stands in contrast to *RITA*, which is not accepted in, e.g., interrogatives, even if the intended interpretation is a NQ reading. Cat. **Ha vingut Rita?* is ungrammatical, and cannot read as either 'Did anyone/someone come?' (PI-reading) nor 'Did nobody come?' (NQ-reading) (see also 38 later for other EPIs). Additionally, squatitives permit *absolutely* modification, unlike *RITA*, and they do not have systematic positional restrictions; they

¹² Though the parallel does not carry over to their potential diachrony, see §4.

can appear both preverbally and postverbally, without any other constraints, such as focalisation (§3.2.1).

Squatitives, then, share some of the NCI-like behaviour of *RITA*, namely licensing under negation (in some speakers), as well as their expressive nature. However, they differ in the possibility of *absolutely/almost* modification, in their licensing in non-veridical contexts, in whether they refer to individuals/people and in their positional preferences/restrictions.

Having established *RITA*'s distinctive categorial behaviour, I now provide a finer-grained analysis of the survey data collected in the next section, focusing particularly on antiveridicality.

3.3. Zooming in on antiveridicality: inter-speaker variation in the distribution of *RITA*

This section introduces the second set of empirical data obtained from the corpus study; specifically, I discuss the results from all antiveridical contexts studied, beyond sentential negation. In doing so, I extract three consequential groups of participants from the survey data, each of which plausibly reflect distinct stages of grammaticalisation of *RITA*.

Recall, as summarised in §2, that the survey and independent native-speaker consultation collected data for the following antiveridical contexts (besides argument structure and focalisation, §3.2): (i) sentential negation, (ii) negative spread, (iii) neg-raising predicates, (iv) negative fragments (through individual consultants only), and (v) without-clauses.

We discussed in §3.2 overall trends in the distribution of *RITA* that generally hold true of the broad population; however, we also noted that significant inter-speaker variation exists, e.g., with respect to negation. We ran k-means clustering analysis to establish coherent groups of participants in their morphosyntactic distribution of *RITA*, focusing particularly on negation. Minimally three unreported groups of participants, are revealed from this investigation. These groups are visualised in Table 3 (with the average values being on a 1-5 rating scale), and in the clustering plot in Figure 4 (where Dim1 and Dim2 correspond to the variance explained by the Affirmative variable and the (Sentential) Negation variable)¹³.

Table 3. Four clusterings of participants obtained based on their ratings.

Group	Affirmative	Negation	<i>Ni</i>	Neg-raising	<i>Without</i> -clauses	<i>N</i>
1	3.258065	1.956452	4.154839	1.693548	1.764516	155
2	4.065476	3.202381	4.328869	2.633929	2.681548	168
3	2.660000	3.395000	3.910000	3.740000	3.320000	50
4	4.402299	4.063218	4.678161	4.074713	3.959770	87

¹³ Negative spread is excluded from the above because, as noted in §2, trials involving (non-)focalisation were ranked on a different scale.

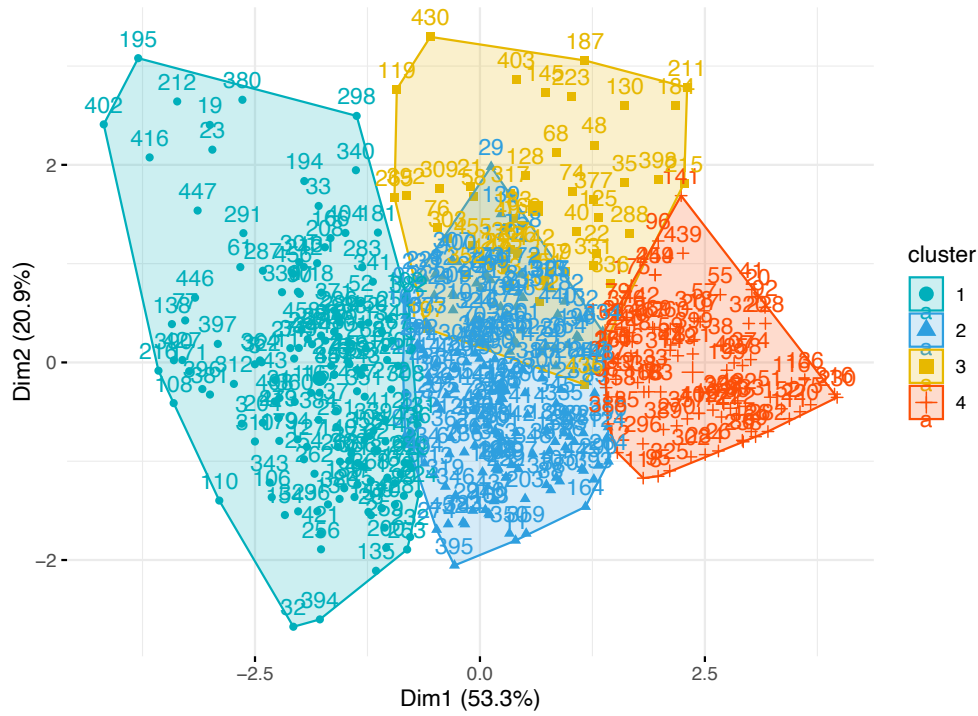


Figure 4. Participant Clustering Plot after k -means clustering.

These 4 groups concern particularly the distribution of *RITA* in (anti)veridical contexts: (i) Group 1 licensed *RITA* only following the NCI *ni* (34%, 155 participants), but no other contexts; (ii) Group 2 extended acceptability with post-*ni* *RITA* and veridical/affirmative contexts (without *ni* and/or sentential negation), but rejected *RITA* with antiveridical contexts (37%, 168 participants). These two exemplify the majority trends observed in §3.2 with respect to affirmative and negation contrasts. On the other hand, (iii) Group 4 accepts *RITA* in most/all of the contexts presented (19%, 87 participants). This suggests compatibility with antiveridicality *is* in fact sanctioned in a non-significant number of speakers, and, crucially, that this compatibility with antiveridicality is *not* limited to sentential negation, but extends to most/all other contexts tested (neg-raising, negative spread, negative fragments and *without*-clauses). We now unpack each of these in turn.

Before doing that, we can also note that Group 3 is an outlier, generally displaying low scores (< 4 , below ‘Good’) for all variables investigated, including veridical contexts and *ni*-accompanied *RITA*. There is reason to think this Group is an artifact of the survey design and/or self-selection: a range of participants noted in the debrief that their varieties do *not* sanction *RITA* in any contexts when the personal article is absent; the article must be used even in the EPI-type use of *RITA*. This readily explains why a group with these ratings would exist: the survey data did not control for this variant (due to unawareness of its existence on my part) and no questions in the survey contained *RITA* with a personal article. Another possibility could be that at least some of these participants are speakers who reported using the expression, but in practice they rarely do so, leading to lower ratings. For these reasons, I set Group 3 aside.

There is no obvious sociolinguistic conditioning among these 4 groups, which is noteworthy: for example, there are no significant age-differences across clusters (Figure 5)¹⁴, and Group 4 is not geographically confined to a specific region in Catalonia; it is observed in most of the areas for which participant data was obtained.

