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## Romanian n-words as negative quantifiers

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## **Abstract**

This paper argues that Romanian n-words are negative quantifiers and provides strong empirical support for this position. First, contrary to what is generally argued for strict negative concord languages, we show that the double negation reading is available in Romanian with two or several n-words. Furthermore, both diachronically and synchronically we find occurrences of n-words without sentential negation that yield semantic negation. Our hypothesis correctly predicts several similarities between n-words in Romanian and their counterparts in Germanic languages. In order to account for these facts, I adopt de Swart and Sag's (2002) polyadic approach of n-words as negative quantifiers. I also argue that the traditional distinction between negative concord and double negation languages needs to be reconsidered.

# Romanian N-words as Negative Quantifiers

Anamaria Falaus

## 1 Introduction

In this paper, I discuss the semantic properties of so-called *n-words* in Romanian and provide strong arguments in favor of an analysis in terms of negative quantifiers. I introduce empirical facts that have been either ignored or overlooked in the literature and argue that competing approaches cannot account for these facts. Two different types of evidence provide support for our hypothesis on the negativity of n-words in Romanian. First, the possible readings of sentences with more than one n-word, together with diachronic data, show that n-words contribute negation to the interpretation of the sentences where they occur. The other type of evidence is the similar behavior of Romanian n-words and negative quantifiers in Germanic languages: fragment answers, modification by *almost/absolutely*, lack of existential commitment, and licensing of *donkey anaphora*. On the basis of these facts, I argue that an analysis of n-words as negative quantifiers, which will be implemented here within the polyadic approach developed by de Swart and Sag (2002), is both empirically and theoretically superior. This raises the more general question of the distinction between negative concord and double negation languages.

## 2 Multiple Occurrences of Negation in Romanian

According to the interpretation of a sentence with several (morphologically) negative elements, there are two main types of languages. In Double Negation (DN) languages, such as standard varieties of Germanic and Scandinavian languages, two negative elements cancel each other out yielding a positive reading, as in (1) below:

(1) Paul didn't see nobody. = Paul saw somebody.

On the other hand, in a wide variety of languages, multiple occurrences of negation are interpreted as one semantic negation, as in the Italian example in (2):

(2) Paola *non* ha visto **nessuno**.  
"Paola didn't see anybody"

In (2), the sentential negative marker *non* co-occurs with the *n*-word *nessuno* (“nobody”), but the sentence has a reading with only one semantic negation, which can be paraphrased as “It is not the case that there is an individual *x*, such that Paola saw *x*.” This phenomenon, where multiple occurrences of negation yield only one logical negation, is known in current linguistic literature as *negative concord*<sup>1</sup> (NC). As Haspelmath (1997) points out, it is a widespread phenomenon across languages and is attested in Romance, Greek, Hungarian, Slavic, Afrikaans, Japanese, non-standard varieties of English, German or Dutch, and many other languages (see, among others, Giannakidou 2002 and references therein).

With respect to this typological distinction, Romanian qualifies as a strict negative concord language, where the sentential negation *nu* obligatorily co-occurs with an *n*-word, be it preverbal (3a) or postverbal (3b):

- (3) a. **Niciun** student \*(*nu*) a citit *Approaching UG from below*.  
 No student neg has read *Approaching UG from below*  
 “No student has read *Approaching UG from below*.”  
 b. Paula \*(*nu*) a citit **niciun** articol de Chomsky.  
 Paula neg has read no paper by Chomsky  
 “Paula hasn’t read any paper by Chomsky.”

Both sentences in (3) get an interpretation with a single negation, in spite of the occurrence of two morphologically negative elements. Thus, I conclude that the following generalization captures the facts in Romanian:

(i) *The co-occurrence of the sentential negative marker with one n-word yields a single negation reading.*

Strict negative concord languages are generally assumed not to allow double negation readings (see, for instance, Giannakidou 2002), and the generalization in (i) above seems to support this claim. A more thorough analysis of the empirical data shows, however, that this conclusion is inaccurate. Although the examples in (3) do not allow a double negation reading, this interpretation becomes available as soon as there is more than one *n*-word in the clause. Consider the Romanian example in (4):

- (4) **Niciun** student \*(*nu*) a citit **niciun** articol de Chomsky.  
 No student neg has read no paper by Chomsky  
 a. “No student read any paper by Chomsky.” [NC]

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<sup>1</sup>In this paper, I set aside the discussion of non-strict negative concord languages, where there is an asymmetry with respect to the presence of the sentential negation, depending on the position of the *n*-word: preverbal *n*-words preclude the presence of sentential negation, whereas postverbal *n*-words require it.

