

# The negative marker that escaped the cycle: some notes on *manco*<sup>\*</sup>

JACOPO GARZONIO<sup>1</sup>, CECILIA POLETTA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University Ca' Foscari Venice, <sup>2</sup>Goethe Universität Frankfurt  
garzonio@unive.it - poletto@em.uni-frankfurt.de



*“To Adriana,  
whose straight and insightful way of doing linguistics  
has been a constant source of inspiration through the years  
and a driving force in keeping formal syntax  
anchored to its empirical foundations”*

The evolution of the negative markers known as the Jespersen cycle has recently received much attention in the literature of both Romance and Germanic (see among others Breitbarth (2014), van Gelderen (2011), van der Auwera (2009) and (2010)). In general, both Germanic and Romance display a clitic-like negative marker which is then substituted by a low negative marker through the well known stage of doubling of the two negative markers, which first starts out in so called “emphatic contexts” and then generalizes followed by a last stage where the originally negative marker is entirely lost and negation is represented by the original “reinforcer”. Looking at both Romance and Germanic, the change in the position of the negative marker seems to be an in-built property of the Jespersen cycle: van der Auwera considers it from a typological perspective and notices that even in the Bantu family, the substitution goes with a change in the position similar to the one of Romance.

In this work we will first take into consideration cases of alternation between a preverbal and postverbal position of the “new” negative marker *mica* in Central and Southern Italian varieties: while in Northern Italian dialects, the minimizer *mica* occurs in postverbal position and doubles the preverbal negative marker, Central and Southern dialects have preverbal *mica*, which however alternates with the usual preverbal negative marker *non*. This seems to indicate that in order for the doubling

---

\* The related article will be part of C. Contemori and L. Dal Pozzo (eds.) (to appear) *Inquiries into Linguistic Theory and Language Acquisition. Papers offered to Adriana Belletti*, Siena, CISCL Press.

effect starting the Jespersen cycle to apply, the two negative markers have to be located on the two sides of the inflected verb, at least in Italian varieties. We will then concentrate on the dialect of Rionero in Vulture, which represents a case where one negative marker substitutes for another without changing its position and more notably, without triggering any doubling effect as usually found in more typical cases of the Jespersen cycle. In this Basilicatan dialect, the adverb *manco*, probably etymologically related to the verb *mancare* ‘lack’, has entirely substituted for the original negative marker *non/n*, so that *non/n* is not used anymore in this variety. However, it has not apparently changed its position, except that for the fact that it does not have the typical behavior of a clitic. This adverb is rather widespread in Southern Italian dialects as a sort of emphatic negative marker meaning ‘not even’, but in Rionero in Vulture the emphatic meaning has completely disappeared as sentences like the following show:

- (1) Vivə spessə se mankə vu carè malatə  
 Drink.imp often if not want.2sg fall.inf ill  
 ‘Drink a lot if you do not want to get ill’

The emphatic meaning (generally referred to as presuppositional meaning since Cinque’s (1976) study of standard Italian *mica*) is expressed by the element *mikə*, as shown in (2):

- (2) Mikə ie fess, ie solə ca mankə studə  
 Not is stupid, is only that not learns  
 ‘He is not at all stupid, it’s just that he does not study enough’

Notice that in both cases the negative marker is preverbal, i.e. it occupies the same position, which is higher than all clitics but lower than the subject. This brings us to the conclusion that a) there is no specialized position in the clause for so-called presuppositional negation, (as also shown by Haegeman (2009) for spoken Belgian Dutch, i.e. Tussentaal, where a preverbal clitic marker has the same semantic import as postverbal standard Italian *mica*), b) the change in the negative marker can also occur in a different way with respect to the “usual” one of the Jespersen cycle, where the additional negative adverb/noun is usually located lower than the original negative marker, c) judging from the distribution of *manco* in the Southern dialects in general, Rionero in Vulture has never undergone a stage where *non* was doubled by *manco*, hence, even doubling is not a necessary stage of the Jespersen cycle. Furthermore, what we generally see from the evolution of negation in French, Northern Italian dialects and Germanic, is that the new negative marker (at least in the first stage in which it finally gets rid of the original negative marker) does not tolerate negative concord. There are clues that a further stage of evolution is that the new negative marker starts accepting negative concord (as it is the case of Piedmontese, but not of Milanese, and of creole languages with a French basis). However, also in this respect *manco* is different, as it requires negative concord just like *non*:

- (3) Manc am fatt nint  
Not have. 1pl done nothing  
'We did not do anything'

We can conclude that the evolution of negative markers does not necessarily go through the three usual stages which go under the label of Jespersen cycle, but can also find other ways to change the form and properties of the negative marker.

### **References**

- Breitbarth, A. (2014) *The History of Low German Negation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cinque, G. (1976) Mica. *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Padova 1*, 101-112.
- Haegeman, L. (2009) Linguistic variation in Belgium: dialects and tussentaal. A case study: West Flemish negation. Paper presented at Meertens Institute. 17.09.2009.
- van der Auwera, J. (2009) The Jespersen cycles. In: van Gelderen, E. (Ed.), *Cyclical Change*, (pp. 35-72). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- van der Auwera, J. (2010) On the diachrony of negation. In: L. Horn (Ed.), *The Expression of Negation*, (pp. 73-109) Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.
- van Gelderen, E. (2011) *The Linguistic Cycle: Language Change and the Language Faculty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.