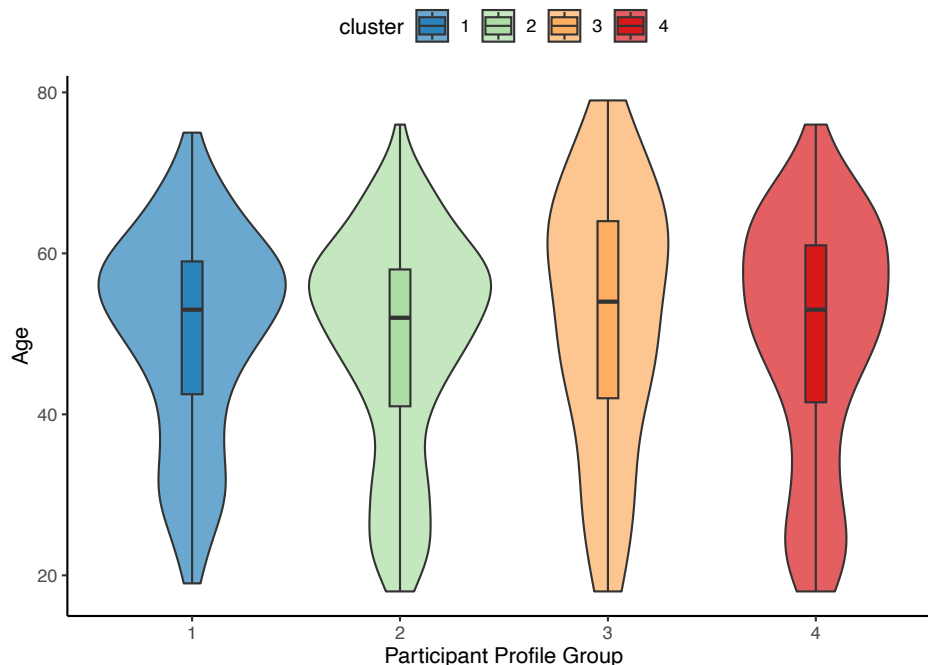


Figure 5. Age profile across cluster groups.

This aside, I draw particular attention here to the participants in Group 4. I illustrate the antiviridical contexts studied below and show that there is consistently a set of speakers in the survey results who sanction *RITA* in those contexts.

I begin with neg-raising (sentential negation was discussed in §3.2). These predicates comprise a restricted set of matrix verbs (*think, believe, suppose, etc.*), which have two important properties in the present context: structures with neg-raising predicates have been shown to involve raising of negation from the embedded to the matrix clause (see Hoeksema 2017, for a review) and, concomitantly, they can license NPIs in the embedded clause, due to the negator that originates in the same clause (23a). Non-neg-raising predicates, on the other hand, do not license NPIs (23b).

(23)

a. Neg-raising predicate

I don't think he lifted a **finger** to help.

b. Non-neg-raising predicate

*I don't mean that he lifted a **finger** to help.

¹⁴ This is *prima facie* surprising, insofar as diachronic changes are often age- or sociolinguistically-conditioned. However, if we consider the fact that EPIs are absent from child-directed speech and only used in specific contexts, then it is plausible that this highly impoverished input may lend itself more easily to varied 'categorisation' of *RITA* across (adult) speakers of the same generation.

The contrast in (24) exemplifies the grammaticality of *RITA* with neg-raising predicates presented in the judgement task (24a), vis-à-vis its ungrammaticality with predicates that do not involve neg-raising (24b). This behaviour is expected of NCIs (and NPIs more generally); these require licensing by a clause-mate negation when postverbal and this negation can move to a higher clause iff it contains a neg-raising verb (as in 24a). Note that, as with other antiveridical contexts below, this generally only holds of speakers who accept (7).

(24)	a.	Neg-raising predicate				
		<i>No</i>	<i>crec</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>vingui</i>	<i>Rita.</i>
		not	think.1sg	that	come.SBJV.3SG	EPI

'I don't think (absolutely) anyone will come / I think (absolutely) no one will come.'

(24)	b.	Non-neg-raising predicate				
		<i>No</i>	<i>dic</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>vinirà</i>	<i>Rita.</i>
		not	say.1sg	that	come.FUT.3SG	EPI

'Intended: I am not saying that anyone/no-one came.'

Statistical analysis on the survey data corroborates this: there is a highly statistically significant difference between acceptability of *RITA* with neg-raising verbs vs non-neg-raising ones ($W = 73484$, $p < .0001$).

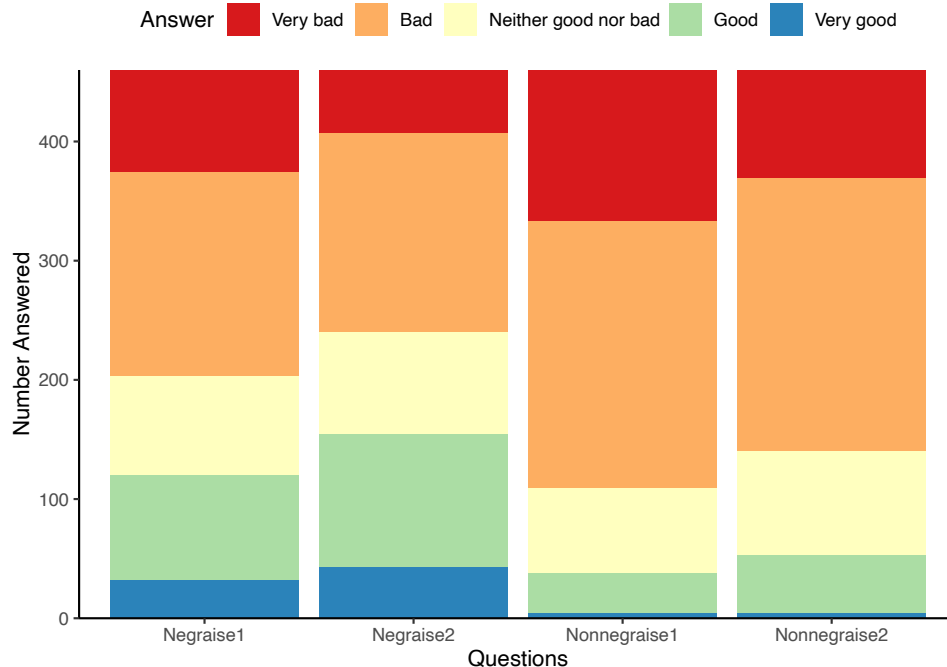


Figure 6. *RITA* with neg-raising and non-neg-raising predicates.

Additionally, *RITA* appears to be able to license lower NCIs, thus matching the second component of the definition of NCIs in (4a), namely 'α can be used in structures that contain [...] another α-

expression'. Examples with pre-verbal (focalised) *RITA* and a lower NCI turn out, again, to be grammatical, at least in these varieties of Catalan. Figure 7 illustrates that, for some speakers, focalisation is not needed for the structure to be grammatical (we return to this in §4).

(25)	Negative spread							
	a.	<i>A</i>	<i>aquest</i>	<i>ritme,</i>	<i>RITA</i>	<i>aprovarà</i>	<i>cap</i>	<i>examen.</i>
		at	this	rate	EPI	pass.FUT.3SG	no	the-exam

'At this rate, nobody will pass any exams / there's no way anyone is passing any exams.'