- b. “Every student read (at least) one paper by Chomsky.” [DN]

The sentence in (4) is ambiguous between a negative concord and a double negation reading. Under the former, given in (4a), the sentence is interpreted as “It is not the case that there is a student  $x$  and a paper  $y$ , such that  $x$  read  $y$ .” This reading can surface in a situation where students were supposed to read papers by Chomsky and it turns out they didn’t. Under the double negation interpretation, the sentence means “It is not the case that there is a student who has read no paper by Chomsky”, which is equivalent to the non-negative paraphrase in (4b), “Every student read (at least) one paper by Chomsky.”

The examples below also show that the double negation reading is always available as soon as there are (at least) two n-words in a sentence:

- (5) **Nimeni** (\**nu*) face **nicio** greseala.  
 nobody neg make.3sg no mistake  
 a. “Nobody makes any mistake.” [NC]  
 b. “Everybody makes mistakes.” [DN]
- (6) **Nimeni** \*(*nu*) moare **niciodata**.  
 Nobody neg die.3sg never  
 a. “Everybody is immortal” [NC]  
 b. “Everybody is mortal” [DN favored]

The double negation readings of the Romanian sentences above are subject to the usual constraints on double negation. Thus, as shown in Horn (2001), pragmatic factors govern the possibility of having a double negation interpretation, which generally contradicts a negative assertion or presupposition. The utterance in (5) could be a reply to an assertion like *I’m surprised by Brad’s professionalism, his work is always perfect*. In this context, (5) could be used to express doubts on Brad’s capacities and would be easily interpreted as *Everybody makes mistakes*. Pragmatic factors can also favor a double negation reading, like in (6), where the most salient reading is in accordance with our knowledge of the world, where everybody is mortal. The NC reading, on the other hand, needs a special context in order to become more salient.

Intonation also plays a crucial role in determining the availability of double negation readings. According to Corblin (1996), double negation is the preferred interpretation if one n-word is “separated” from the rest of the sentence through a different intonation. He illustrates this with French sentences that contain three n-words:

- (7) *PERSONNE // ne dit rien à personne* [DN favored]  
 nobody neg say.3sg nothing to nobody  
 “Nobody is such that he doesn’t say anything to anyone”

As Corblin points out, sequences of three n-words are usually difficult to process. Consequently, the example in (7) acquires a double negation reading, marked by special intonation. As a general rule, intonation can always be used to disambiguate sentences with two or more n-words.

Without going into further details on this issue, I adopt Zeijlstra’s conclusion that double negation is always available, but it has highly infrequent usage conditions: “[...] Clause-internal Double Negation is extremely rare, but I account for this due to its pragmatic restrictions and not to any syntactic or semantic unavailability of Double Negation” (Zeijlstra 2004:60).

With respect to double negation in Romanian, I have shown that this interpretation is available with more than one n-word. Since it is a highly marked (and therefore less frequent) reading, its marginal status in a strict negative concord language should not be surprising. This is probably the reason why this kind of data have been ignored (or overlooked) so far in the literature on Romanian n-words.

I conclude that the empirical generalization that emerges from the facts in Romanian is the following:

(ii) *a sentence with two or more n-words as arguments/modifiers of the same predicate can yield a double negation reading.*

The distribution and interpretation of Romanian n-words is given in (8):

- (8) (i) the co-occurrence of the sentential negative marker with one n-word yields a single negation reading.  
 (ii) a sentence with two (or more) n-words arguments/modifiers of the same predicate can yield a **double negation** reading

The two generalizations above call for an explanation. I argue that the puzzle in (8) poses a serious challenge both to theories that take n-words in strict negative concord to be non-negative elements<sup>2</sup> (Laka 1990, Ladusaw 1992, Giannakidou 2002) and to theories that rely on ambiguity (van der Wouden 1997, Herburger 2002). An analysis that supposes semantic negation is only introduced by sentential negation has to explain where the second negation comes from in sentences that acquire a double negation reading. The only possible way out of this problem would be to posit a silent negative operator

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<sup>2</sup>I have shown elsewhere (Falaus 2006) that n-words in Romanian are both distributionally and semantically different from typical polarity items, but I will not provide a detailed discussion of this issue in this paper.

that is semantically relevant only in sentences with two n-words. Note, however, that one would have to explain why this abstract operator can't be introduced when there is only one n-word and can't force a double negation reading in this case. I take the silent negation proposal not to be independently motivated and I argue the negative quantifier approach to be both empirically and theoretically superior.

