NEGATIVE FRAGMENT ANSWERS IN ROMANIAN

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1. Definition

A fragment answer has received the following definition: "An answer α to a wh-question Q is a fragment answer iff 1) α corresponds in form to the wh-XP constituent in Q and 2) α is interpreted as a proposition" Giannakidou (2006: 27). We call a negative fragment answer the reply of B in the example under (1) from Romanian:

(1) *A:* *Cine a venit?*
who AUX came
'Who came?'
B: ***Nimeni.***
'Nobody.'

Apparently, a negative fragment answer is an elliptical structure (see Merchant 2004), having a single residual element and a VP as the elided material. The occurrence of *N-words* as negative fragment answers is one of the most frequent arguments for the status of N-words in negative concord (NC) languages as negative quantifiers (NQs) (see Fălăuș 2007, 2008, Iordăchioaia 2010, Ionescu M. 2015).

The interpretation of N-words as negative fragment answers is a controversial subject and is present in the very recent literature (Fălăuș and Nicolae 2016a, 2016b). The aim of this paper is to support the hypothesis that N-words in NC languages are NQs (and not negative polarity items, NPIs) and to account for the double reading that an N-word as a fragment answer to a negative question generates.

2. Patterns for negative fragment answers

In many languages, an N-word can be offered as a negative answer to a positive wh-question[1]:

(2) 'Who came?'
a. *Nimeni.* (Romanian)
b. *Nessuno.* (Italian)
c. *Nadie.* (Spanish)

[1] There is also a special case, where in some dialects of Belgian Dutch, the N-word in the fragment answer is accompanied by a negative marker (NM), giving rise to a NC construction (Aelbrecht 2006).

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d. *KANENAS.* (Greek)
e. *Nikt.* (Polish)
f. *Nobody.* (English)
g. *Dare-mo.* (Japanese)

In Romanian, we have the following types of constructions involving negative fragment answers:

Negative answer to a negative wh-question

(3) *A:* *Cine **nu** a băut whisky/nimic?*
who not AUX drank whiskey/nothing
'Who didn't drink anything?'
B: ***Nimeni**.*
'Nobody.'

Negative answer (with NC) to a positive wh-question

(4) *A:* *Cine pe cine a lovit?*
who on who AUX hit
'Who hit whom?'
B: ***Nimeni** pe **nimeni**.*
nobody on nobody
'Nobody anyone.'

Negative answer to a positive or negative yes-no question

(5) *A:* *(**Nu**) îți place?* (Avram 1987: 150)
not you-DAT like
'Don't/Do you like it?'
B: ***Deloc**!*
'At all!'

Negative answer to a positive yes-no question

(6) *A:* *A venit cineva?* (Avram 1987: 150)
AUX came anybody
'Did anybody come?'
B: ***Nimeni**.*
'Nobody.'

3. Negative fragment anwers – instances of ellipsis?

Giannakidou (1998, 2006) considers that the occurrence of an N-word in a negative fragment answer is licensed by the NM from the elided material. Thus, the N-word is interpreted as a negative polarity item (NPI).

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(7) *A:* *Cine a venit?*
who AUX came
'Who came?'
B: *[~~**Nu** a venit~~]* ***nimeni***.
not AUX came nobody
'[There did not come] anybody.'

Giannakidou argues that the NM belongs to the antecendent, but it cannot be sintactically expressed. Thus, the N-word is semantically licensed by the denotation of the antecendent, i.e. the question. The denotation of the question is the set of the possible answers (Q):

(8) *Domain: {John, Mary}*
Q: {John came, Mary came, nobody came}

Iordăchioaia (2010) argues against the proposal of interpreting the negative fragment answers as instances of ellipsis, bringing two arguments. Firstly, she argues against the NPI status of the N-words in these structures. As can be seen under (9), in the case of English, the negative fragment answer contains an NQ, while the occurrence of an NPI is ungrammatical:

(9) *A: Who came?*
*B: Nobody/*Anybody*.

The second counterargument brings into question the ellipsis resolution, which presupposes semantic identity between the elided material and the antecedent (see Merchant 2001, Watanabe 2004). In this case, it is about polarity identity: if the verb in the antecedent is positive/negative, the elided material has to be also positive/negative. Therefore, the N-word cannot be licensed by the elided NM, because the verb in the antecedent is positive.

4. Negative fragment answers to negative questions

Imagine the following situation: professor ends up teaching the lesson, he puts the following question to his students and receives the following answer:

(10) *Profesor: Ce* ***nu*** *ați înțeles?*
professor what not AUX understood
'Professor: What have you not understood?'
Studenți: ***Nimic***.
'Students: Nothing.'

The following question arises: how do we interpret the students' answer? Did they understand everything or nothing?