(25)	b.	<i>RITA</i>	<i>ajudarà</i>	<i>ningú.</i>
		EPI	help.FUT.3SG	nobody

'There's no way I'm helping anyone'

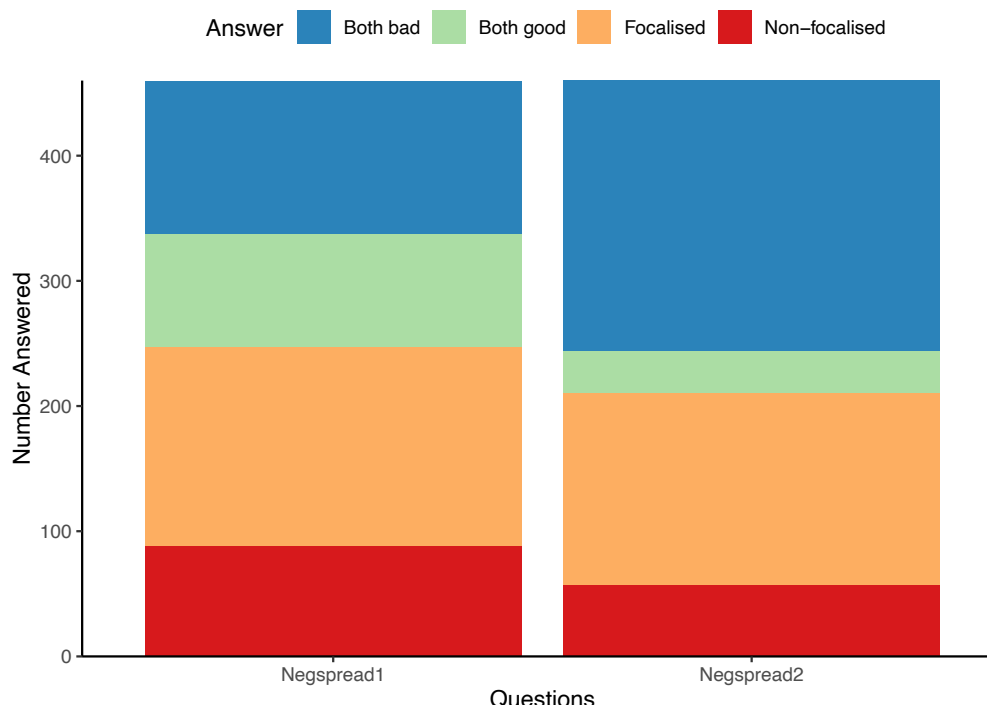


Figure 7. Preverbal *RITA* with negative spread.

In Catalan and Spanish (and non-strict NC languages generally), a pre-verbal n-word can sanction a postverbal one, without requiring sentential negation; a construction termed *negative spread*. This is the case in Sp. *Nadie comió nada* 'Nobody ate anything' (lit. 'nobody ate nothing'). (25a), then, effectively illustrates that *RITA* occurs in negative-spread structures in Catalan. At a surface level, the extent to which (25a) features negative spread could be contested, insofar as negative spread is generally taken to require a negative item (often assumed to bear [NEGATIVE] or similar) to license the postverbal NCI. This may be unexpected of *RITA* *prima facie*, given its proper-noun origin. However, note the following contrast between *RITA* and other proper nouns in Catalan: *RITA* can

sanction a postverbal NCI, but, crucially, proper nouns in Catalan (e.g., *Joan*) systematically *cannot*. They require accompanying sentential negation (see 26)¹⁵.

(26)	A	<i>aquest</i>	<i>ritme</i> ,	<i>en</i>	<i>Joan</i>	*(<i>no</i>)	<i>aprovarà</i>	<i>cap</i>	<i>examen.</i>
	at	this	rate	the	John	not	pass.FUT.3SG	no	the-exam

‘At this rate, John won’t pass any exams.’

Equally crucially, examples without sentential negation like (25) are *not* grammatical if *RITA* is postverbal (e.g., *A aquest ritme, aprovarà cap examen Rita*); whatever *RITA*’s formal properties may be, they are *enough* to sanction these constructions. This suggests *RITA*’s preverbal position (where it c-commands *cap*) can license the NCI in these speakers, but not in its lower postverbal position.

The above shows that the formal make-up of *RITA* is distinct from canonical proper nouns in Catalan. Potentially, the former may have acquired (or may be acquiring) some inherent negative force or negation-related formal features, which sanction these constructions, at least in the variety discussed here (I come back to this in §4).

Thirdly, recall as in §3.2.1, that *RITA* can serve as a negative fragment for some speakers (8 earlier); another example is given below¹⁶.

(27)	A:	<i>I</i>	<i>qui</i>	<i>farà</i>	<i>el</i>	<i>favor</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>netejar</i>	<i>tot</i>	<i>això?</i>
		and	who	make.FUT.3SG	the	favour	of	clean.INF	all	this

‘And who is going to please clean all of this?’

	B:	<i>Rita!</i>
		who

‘No one! / I’m not going to!’

The final antiveridical context I will discuss is *without*-clauses, which are antiveridical and thus license NCIs (Giannakidou 1999), as below.

(28)	El	<i>partit</i>	<i>es</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>acabar</i>	<i>sense</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>els</i>	<i>equips</i>
------	----	---------------	-----------	-----------	---------------	--------------	------------	------------	---------------

¹⁵ A further question is whether the reverse can hold, i.e., negative spread with a preverbal NCI and postverbal *RITA*. Thanks to Pavel Rudnev for bringing this to my attention. These examples are hard to judge by consultants, and at best appear marginal. A general impression is that focalisation of the preverbal NCI improves judgements (e.g., Catalan *CAP EXAMEN aprovarà Rita*, lit. ‘no exam will Rita pass’). At any rate, these are judged as significantly worse than when *Rita* is used preverbally and the NCI follows *Rita* (as the examples in the main text). Future work should investigate this construction further, including ruling out potential confounds. Two such confounds are the possible conflicting focalisation requirements in these examples: postverbal subjects in Cat./Sp. receive focus (as noted in §3.2.1); this could be affecting judgements with *cap examen* above, where it is focalised. The second, important confound is *RITA*’s subject/agentive preference, making it hard to find contextually felicitous preverbal NCIs that are not objects.

¹⁶ As noted in §2, this structure was not included in the grammaticality judgement task, but a range of consultants, showing a linguistic profile comparable to Group 4 (but also other Groups), find negative fragment answers with *RITA* grammatical. Note that this is, again, far from universal: the above merely notes that this systematically holds for *some* speakers, an observation that accordingly requires an explanation.

	the	match	CL.REFL=	AUX.PST.3SG	finish.INF	without	that	the	teams
<i>concedissin</i>			<i>cap</i>	<i>gol.</i>					
concede.SBJV.IMPF.3PL			no	goal					

Eliciting judgements of *RITA* (or other EPIs) for these contexts is, however, not straightforward, as they rarely occur in these constructions and consultants judge them as artificial. My own and some participants' judgements suggest, however, that *without*-clauses can probably allow EPIs given an appropriate context, see (29) and Figure 8 (169 and 98 participants rated the two examples as 4-5 across the two questions).

(29)	A:	<i>A</i>	<i>en</i>	<i>Joan</i>	<i>el</i>	<i>devia</i>	<i>veure</i>	<i>marxar</i>	<i>tothom,</i>	<i>no?</i>
		DOM	the	John	CL.DO=	should.IMPF.3SG	see.INF	leave.INF	everyone	no

'And who is going to please clean all of this?'

	B:	<i>Què</i>	<i>va!</i>	<i>El</i>	<i>tio</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>marxar</i>	<i>sense</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>se</i>
		INTJ		the	guy	AUX.PST.3SG	leave.INF	without	that	CL.REFL=
<i>n'adonés</i>				<i>Rita!</i>						
CL.PART=notice.SBJV.IMPF.3SG				EPI						

'Not at all! The guy (somehow) managed to leave without anyone/a single person noticing!'

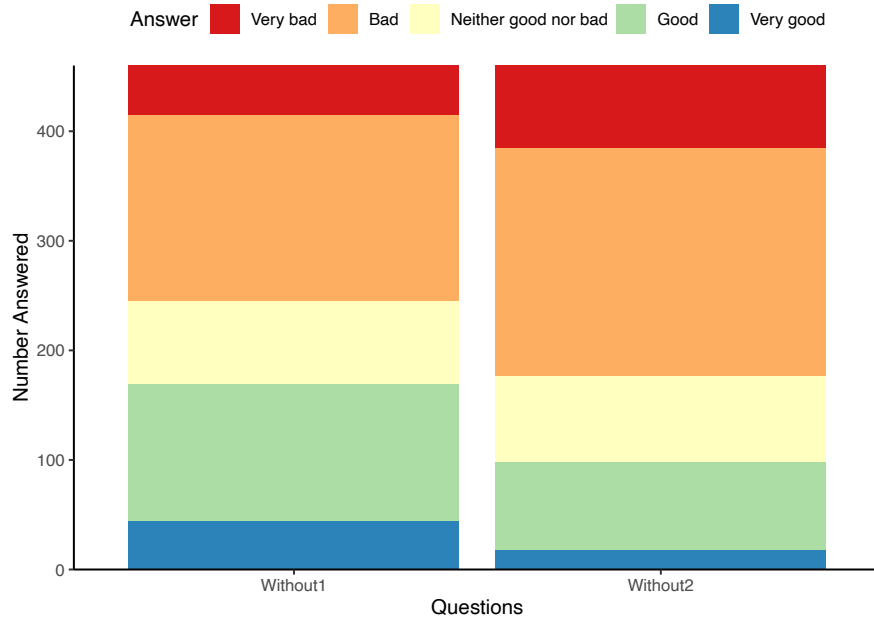


Figure 8. *RITA* with *without*-clauses.