Another possible solution would be to analyze n-words as ambiguous elements: they are non-negative in sentences where they only co-occur with the sentential negative marker, but they become negative when they also co-occur with another n-word. This kind of lexical ambiguity, however, also has to be motivated on independent grounds.

A detailed discussion of the different accounts of negative concord is beyond the scope of this paper (cf. Falaut to appear). The only relevant fact at this point is that the existence of double negation readings provides a strong argument in favor of an analysis of n-words as semantically negative items. Consequently, I argue that a negative quantifier analysis for n-words provides a straightforward account for the puzzle in (8). Setting aside for the moment the issue of sentential negation (see section 4.2), under this approach, n-words contribute semantic negation to the interpretation of the sentence where they occur. When there is only one n-word, we always end up with a single negation reading. However, as soon as there are two n-words, the two negations contributed by each one of them can either combine and get interpreted as a single negation, or cancel each other out, by virtue of the Law of Double Negation. In section 4, I will adopt the polyadic approach and provide a detailed account for the generalizations introduced in this section.

### **3 Further Arguments for the Negativity of N-words**

In the previous section, I have shown that the availability of double negation readings strongly supports a theory of n-words as negative elements. This hypothesis is also confirmed by the existence of contexts where n-words appear without sentential negation and contribute semantic negation. This kind of data can be found both diachronically and synchronically, in some non-finite contexts.

#### **3.1 Diachronic Evolution of N-words**

In spite of the reduced amount of relevant data in Old Romanian, the distribution of n-words in their evolution from Latin to contemporary Romanian further supports the hypothesis that n-words introduce semantic negation in

the sentences where they occur. More specifically, just like in non-strict negative concord languages, preverbal n-words in Old Romanian (mainly 16<sup>th</sup> century) do not co-occur with sentential negation. This distributional pattern is illustrated in the examples in (9):

- (9) **Nimea** are a sedea de-a dereapta.  
 nobody have.3sg to sit of right  
 “Nobody will sit on the right (side).”

Preverbal n-words are the only negative elements in the sentences above, as the negative sentential marker is absent. Consequently, a reasonable way of accounting for the negative meaning of such sentences is to assume that preverbal n-words contribute semantic negation. Sentential negation only appears with postverbal n-words, as shown in (10):

- (10) Ca când **nu** ar avea impreunare **nemica** trupul cu sufletul.  
 as when neg would have bound nothing body.the with soul.the  
 “As if body and soul had nothing in common.”

Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, sentential negation became more and more frequent with preverbal n-words, and consequently, Romanian turned into a strict negative concord language.

This evolution pattern is the mirror image of the one reported for other Romance languages, such as Spanish or Portuguese (cf. Herburger 2002), which used to have strict negative concord and then became non-strict negative concord languages. The comparison between the diachronic distributions of n-words in Romance raises the more general question of the exact historical relation between strict and non-strict negative concord, and shows that diachronic shift is not unidirectional (Jaeger 2007). As far as the analysis developed here is concerned, two important conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the available data in Old Romanian. First, n-words clearly contribute semantic negation when they occur in preverbal position, just like negative quantifiers in other languages. The second point arguing in favor of a negative quantifier approach is the fact that, although both Old Romanian and contemporary Spanish/Italian display non-strict negative concord, n-words in Romanian are never attested with a non-negative, existential interpretation. More specifically, they never appear in typical polarity contexts, such as questions or antecedents of conditionals, unlike what we find in other non-strict negative concord languages. The absence of a positive reading represents a crucial difference between Romanian n-words and their counterparts in Romance and strongly supports an analysis of n-words as semantically negative elements.



### 3.2 Non-finite Contexts

The diachronic data introduced in the previous section indicate that at a certain stage of the evolution of negation, Romanian was a non-strict negative concord language. This distributional pattern survives in contemporary Romanian in some non-finite contexts<sup>3</sup>. The following examples illustrate the asymmetry between preverbal and postverbal n-words with a past participle:

- (11) a. Un mister **niciodata**/de **nimeni** rezolvat  
 A mystery never /by nobody solved  
 b. Un mister \*(ne)rezolvat **niciodata**/de **nimeni**  
 A mystery neg.solved never /by nobody  
 “A mystery never/by nobody solved”

In the examples in (11), the presence of the negative marker *ne-* (the typical negation in non-finite contexts) is required with an n-word in postverbal position (11b), whereas preverbal n-words need not be licensed by some other negative element (11a). The two examples have the same interpretation, with one semantic negation, but, crucially, in (11a), the only negative element is the preverbal n-word.