The semantic identity theory leads to the following conclusion: negative fragment answers to negative questions can only have double negation (DN) reading in Romanian (see Iordăchioaia 2010, Iordăchioaia and Richter 2015). Actually, this type of structure is ambiguous between a DN and a NC reading:

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(11) *A:* *Cine **nu** a venit?*
who not AUX came
'Who did not come?'
B: *[**Nu** a venit] **nimeni**.*
not AUX came nobody
'Nobody came/Everybody came.'
a. There is no one who didn't come. [DN]
b. $\neg(\exists x)\ \neg(\text{come}\ (x)) \equiv (\forall x)\ (\text{come}\ (x))$
c. There is no one who came. [NC]
d. $\neg(\exists x)\ (\text{come}\ (x))$

The results of a survey applied to 200 Romanian native speakers (Ionescu M. 2015) confirmed that an N-word offered as an answer to a negative question could generate two readings: one with NC (12a) and another one with DN (12b):

(12) *How do you interpret B's reply in the next dialogue: "A: Who hasn't eaten dessert? B: Nobody.":*
a. *There is no one who has eaten dessert. (95)*
b. *Everybody has eaten dessert. (89)*
c. *Both a and b above. (16)*

5. Negative fragment answers in other NC languages

The following table summarizes the interpretation of a negative fragment answer to a negative question in languages with strict or non-strict NC, or with Negative Spread (see Corblin and Tovena 2003, Tanaka 2011, Fitzgibbons 2011)[1]:

Language	**NC (+ type)**	**Interpretation**
Romanian	strict NC	NC/DN ?
French	negative spread[2]	DN
Italian	non-strict NC	DN
Portuguese	non-strict NC	DN
Spanish	non-strict NC	NC/DN ?
Japanese	strict NC	#
Serbo-Croatian	strict NC	#; the long answer: DN
Russian	strict NC	DN

6. Negative fragment answers to negative questions: NC or DN? The source of ambiguity

Fitzgibbons (2011) argues that only a positive fragment answer can be chosen from the set of alternatives that constitutes the denotation of the question, while the negative fragment answer comes from negating the presupposition of the question. Thus, when there is

[1] A convincing comparison would involve the same set of tests, the same number and the same type of speakers for all the languages analysed.
[2] See Giannakidou (2006: 24).

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a positive presupposition ("Who came?⟶Someone came."), the interpretation of the negative answer "nobody" has NC reading in Romanian. Likewise, when the question has a negative presupposition ("Who didn't come?⟶There is someone who didn't come."), the interpretation of the negative answer "nobody" has DN reading in Romanian.

The NC structure is visible when we reconstruct the answer: "**Nimeni nu** a venit. (Nobody came)". Romanian is a strict NC language, meaning that the occurrence of an N-word triggers the occurrence of the NM on the finite verb in the sentence. In the example under (11), one cannot argue that the NM from the question licenses the N-word from the answer, as we know that NC is clause-bounded (Giannakidou 2006: 10-11). But the interaction between the NM from the question and the N-word from the answer gives rise to the DN reading (the two negations cancel each other).

Now we have to answer to the following question: *Where does the NC reading of the negative fragment answer to a negative question come from?*

Our interpretation is the following: when we reconstruct the answer, the N-word is accompanied by the NM. But this NM is semantically empty, it carries no negative content and it is different from the NM in the question, which occurs independently of the N-words and carries negation alone. After the reconstruction of the answer, the ambiguity of the two readings appears, and the speaker needs to continue his answer, in order to be clear:

(13) *A:* *Ce* ***nu*** *ați înțeles?*
what not AUX understood
'What have you not understood?'
B1: ***Nimic****, nu am înțeles nimic. [NC]*
nothing not AUX understood nothing
'Nothing, we have not understood anything.'
B2: ***Nimic****, am înțeles tot. [DN]*
nothing AUX understood everything
'Nothing, we have understood everything.'

Therefore, Romanian makes use of two NMs (or one NM with two values/instances):

- NU_1, which has negative content and occurs independently, without N-words;
- NU_2, without negative force, which occurs with the finite verb and is triggered by the presence of an N-word (see the analysis of this NU as a 0 type quantifier within the *Polyadic Quantifier Theory*, in Iordăchioaia and Richter 2015).

7. Proposal: negative fragment answers are *fragments*

We have seen that N-words as negative fragment answers cannot be interpreted as instances of ellipsis. We propose to analyse these structures in terms of *fragments*. A fragment is a construction which is syntactically incomplete, but which expresses a propositional content. This concept has been introduced in Ginzburg and Sag (2000) to account for the structure of the fragment answers, but its meaning has been extended in order to cover *gapping* (Bîlbîie 2009, 2011) and *pseudo-stripping* constructions (Ionescu E. 2012).

Let us look at the example under (1). We have an NP that misses a VP in order to make a sentence. Thus, we have a syntactically incomplete answer. Nevertheless, this negative fragment answer is semantically equivalent to the complete sentence "Nimeni nu a venit (Nobody came)".

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8. Conclusions

We have discussed in this paper the interpretation of N-words as negative fragment answers in Romanian. These structures are a well spread argument for the status of N-words as NQs in NC languages. We have shown that these structures are not instances of ellipsis, because this violates the semantic identity theory. We argued that the source of ambiguity in the case of negative fragment answers to negative questions is the reconstruction of the answer, in which case the presence of the N-word triggers the occurrence of the NM, because Romanian is a strict NC language. We have shown there are two possible readings, with DN and NC, both accepted by the Romanian native speakers. Moreover, we have stated that Romanian uses two NMs: one is negative and occurs independently of the N-words (as the one in the questions), while the other lacks the negative force and occurs in the NC constructions. The latter one has been interpreted as a 0 type quantifier within the *Polyadic Quantifier Theory*, in Iordăchioaia and Richter (2015).

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(*Abstract*)

This paper aims to support the hypothesis that N-words in NC languages are NQs (and not NPIs) and to account for the double reading (one with NC and the other with DN) that an N-word as a fragment answer to a negative question generates in Romanian. We show that negative fragment answers are not instances of ellipsis and we argue that Romanian makes use of two NMs: one with negative force, which occurs independently of N-words, and the other without negative content, which is triggered by the presence of N-words in NC constructions.

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