This leads us to re-address the evaluation of *RITA* vis-à-vis NCIs in §3.1.1. In Group 4, *RITA* matches the distribution of NCIs to a significant extent, due to its compatibility with most or all antiveridical contexts: namely, sentential negation, neg-raising predicates, negative spread, negative fragments and, possibly, *without*-clauses. However, as noted in §3.2.2, this remains a partial match. Its availability in veridical contexts, its focalisation and argument structural requirements, among

other, set *RITA* apart from the natural class of NCIs. *RITA* is thus not an NCI in *any* of the groups studied; however, it is plausibly undergoing even more formal change in Group 4, gradually causing points of convergence with NCIs.

Before closing the empirical discussion on *RITA*, I now show that this observation regarding ‘degrees’ of grammaticalisation in *RITA* is visible in finer-grained patterns in Group 4.

Further analysis shows that the Group is also *distinct* in its behaviour with argument structure and focalisation. Group 4 is the most permissive with respect to argument structural contexts where *RITA* can surface, see Figure 9 (for unaccusatives) and Figure 10 (for *RITA* as direct object). In all cases there is a highly statistically significant difference across all groups: Group 1 is the most conservative in both contexts, Group 2 is in turn slightly more liberal than Group 1, but nonetheless conservative relative to Group 4.

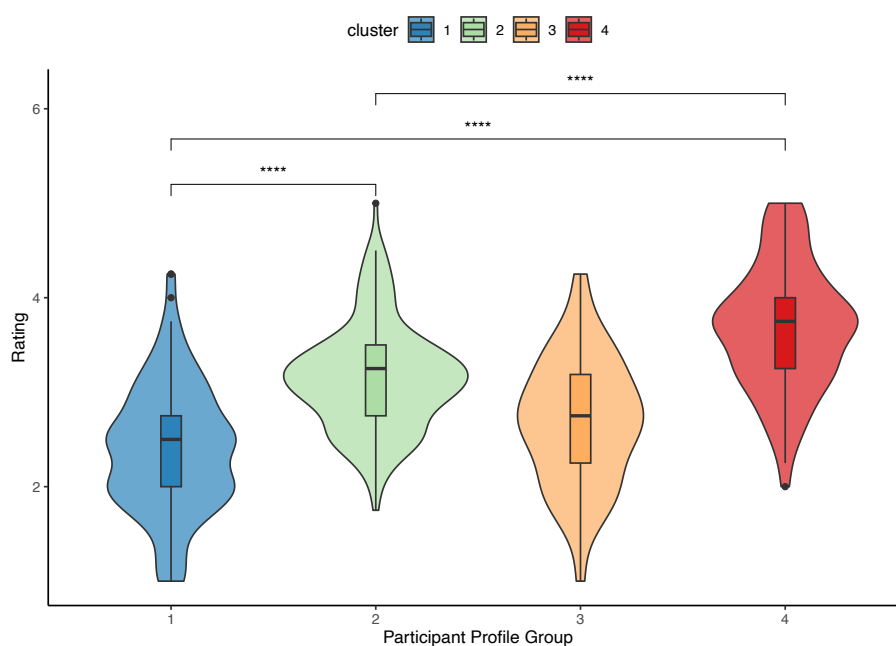


Figure 9. Responses with *RITA* with unaccusative verbs.

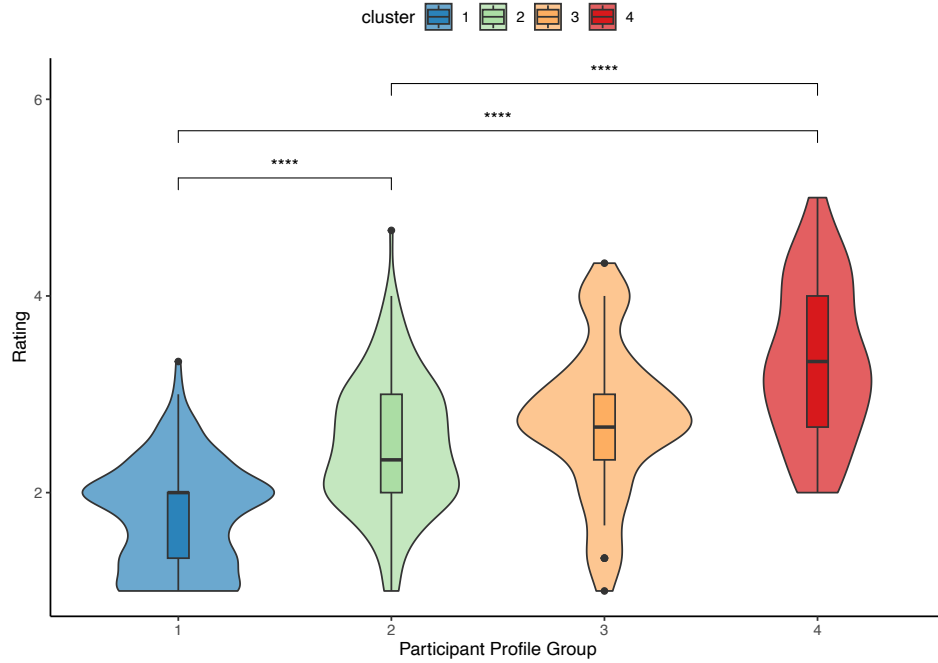
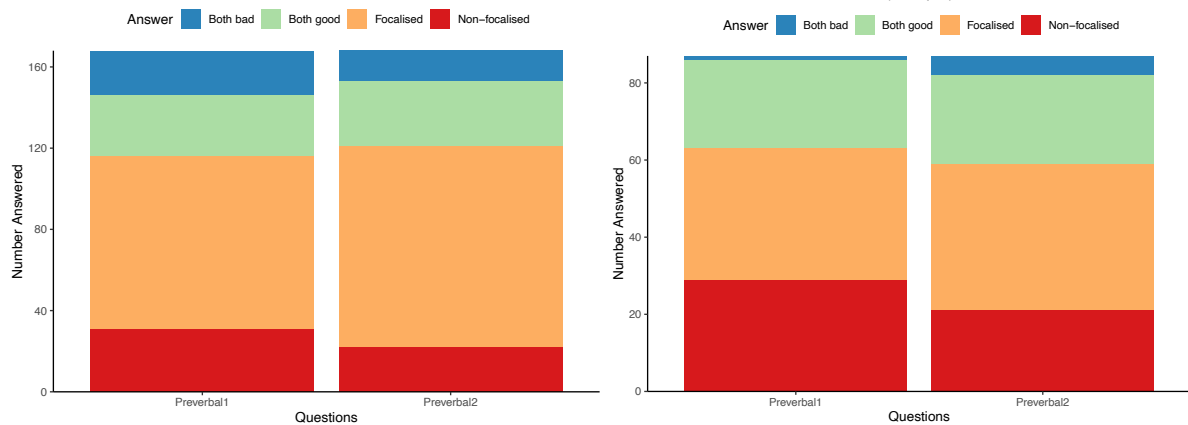


Figure 10. Responses with *RITA* as direct object.