If preverbal n-words co-occur with the negative affix *ne-*, the construction acquires a (marginally accepted) double negation interpretation, as in the sentence in (12), taken from Teodorescu (2004):

- (12) ? o carte **niciodata** *necitata*  
 a book never neg.quoted  
 “a book never unquoted”

The distribution and interpretation of n-words in non-finite contexts raises the same question as the double negation readings discussed in section 2 and the diachronic data in 3.1. If n-words were non-negative elements, where would the (double or single) negative meaning of these constructions come from? Rather than positing and trying to motivate a silent negation operator, I argue that an analysis of n-words as negative quantifiers correctly predicts these facts.

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<sup>3</sup>Non-strict negative concord is ruled out with infinitives and gerunds, but allowed in the other Romanian non-finite contexts, i.e. supines, present and past participles. For more details, see Iordachioaia (2004) or Teodorescu (2004).

### 3.3 Romanian N-words and Negative Quantifiers in Germanic

In spite of their systematic co-occurrence with sentential negation, Romanian n-words show interesting similarities with their counterparts in Germanic languages, typically analyzed as negative quantifiers. The table in (13), which is a slightly modified version of Iordachioaia (2005), shows that negative quantifiers and n-words (in strict NC languages) share several properties.

(13)

	Existential	Universal	NPI ( <i>any</i> )	Negative quantifier	N-word
Locality	yes	no	yes	<b>no</b>	<b>no</b>
Fragmentary answers	yes	yes	no	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>
<i>Almost/absolutely</i> modification	no	yes	no	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>
Existential commitment	no	yes	no	<b>no</b>	<b>no</b>
<i>Donkey</i> anaphora	yes	no	yes	<b>yes/no</b>	<b>yes/no</b>

First, neither of these classes of elements can take scope outside the proposition where they occur. Moreover, both negative quantifiers and n-words can be used as fragmentary negative answers and can be modified by *almost/absolutely*, a property they share with universals. On the other hand, negative quantifiers and n-words show the lack of existential commitment proper to existential quantifiers. Furthermore, negative quantifiers and n-words do not license pronouns outside their syntactic scope. However, as shown in Iordachioaia (2005), these elements can bind anaphora when they occur with an existential predicate.

In this paper, I will not provide a detailed discussion of the similarities between negative quantifiers and Romanian n-words (see Falauş to appear). The relevant point illustrated by table (13) is that diagnostics generally used to determine the exact quantificational force of n-words in negative concord languages point out interesting resemblances with negative quantifiers (and also interesting differences with other types of quantifiers and polarity items). If the semantics of n-words in (strict) negative concord and double negation languages is assumed to be different, their similar behavior remains unexplained. Consequently, I argue for a unitary treatment of n-words as negative quantifiers.

## 4 Negative Quantifiers: A Unified Analysis

I have argued so far that Romanian n-words are negative quantifiers and provided strong empirical support for this view. On the one hand, the existence of double negation readings shows that n-words clearly contribute semantic negation. Both diachronically and synchronically n-words appear without any other negative element and have a negative interpretation. On the other hand, I have mentioned several similarities between n-words in Romanian and negative quantifiers in double negation languages. On the basis of these facts, I conclude that a unified treatment is required for double negation and negative concord. In this section, I elaborate on this idea by adopting de Swart and Sag's (2002) polyadic analysis of n-words.

### 4.1 The Polyadic Approach to Negative Concord

De Swart and Sag develop an account of n-words in the framework of the theory of generalized quantifiers. NPs are taken to denote sets of properties, whereas standard determiners denote relations between sets. Thus, in a sentence like *Every politician is a liar*, the universal quantifier establishes a relation between the set of politicians and the set of individuals that are liars and requires that the first set be included in or equal to the latter. This type of determiner is usually called a  $\langle 1,1 \rangle$  quantifier.