These containment relationships of ‘permissiveness’ in these contexts align with the overall profile of these Groups: Group 1 only sanctions *ni*-accompanied *RITA*, hence, since all examples tested with unaccusatives/objects involved veridical/affirmative uses of *RITA*, particularly low ratings in this group are expected. Group 2 on the other hand is more liberal, allowing use of *RITA* without sentential negation, but banning antiveridical contexts. Group 4 sanctions *RITA* in most/all contexts.

As regards focalisation, Group 2 is the group which most clearly exhibits a preference for focalisation (Figures 11-12). On the other hand, while around a third of the participants require focalisation preverbally in Group 4, Group 4 presents higher acceptance of *non-focalised* pre-verbal *RITA* ($p = .03$).



Figures 11 and 12. Rita with and without focalisation (Group 2, left, and Group 4, right).

These two observations – increased permissiveness with argument structural frames and (non)focalisation – insinuate potentially more widespread differences between Group 4 and the rest. Group 4 thus goes well beyond the primarily expressive and epistemic properties of *RITA* in Group 1 and 2: it also appears to involve a non-trivial interaction with negation, absent in other groups. All these properties are important explananda for a model of *RITA* (§4).

3.2.4. Interim summary

So far, this paper has centred on one EPI, *RITA*, in some varieties of Catalan. I have shown that it can be licensed in a range of antiveridical contexts (sentential negation¹⁷, neg-raising, negative spread, negative fragment answers, *without*-clauses), paralleling some of the behaviour of NCIs. Nonetheless, I concluded that *RITA* still only partly overlaps with existing classes of polarity/negation items, given its behaviour with non-veridical contexts and *absolutely*-modification, among others. Table 4 summarises this:

Table 4. Comparison of the behaviour of NCIs, PIs, squativives and *RITA*.

	NCIs	PIs	Squativives	<i>RITA</i>
Licensing via anti-veridical operators	✓	✓	✓	Some
Licensing via non-veridical operators	X	✓	✓	X
Pre-verbal focalisation requirement	X	X	X	✓
Argument structural restrictions	X	X	X	✓
Embeddability	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Absolutely</i> -modification	✓	✓	✓	X
Expressivity	X	X	✓	✓
Speaker-attitude orientation	X	X	X	✓

Therefore, *RITA* behaves as a systematic syntactic class of its own, showing notable interaction with negation in a subset of participants. A resulting challenge is therefore modelling *RITA*'s syntactic behaviour, including the significant inter-speaker variation observed. Before discussing these theoretical issues, I now briefly describe how *RITA*'s behaviour contrasts with other EPIs exemplified in (2), to establish whether this syntactic patterning, particularly in Group 4, is unique to *RITA*.

3.4. The behaviour of EPIs beyond *Rita*

The general behaviour observed in *RITA* – namely, its ability to function partly as a negative indefinite with speaker-attitude-oriented interpretations – is also displayed in a wider range of

¹⁷ In this context, it is misleading to speak of 'licensing' proper, insofar as *RITA* is grammatical without negation and so does not actually require 'licensing' by negation.

proper nouns and person-referring DPs in Catalan and Spanish, as briefly outlined in (2). These are what we referred to initially as Expressive Pseudo (Negative) Indefinites. Here, I illustrate that EPIs are a broader, but not fully homogeneous, phenomenon in Catalan. I compare some of the behaviour of other EPIs with *RITA*, notably their (in)compatibility with negation; I focus on judgements from participants in Group 4, primarily my own judgements, but also other consultants that fit that profile. Recall that Group 4 participants were those that sanctioned *RITA* in antiveridical contexts, unlike Groups 1-2, who do not. Note therefore that this data is necessarily more speculative, since it was not included in the survey (which addressed *RITA* only); however, insofar as the patterns appear representative of a subset of consultants, they are still consequential. Based on EPIs' syntactic distribution in these speakers, I show that *RITA* is plausibly at a more advanced stage of grammaticalisation compared to other EPIs at least for speakers in Group 4, which behave unlike *RITA* in several respects.

Some illustrations of EPIs outside *RITA* are repeated below from (2), and a non-exhaustive list of proper nouns or person-referring DPs exhibiting EPI-like behaviour is given in Table 5¹⁸.

Table 5. (Incomplete) list of EPIs in Catalan and Spanish.

EPI	Language(s)	Original denotation/translation
<i>Rita (la Cantaora)</i>	Cat./Sp.	19th century Spanish singer/artist
<i>El Papa de Roma</i>	Cat./Sp.	'The Pope of Rome', head of the worldwide Catholic Church
<i>Déu, Dios</i>	Cat./Sp.	'God'
<i>La teva/te/ta mare, Tu madre</i>	Cat./Sp.	'Your mother'
<i>El teu pare, Tu padre</i>	Cat./Sp.	'Your father'
<i>El Tato</i>	Cat./Sp.	19th century Spanish bullfighter (Antonio Sánchez 'el Tato')
<i>Txapote</i>	Spanish	Former member of the 'hard wing' of <i>Euskadi Ta Askatasuna</i> (ETA)
<i>En Pere Vamba</i>	Catalan	King of the Visigoths from 672 to 680
<i>Josep el fuster</i>	Catalan	Reference to St Joseph of Nazareth

(30)	Spanish							
	a.	<i>Pues</i>	<i>vendrá</i>	<i>el Papa de Roma</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>arreglar</i>	<i>las</i>	<i>cosas.</i>
		well	come.FUT3SG	EPI	to	fix.INF	the	things

'Well, nobody is going to come to fix this / 'I'm not coming to fix this.'¹⁹

(30)	Catalan						
	b.	<i>Això</i>	(no)	<i>ho</i>	<i>farà</i>	(ni)	<i>Déu.</i>
		this	not	CL.DO=	do.FUT.3SG	not.even	EPI

¹⁸ Not all speakers will readily use all EPIs in this paper. Nonetheless, with respect to the observation above, the point still holds that, generally, native speakers' use of the EPIs in their system is most commonly found in this type of construction. The extent to which all of these (putative) EPIs behave morphosyntactically similarly is, of course, an additional question for future work.

¹⁹ Retrieved 2 March 2024, from <https://x.com/LauritaRMadrid/status/185108997504909313?s=20>.

‘No one is going to do this.’

(30)	c.	<i>Perdona'm,</i>	<i>però</i>	<i>les</i>	<i>redaccions</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>les</i>	<i>farà</i>	<i>ta mare.</i>
		Forgive.IMP=CL.DO	but	the	essays	CL.IO=	CL.DO=	do.FUT.3SG	EPI

‘Sorry, but I’m not doing these essays / no one is doing these essays.’²⁰

(30) illustrates the primary constructions in which all EPIs can be found and are grammatical, namely positive affirmative sentences where the EPI is postverbal and/or negative affirmative sentences with the accompanying NCI *ni*. As far as (30) is concerned, then, other EPIs pattern interchangeably with *RITA*. In contrast to *RITA*, however, the broader range of EPIs appears generally ungrammatical (or, minimally, much more degraded) in antiveridical contexts. Observe the behaviour of the EPIs above with sentential negation in these dialogues, where the intended interpretation is one of single negation:

(31)	Spanish							
	a.	*	<i>No</i>	<i>lo</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>comprar</i>	<i>tu madre.</i>
			not	CL.DO=	go.3SG	to	buy.INF	EPI

Intended: ‘No one is going to buy this / I’m definitely not buying this.’ Alternative readings: ‘Your mother will not buy this.’

(31)	Catalan							
	b.	*	<i>No</i>	<i>es</i>	<i>saltarà</i>	<i>classe</i>	<i>Déu.</i>	
			not	CL.REFL=	jump.3SG	class	EPI	

Intended: ‘No one is skipping class / I’m definitely not skipping class.’ Alternative readings: ‘God is not skipping class.’

Unlike *RITA*, these items categorically cannot appear under the scope of negation and receive a single-negation reading, in contrast to *RITA* in (7), where a single-negation reading *was* possible in the speakers consulted. They have to occur without sentential negation (as shown in 31) or with the NCI *ni* as a preceding minimiser. The latter option is illustrated below:

(32)	Spanish							
	a.	<i>No</i>	<i>lo</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>*(ni)</i>	<i>comprar</i>	<i>tu madre.</i>
		not	CL.DO=	go.3SG	to	not.even	buy.INF	EPI

‘No one is going to buy this / I’m definitely not buying this.’ Literal reading: ‘Not even your mother will buy this.’

(32)	Catalan							
	b.	<i>No</i>	<i>es</i>	<i>saltarà</i>	<i>classe</i>	<i>*(ni)</i>	<i>Déu.</i>	
		not	CL.REFL=	jump.3SG	class	not.even	EPI	

‘No one is skipping class / I’m definitely not skipping class.’ Literal reading: ‘Not even God is skipping class.’

²⁰ Retrieved 2 March 2024, from <https://x.com/AnaFerrerS/status/521411305102929920?s=20>.

Crucially, however, if a sentential negator is used (without *ni*) and the context is appropriate, then the reading can become one of *double negation*. Compare (31) with (33), where supporting context has been added:

(33)	Spanish							
	A:	<i>Tienes</i>	<i>demasiados</i>	<i>videojuegos,</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>te</i>	<i>compres</i>	<i>el</i>
		have.2SG	too.many	videogames	not	CL.IO=	buy.SBJV.2SG	the
	<i>nuevo</i>	<i>FIFA.</i>	<i>Guarda</i>	<i>el</i>	<i>dinero</i>	<i>para</i>	<i>otra</i>	<i>cosa.</i>
	new	FIFA	save.IMP	the	money	for	other	thing

'You have too many videogames, don't buy the new FIFA game. Save this money for something else.'

B:	*	<i>¡No</i>	<i>lo</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>comprar</i>	<i>tu madre!</i>	<i>Llevo</i>	<i>tiempo</i>	<i>esperándolo.</i>
		not	CL.DO=	go.3SG	to	buy.INF	EPI	bring.1SG	time	waiting=CL.DO

Intended: 'No one is going to buy this.' Alternative reading: 'I'm going to buy it anyway (regardless of what you are telling me)! I've been waiting for it for a long time' (double-negation reading).

Notice that, with additional context, the examples in (31) now permit double-negation readings in the speakers consulted.

Overall, then, the availability of a single-negation reading with sentential negation potentially appears to be a feature of *RITA* for Group 4 speakers. It does not carry over to other EPIs (or other speaker groups for *RITA*), which either ban sentential negation or, in certain contexts, receive double-negation readings. Assuming that the uses of *RITA* with negation are diachronically more recent²¹, it suggests higher degree of grammaticalisation for *RITA*, vis-à-vis other items, as noted earlier.

This point is again endorsed by other EPIs' behaviour with neg-raising predicates and negative spread. These are similarly degraded, as with sentential negation above:

(34)	Spanish, neg-raising						
	a.	*	<i>No</i>	<i>creo</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>venga</i>	<i>el Papa de Roma.</i>
			not	think.1SG	that	come.SBJV.3SG	EPI

Intended: 'I don't think anyone will come / I think no one will come / there's no way anyone will come, etc.' Alternative reading: 'I don't think the Pope of Rome will come.'

(34)	Catalan								
	b.	*	<i>No</i>	<i>crec</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>ho</i>	<i>solucioni</i>	<i>ta mare</i>	<i>això.</i>
			not	think.1SG	that	CL.DO=	fix.SBJV.3SG	EPI	this

Intended: 'I don't think anyone will fix this / I think no one will fix this / there's no way anyone will fix this, etc.' Alternative reading: 'I don't think your mother will fix this.'

²¹ Possibly supported by the fact that there is little attestation of these uses with Google Search or on Twitter/X, while the use without negative markers is widely attested.

(35)	Catalan, negative spread					
	a.	?*	<i>TA MARE</i>	<i>aprovarà</i>	<i>cap</i>	<i>examen.</i>
			EPI	pass.FUT.3SG	no	exam

Intended: ‘There’s no way I/we/anyone is passing any exams.’

(35)	Spanish				
	b.	*	<i>EL PAPA DE ROMA</i>	<i>limpiará</i>	<i>nada.</i>
			EPI	clean.FUT.3SG	nothing

Intended: ‘I’m not cleaning any of this / no one is going to clean anything.’

They only pattern alike in negative fragment answers, where EPIs can serve as negative fragments:

(36)	Spanish, fragment answer				
	A:	<i>¿Quién</i>	<i>piensa</i>	<i>solucionar</i>	<i>esto?</i>
		who	think.3SG	fix.INF	this

‘Who is going to fix this?’

(36)	B:	<i>¡Tu madre / el Papa de Roma / Dios!...</i>
		EPI

‘No one! / I’m not going to do this’, etc.

That these EPIs are licit as negative fragment answers and lead to double-negation readings should not be taken to suggest that their behaviour should be derived syntactically following the treatment of other polarity/negation items that pattern similarly in these contexts, such as negative quantifiers (e.g., English *nobody*; see Weir 2020; Espinal et al. 2023, for a review). In other words, EPIs’ grammaticality in (only) these two contexts does not imply they are acquiring or have acquired any (inherent, syntacticosemantic) negative force, e.g., that they bear [NEG] and have a negative universal quantifier semantics. The interpretation in (36) could be a pragmatic by-product, as I speculate in the following section, and *not* a result of a change in these EPIs’ featural/formal status. From this pragmatic perspective, *tu madre* and others are interpreted as \approx *nobody* by virtue of their expressive nature and use conditions. Namely, *tu madre*, *el Papa de Roma*, etc., are felicitously used only if the speaker feels negatively about a certain proposition/event; whence an interpretation such as ‘I’m not doing this’ could be achieved for negative fragments, without needing to resort to a change in their formal content. Double-negation interpretations could, potentially, receive a similar treatment, where the negative interpretation provided by the sentential negation would be ‘cancelled out’ by this, also negative, pragmatic inference. This stands in contrast to the discussion in §3.2.1 on *RITA*, which did invite an analysis where it is acquiring some negative force. Its behaviour with neg-raising and negative spread lead to this tentative conclusion, as both constructions are generally analysed as requiring a negation-related feature of some kind on the relevant item to sanction them. I will return to this in the next section.

By implication, then, EPIs beyond *RITA* do not behave at all like NCIs or squatives, bar in negative fragments, which are plausibly a pragmatic, *not* syntactic, result. Similarly like *RITA*, they

are also sharply ungrammatical in non-veridical contexts where PIs are licensed, see below:

(37)	Spanish, conditional										
	a.	*	<i>Si</i>	<i>ve</i>	<i>Déu</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>botiga,</i>	<i>avisa'm,</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>surto</i>
			if	come.3sg	EPI	to	the	shop	warn.IMP=CL.DO	that.CONJ	go.out.1SG
<i>a</i>	<i>fer</i>		<i>un</i>	<i>encàrrec</i>	<i>un</i>	<i>moment.</i>					
to	make.INF		an	errand	a	moment					

Intended: 'If anyone/nobody comes to the shop, let me know, I'm going out for a moment to run an errand.'

(37)	Catalan, interrogative							
	b.	*	<i>Que</i>	<i>vindrà</i>	<i>ta mare</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>posar</i>	<i>pau?</i>
			that.INT	come.FUT.3SG	EPI	to	put.INF	peace

Intended: 'Is anyone/nobody going to come to calm things down?'