In this approach, n-words are analyzed as semantically negative monadic quantifiers, i.e. quantifiers binding one variable (a quantifier of type  $\langle 1 \rangle$ ). Negative concord and double negation are both assumed to involve polyadic quantification, but rely on two different composition modes. Either n-words combine by standard functional application and the result is an iteration of negative quantifiers (yielding double negation), or they are interpreted in terms of resumption, building a polyadic quantifier ranging over pairs of variables (negative concord). For reasons of convenience, I illustrate the two possibilities with an ambiguous example in French, but the same holds for Romanian:

- (14) *Aucun enfant ne connaît aucune histoire.*  
 No child neg know.3sg no story

The sentence in (14) has two possible readings. The first one is the double negation interpretation, derived by compositional iteration of two negative quantifiers, each binding one variable. The different steps in the semantic derivation are given in (15) below:

- (15) a. [No, No] (Children, Story, Know)

- b.  $\text{Children} \cap \{x \mid \text{Story} \cap \text{Know}_x = \emptyset\} = \emptyset$
- c.  $\neg \exists x, x : \text{child}, \neg \exists y, y : \text{story}, \text{Know}(x, y)$
- d. It is not the case that there is a child who knows no story

In (15a), there are two negative quantifiers and three predicates: two one-place predicates *child*, *story* and the two-place predicate *know*. The monadic negative quantifier [NO] establishes a relation between the set of children and the set of individuals who don't know any story. As shown in (15b) and in the first-order translation in (15c), the intersection of the set of children and the set of individuals who don't know any story has to be empty. The sentence yields a reading equivalent to the statement "Every child knows (at least) one story," where the two negations cancel each other out.

The negative concord interpretation of a sentence with two negative quantifiers is achieved via resumption. I set aside here the definition or the restrictions on resumption, extensively discussed by de Swart and Sag. When this mechanism applies to n-words, the two negative quantifiers combine and are reinterpreted as only one complex negative quantifier (here dyadic) that ranges over the set of pairs denoted by the verb, as in (16a):

- (16) a.  $\text{No}_{x,y}(\text{Child } x, \text{Story } y, \text{Know})$   
 b.  $\neg \exists x, x : \text{child}, \exists y, y : \text{story}, \text{Know}(x, y)$   
 c. It is not the case that there is a pair  $x$ : child,  $y$ : story, such that  $x$  knows  $y$

The resumptive negative quantifier thus binds the sum of all the variables of the composing monadic quantifiers, in this case the two n-words. Since there is only one semantically negative quantifier, the sentence ends up having a negative concord reading, paraphrased in (16c).

#### 4.2 Sentential Negation in Negative Concord

The polyadic approach that I adopted in this paper provides an account for the puzzling double negation readings that only occur with (at least) two n-words. Since Romanian is a strict negative concord language, the sentential negative marker is always present. Recall however, that sentences where sentential negation licenses only one n-word are never interpreted as double negations. The crucial factor for the availability of double negation readings is the presence of at least two n-words. I take this to indicate that sentential negation doesn't influence the distribution of negative concord or double negation readings. We therefore need an account that can explain why sentential negation seems semantically vacuous in sentences with n-words.

Under the polyadic approach that I advocate here, sentential negation is treated as a propositional, non-variable binding operator. Semantically, negation is a function from propositions to truth-values. Assuming the Aristotelian view of negation (Horn 2001) as predicate denial and treating propositions as zero-place predicates, sentential negation is analyzed as a negative quantifier with addicity zero, a  $\langle 0 \rangle$  quantifier. Since negation is a quantifier<sup>4</sup>, it can participate in the resumptive negative quantifier, but it doesn't add any variable to the sum of variables that need to be bound. Consequently, sentential negation is "absorbed" in the resumptive quantifier and has no effect on truth-conditions. In other words, sentential negation is semantically redundant in negative concord contexts (de Swart and Sag 2002:401).

This analysis provides a straightforward explanation for the distribution of double negation readings. Since in negative concord contexts sentential negation is semantically redundant, it gets absorbed by the polyadic quantifier and consequently, double negation never arises in sentences where sentential negation co-occurs with only one n-word. Resumption is therefore the default mechanism of interpretation in negative concord languages. In contextually appropriate conditions, sequences of n-words can also be interpreted by iteration. Note however, that clause-level iteration is only possible with monadic quantifiers, so the combination of sentential negation and one n-word can never yield a double negation interpretation.

In contexts without any other n-words, sentential negation is both semantically and syntactically active. In negative concord structures, however, the sentential negative marker is required for syntactic reasons. As de Swart (2006) puts it, "given that the marker of sentential negation is semantically redundant in negative concord contexts, languages are free to include it in the concord system, exclude it from the concord system, or exploit the marker of negation for syntactic purposes (typically as a scope marker)" (de Swart 2006:164).