Overall, other EPIs are (at best) only licit in affirmative contexts without sentential negation, negation with *ni*, and as negative fragment answers, like Groups 1-2. Although this needs further confirmation, *RITA* is singled out, in Group 4, as an EPI potentially further advanced in the process of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation, shown primarily by its behaviour in antiveridical contexts. The broader range of EPIs diverge significantly in distribution from *RITA*. However, they share with *RITA* their expressive, speaker-attitude dimension, as well as bleaching from a lexical item (a proper noun denoting a *specific* individual) into an item acquiring pronominal and quantificational functions. The next section summarises the conclusions extracted so far.

4. Discussion

Taking stock, then, of the above showed, by using *RITA* as the central case study, how EPIs differ from NCIs, PIs and squatives, despite sharing some of their traits; this endorses further crosslinguistic study of their syntactic properties, in Catalan, Spanish and other languages. I began by outlining broad trends of syntactic behaviour in the survey results obtained: preference for veridical contexts and/or sentential negation with the NCI *ni*, argument structural and focalisation restrictions, incompatibility with *absolutely*-modification, among others. This, along with its expressive and epistemic properties, were sufficient to set *RITA* aside from other syntactic categories in Catalan.

Nonetheless, the inter-speaker variation in the use of *RITA* is substantial. I then motivated why an investigation of *RITA*'s behaviour with negation and antiveridicality is warranted: a subset of consultants reported acceptability of *RITA* with sentential negation. The rest of the survey data corroborated and further expanded on this observation. Via clustering analysis, we established four groups of participants, at least three of which are significant: while Groups 1 and 2 instantiate the majority pattern discussed in §3 (*RITA* in veridical context and/or with *ni*), a fourth Group exists, where *RITA* appears compatible with a range of antiveridical contexts. I compared *RITA*'s behaviour in consultants exhibiting Group 4's behaviour, and established that the compatibility with negation

appears *specific* to *RITA*; this accordingly signalled distinct degrees of grammaticalisation of both *RITA* itself (across Groups of participants) and *RITA* vis-à-vis other EPIs (the former plausibly further grammaticalised in Group 4).

Altogether, then, we observed that the Groups studied maintain a containment relationship with respect to each other, with Group 1 being the most restrictive set of speakers (Figure 13)²².

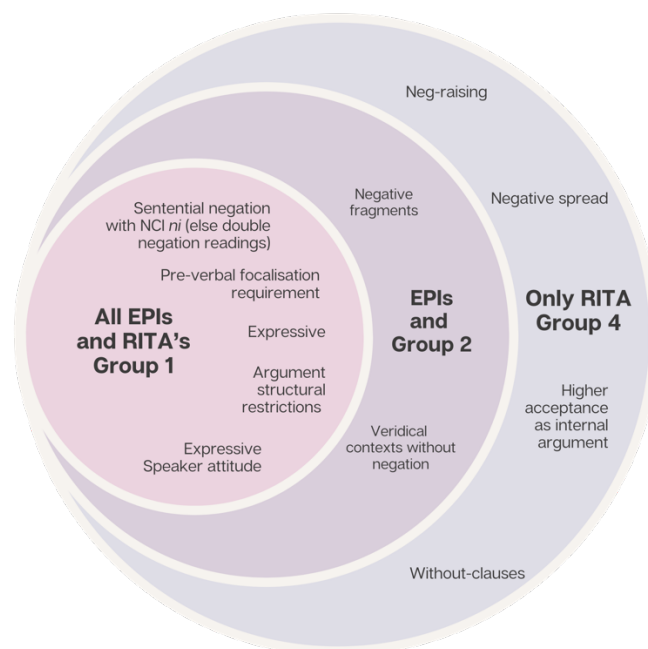


Figure 13. Euler diagram of EPIs' distribution across items and speaker groups.

The question now arises as to what properties of *RITA* and EPIs across the various Groups derive their morphosyntactic behaviour as well as their interpretation, both of which have characteristics that partly resemble the behaviour of negative elements and indefinite pronouns. I will not offer a formal analysis of EPIs, but I will offer some suggestions as to how Groups 1-4 may formally differ from each other, leaving the main bulk of this theoretical question to future work.

Group 1-2 EPIs and *RITA* show no interaction with negation/quantification; this begs the question of whether their negative-like interpretation is not due to their formal properties. Indeed, it is conceivable that the negation-like reading in EPIs could stem (at least partly) from a pragmatic/semantic after-effect (*not* from EPIs' featural content). Namely, the negative attitude in EPIs may be associated by convention and the felicity of EPIs is determined by its use conditions, e.g., '*RITA* is felicitously used if the speaker feels negatively about a certain event, utterance, action, etc.'. A semanticopragmatic account of EPIs' negative 'flavour' could help explain the behaviour of EPIs beyond *RITA*, which are only allowed as negative fragments, among all the antiveridical contexts examined (§3.4).

However, whether this 'pragmatic after-effect' is sufficient to derive, for example, negative spread, among others, with *RITA* in Group 4 is much less trivial. Possibly, then, (at least some) EPIs

²² Note that Group 3 is absent in Figure 13. Recall that this is because Group 3 was set aside, as discussed in §3.3; it appears to be an outlier and a potential artifact of the experiment design.

may indeed be acquiring some negative properties (the precise nature of which remains open, see Espinal et al. 2023 for a review of approaches). Group 4 turns out to be particularly significant, therefore; it raises the question of how, formally, an original proper noun has acquired properties highly resemblant of negative/quantificational elements, besides its expressivity, epistemicity and pronominal-like characteristics. Elements permitting these structures (NCIs, notably) are sometimes analysed as contributing negation themselves (Giannakidou 2002; Weir 2020; Tubau et al. 2023). This thus concerns whether (some) EPIs, e.g., *RITA*, are truly specified as inherently negative in the syntax (e.g., bearing [NEG] and contributing a negative semantics), or alternatively, if a non-negative approach to NCIs is adopted, if *RITA* bears an uninterpretable [*u*NEG] feature (per Zeijlstra 2004, *et seq.*). This would help explain *RITA*'s availability in negative spread and negative fragment answers (Giannakidou 2002). For all groups too, *RITA* shows focalisation pre-verbal and expressive, speech-act-oriented properties, suggesting it interacts, in some form, with discourse features and/or the left periphery. I set a theoretical analysis of *RITA* aside, in any Groups, but I note that, whatever formal properties are assumed, they have to be sufficient to license the wide distribution observed in Group 4.

Notice, finally, that we have set aside the precise diachronic pathway these items may have undergone: as expressive, colloquial language, relevant diachronic data is virtually absent. We simply assume that these elements developed from a proper noun, denoting a specific individual (§2), and then took on this further EPI use. This could have been via a conventionalisation of a pragmatic implicature of some kind, whereby 'Rita is going to do this' came to roughly imply 'No one/I/we won't do this (only Rita, God, etc. will)'. It is, however, unclear which Groups are diachronically more recent. While the minority Group 4 is likely to be a more recent innovation (given the predominance of affirmative sentences with *RITA*), it is not clear whether the distribution in Group 2 is original (as the newspaper quote, page 4, appears to suggest) or whether it is instead that of Group 1. At any rate, more work on the diachronic implications of these EPIs will be illuminating. We can already note that the distribution of absence/presence of negation across speakers are *opposite* in squatives vs *RITA*: squatives, and postverbal negators generally, are grammatical with negation for all speakers, and without negation only for some; the opposite holds of *RITA*, suggesting a distinct grammaticalisation pathway from canonical Jespersen's Cycle developments.

Taken together, the empirical contribution of this paper then raises the need for a model that can incorporate the behaviour of *RITA* and EPIs, within and across speakers. It expands the range of case studies on expressive material and its syntactic distribution, presenting a novel phenomenon where *proper nouns* are seemingly acquiring some (expressive) negative/quantificational uses. It also opens the door to further crosslinguistic investigation into EPIs in Romance (e.g., Spanish) and crosslinguistically similar phenomena. §4.2 briefly addresses the latter.

4.2. Crosslinguistic comparison

Besides determining the precise formal status of EPIs and their possible origin, future work should also investigate whether similar constructions exist in other languages where proper nouns can take on similar interpretations, and to what extent these overlap with the EPIs discussed here. I finish this paper by giving a brief crosslinguistic comparison with structures similar to EPIs.

Some Romanian structures with *dracul* ('the demon/devil') appear to be used with comparable functions to *RITA*. Similarly, *Bulă* (a name for a fictional stock character) is used to refer to a 'generalised silly character/person', often in jokes. This is illustrated in the following dialogues:

(38)	Romanian								
	A:	<i>Ai</i>	<i>văzut</i>	<i>cât</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>multe</i>	<i>lungă</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>tema.</i>
		AUX.HAVE.2SG	see.PTCP	how	of	very	long	the	homework
	<i>de</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>matematică?</i>						
	of	the	maths						

'Have you seen how long the homework for maths is?'

B:	<i>Da,</i>	<i>sunt</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>probleme...</i>
	yes	are	30	of	problems

'Yes, there are 30 problems...'

A:	<i>Dracul</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>face.</i>
	devil.the	CL.DO=	will.3SG	do.INF

'I'm not going to do them (lit. the devil will do them).'

(Sergiu Petrușca, p.c.)

(39)						
A:	<i>Bucătăria</i>	<i>miroase</i>	<i>îngrozitor.</i>	<i>Cine</i>	<i>duce</i>	<i>gunoiul?</i>
	kitchen.the	smell.3SG	horrible	who	take.3SG	garbage.the

'The kitchen smells horrible. Who takes the garbage out?'

B:	<i>Bulă</i>	<i>duce</i>	<i>gunoiul.</i>
	Bulă	take.3SG	garbage.the

'Bulă takes the garbage out...'

A:	<i>Așa</i>	<i>mă</i>	<i>gândeam</i>	<i>și</i>	<i>eu,</i>	<i>Ionut</i>	<i>este</i>	<i>neglijent</i>	<i>ca de obicei.</i>
	then	CL.REFL=	think.IMPF.1SG	and	I	Ionut	is	negligent	as-usual

'That's what I thought, Ionut is neglectful as usual.' (Bulă ≈ 'no one', but both Speaker and Addressee have a specific 'silly' person in mind that they know won't do it (Ionut))

(Sergiu Petrușca, p.c.)

So-called 'Demonic Negation' in Irish (after McCloskey 2009, 2018) also displays parallels with *RITA*-type sentences, being a type of emphatic negation with *dheamhan* ('demon'). However, its distribution is distinct: it can appear in two forms 'DemNeg + XP' and 'Bare DemNeg' (39a and 39b below, respectively) and is generated in CP, according to D'Antuono (2024) (see D'Antuono's paper for further details). Its interpretation also varies from the EPIs discussed. Demonic Negation, according to D'Antuono, is a semantic expression of *sentential* negation.

(40)	Irish, DemNeg + XP
------	--------------------

	a.	<i>Dheamhan</i>	<i>duine</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>bhuaileann</i>	<i>sé.</i>
		demon	person	that	hits	he

‘Not one person does he hit.’

(40)	Bare DemNeg						
	b.	<i>Dheamhan</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>mbuaileann</i>	<i>sé</i>	<i>aon</i>	<i>duine.</i>
		demon	that	hits	he	any	person

‘Indeed, he doesn’t hit anybody.’

(D’Antuono 2024:2)

The German expression *einen/den Teufel tun* ‘do a/the devil’ (abbreviated as TT) is similarly used for emphatic rejection (41), as summarised in Sailer (2018).

(41)	German							
	<i>Ich</i>	<i>werde</i>	<i>einen/den</i>	<i>Teufel</i>	<i>tun,</i>	<i>dir</i>	<i>zu</i>	<i>helfen.</i>
	I	will.1SG	a/the.ACC	devil	any	person	to	help.INF

‘I’ll be damned if I help you / I will certainly not help you.’

(Sailer 2018:402)

The parallels with *RITA* are again only partial: TT is analysed as contributing a negative conventional implicature, which entails the negation of the proposition; this resembles the proposals above for EPIs. However, there are various points of divergence between TT and EPIs. Among other aspects, the expression is analysed as a Positive PI by Sailer, as it cannot occur under the scope of negation. This is unlike *RITA*, for some speakers, but like the rest of EPIs. TT furthermore requires a *personal agent* as the subject, which is also the subject of second part of the construction (the *zu*-clause). This person-referring aspect of TT is shared with EPIs (which are very often also agents), but EPIs do not have a set subject of the activity in the proposition, even if the structure is strongly speaker-attitude-oriented (it can be a 1st, 2nd or 3rd person, given an appropriate context, §2.1).

Other examples of proper nouns undergoing some bleaching include Italian nouns *Tizio*, *Caio* and *Sempronio* (originally denoting three Roman politicians), which are now used to indicate any person taken as an example (Valentina Colasanti, p.c.; see also the placeholder names Spanish *fulanito/a*, *zutanito/a* and *menganito/a* or English (*little*) *John Doe*). These however have not taken on negative interpretations, unlike EPIs.

(42)	Italian									
	<i>Già</i>	<i>queste</i>	<i>sanzioni</i>	<i>che</i>	<i>vanno</i>	<i>bene</i>	<i>per</i>	<i>Tizio</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>non</i>
	yes	these	sanctions	that	go.3PL	well	for	Tizio	but	not
<i>per</i>	<i>Sempronio.</i>	<i>Chissà</i>	<i>sulla</i>	<i>base</i>	<i>di</i>	<i>cosa</i>	<i>viene</i>	<i>presa</i>		
for	Sempronio	who.knows	on.the	basis	of	what	come.3SG	take.PTCP		
<i>la</i>	<i>decisione.</i>									
the	decision									

‘Yes, these sanctions are good for some people but not for others. Who knows on what basis the decision is made.’²³

5. Conclusions

In this paper, I introduced a previously undescribed phenomenon in Catalan (and Spanish) – proper nouns that have undergone some formal change and have started to take on an expressive role partly resembling the behaviour of negative indefinites, dubbed here ‘EPIs’. With particular focus on *RITA*, I carried out an in-depth grammaticality judgement task documenting *RITA*’s distribution across speakers of Catalan. I compared their behaviour to existing polarity/negation categories: NCIs, PIs and squativives. I concluded that they pattern as a *distinct*, though partially overlapping, class. Furthermore, the survey data established minimally three new significant groups of participants as far as the distribution of *RITA* is concerned; I argued for the theoretical significance of Group 4, a group which has not just grammaticalised a proper noun (*RITA*) into an expressive element with pronominal properties, but has additionally expanded *RITA*’s distribution to antiveridical contexts, partly paralleling NCIs’ behaviour. Finally, I discussed other similar EPIs beyond *RITA* in Catalan, and showed that the wider distribution of *RITA* in Group 4 is *unique* to this item, and is absent in other EPIs. I left a theoretical model of *RITA*’s and EPIs’ formal profile to future work. Altogether, these results make the typology of EPIs, but especially *RITA*, a linguistically peculiar phenomenon, worthy of further study. Our data, albeit preliminary and exploratory, has theoretical implications, insofar as they may open new research avenues on diachronic sources of polarity/negation items and expand our grasp of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation pathways of proper nouns and expressive material.

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²³ Retrieved 2 March 2024, from <https://x.com/amanuzzicri/status/1711714877562146826?s=46&t=fuiwVRJTim3v2iCMFnjdW>.

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