### 4.3 Double Negation in Negative Concord Language

The polyadic approach developed by de Swart and Sag (2002) accounts for the distribution of double negation readings in Romanian without positing any silent negation in the syntactic structure. Moreover, the analysis relies on a unified treatment of n-words in both negative concord and double negation languages. Given the existence of two different modes of semantic composition, the ambiguity of a sequence of two negative quantifiers is expected.

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<sup>4</sup>To be more precise, resumption is only defined for quantifiers that are somehow "similar." In the case of negative concord, quantifiers entering resumption have to be anti-additive (de Swart and Sag 2002).

Although this is a welcome result for Romanian, the analysis does not predict the whole range of cross-linguistic variation, as pointed out by Zeijlstra (2004), as there are languages that clearly “prefer” one of the two possible readings.

Note however, that even though not all languages freely allow both negative concord and double negation readings, we still need a theory that can handle ambiguities, when they occur. Romanian is the typical example of strict negative concord language, but I have shown that double negation is possible. In fact, a more careful investigation of cross-linguistic data reveals that Romanian is not the only negative concord language to display double negation readings. De Swart (2006) provides strong empirical support for this claim, with examples from Romance (17), Bulgarian (18), Hungarian, Welsh, West-Flemish and Afrikaans<sup>5</sup>. Here are some of the examples given in de Swart (2006):

- |                                    |             |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| (17) Nadie nunca volvió a Cuba.    | [Spanish]   |
| nobody never returned to Cuba      |             |
| a. “Nobody ever returned to Cuba”  | [NC]        |
| b. “Nobody never returned to Cuba” | [DN]        |
| (18) Nikoj ne obica nikogo.        | [Bulgarian] |
| nobody.NOM SN loves nobody.ACC     |             |
| a. “No one loves anyone”           | [NC]        |
| b. “Everyone loves someone”        | [DN]        |

Both strict and non-strict negative concord varieties allow double negation readings<sup>6</sup>, although the examples are marked and influenced by intonation and context. However, this is always the case with double negation readings, regardless of whether we are dealing with a double negation or a negative concord language. Consequently, I argue that these empirical facts can no longer be overlooked by analyses of negative concord.

## 5 Conclusions and Further Issues

Taking as the starting point the interpretation of n-words in Romanian, I have defended a unified analysis of n-words as negative quantifiers. I have

<sup>5</sup>The same pattern holds in Modern Hebrew (Yael Sharvit, p.c.).

<sup>6</sup>Languages differ with respect to the double negation reading of the co-occurrence of sentential negation and one n-word. While this is possible in non-strict negative concord languages, in strict varieties, double negation only appears in languages that have discontinuous negation, i.e. French and Afrikaans, and only with one of the two negative markers (de Swart 2006).

provided strong empirical support in favor of this approach. First, Romanian data directly challenge the generalization stating that double negation readings are not possible in strict negative concord languages. I have established a new empirical generalization according to which double negation is available with two n-words. This clearly indicates that n-words contribute semantic negation. Moreover, both diachronically and synchronically (non-finite contexts), we find contexts where n-words occur without sentential negation and yield negative meaning. A merely existential, non-negative reading never surfaces in Romanian. Another type of evidence supporting the view advocated here is the similar behavior of n-words and negative quantifiers in double negation languages. Under this approach, the existence of two mechanisms of interpretation (iteration and resumption) accounts for the ambiguities of sentences with two or more n-words. Although these ambiguities do not always arise, they are possible and therefore have to be accounted for.

The polyadic approach offers a unified analysis of n-words across languages and needs not posit hidden negations in syntax to account for their interpretation. Moreover, the noticed similarities between n-words in strict negative concord and negative quantifiers in double negation languages get a straightforward explanation. These are important advantages of the polyadic analysis over competing theories.<sup>7</sup> The main conclusion that emerges from our discussion of Romanian data is that the distinction between negative concord and double negation languages is not as clear-cut as it was initially believed and consequently has to be reconsidered. Although we still need to account for the considerable range of cross-linguistic variation, I argue that a unified analysis of n-words as negative quantifiers is both theoretically and empirically superior.

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<sup>7</sup>It has been recently argued (Penka 2005) that the determiner *no* and its cross-linguistic counterparts should always be decomposed into sentential negation+indefinite. Whether or not this line of argumentation is correct remains an open issue. What I would like to emphasize, though, is that no matter what turns out to be the correct analysis of negative quantifiers in double negation languages, it also has to apply to negative concord languages.

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