N-WORDS IN FRAGMENTS ANSWERS
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Introduction: The goal of this abstract is to account for the interpretation of n-words in fragment answers to both positive and negative questions. Most theories of n-words have discussed the issue of how and why n-words can survive as fragment answers to positive questions. This abstract sheds light on a different set of data, namely n-words as fragment answers to negative questions. We focus on data from strict negative concord languages, specifically Romanian.
N-words in strict NC languages need to be accompanied by sentential negation (SN), regardless of their position in the sentence, as the examples from Romanian below show:

(1) a. Nimeni *(nu) a venit.   b. *(Nu) am văzut nimic.
      nobody not has come   not have seen nothing
      'Nobody came.'   'I didn't see anything'

N-words are felicitous fragment answers and can also be found in other elliptical structures, where there is no antecedent SN.

(2) a. Cine a venit?   Nimeni.   b. Maria cam exagerează, dar Ion niciodată.
      who has come?   nobody   Mary sort of exaggerates but John never
      'Who came?   Nobody.'   'Mary sort of exaggerates, but John never does.'

It has been noted that n-words can also serve as fragment answers to negative questions. To our knowledge, there is no systematic investigation of the available interpretations for such answers.

(3) Cine nu a venit?   Nimeni.   a. Nimeni. = nobody came
    who not has come?   nobody   *You're the first one here.*
    'Who didn't come?   Nobody.'   b. Nimeni. = nobody didn't come
                               Everybody's here.

We point out that these answers can be ambiguous between a negative concord reading, (3a), and a double negation reading, (3b). The two possible continuations in (3) confirm these intuitions. It is important to note that the DN reading in (3b) is never available for the non-elliptical version, namely (1a). The goal of this abstract is to understand what is responsible for the availability of this additional reading.

An account of n-words: We adopt the view that n-words are existential quantifiers which should be analyzed as strong NPIs (Ladusaw 1992, Chierchia 2013). These are NPIs such as *either* and *in weeks*, which are more restricted than the *any/ever*-type in that they can only occur in the scope of sentential negation. For the purposes of this abstract we do not detail any particular analysis of NPI licensing.

     We argue that the difference between n-words and other NPIs should be seen as the result of two parameters: (i) n-words but not NPIs can reconstruct and (ii) n-words but not NPIs can invoke a covert negation (CN) (Zeijlstra 2004). The fact that n-words are licensed even if not c-commanded by SN at surface structure (see (1a) above) indicates that they can reconstruct to their base position, which is below negation. NPIs, on the other hand, cannot be interpreted in a position other than their surface position, as shown in (4).

(4) a. *In weeks he hasn't visited me.   b. *Anything John didn't buy.

The most relevant aspect of the proposal for our current purposes is the ability of n-words to appeal to covert negation. Due to the fact that elliptical constructions are the only environments in which n-words in strict NC languages may surface in the absence of overt negation, we claim that covert negation must be a last resort strategy, governed by the following condition.

(5) An n-word may invoke covert negation if the material in the vP it originates from is
      not spelled out.

Further support in favor of invoking covert negation comes from double negation readings. In strict NC languages, a DN reading can only arise in the presence of two n-words and SN.

(6) Nimeni nu a citit nimic.
     nobody not has read nothing
     'Nobody hasn't read anything.' (DN) *or* 'Nobody has read anything.' (NC)

Since a DN meaning amounts to two negations, for (6) to receive this reading a covert negation must be invoked. This may seem to go against the condition in (5), but note that this violation falls under the umbrella of phenomena regulated by the principle of minimal compliance (Richards 1998): it's enough if one n-word satisfies the condition in (5), namely it's enough if one n-word is licensed by an overt negation. Once that happens, the second n-word can be licensed either by SN, giving rise to the NC reading, or by a covert negation, giving rise to the DN reading.

Fragment answers to positive questions: The fragment answer in (7) can in principle have any of the structures in (7a-c). In (7a), the identity condition on ellipsis is satisfied, but the n-word is not licensed. In (7b), the n-word is licensed, but the identity condition on ellipsis is violated. There is, however, a third option that satisfies both requirements, namely one in which the n-word is licensed by CN, (7c). This is a construction where the last resort strategy can be invoked given that the material in the vP is not spelled out.

(7) Q: Cine a venit? A: Nimeni.
     a. *[Nimeni [a venit]]
     b. *[Nimeni [nu a venit]]
     c. [CN [Nimeni [a venit]]]

Fragment answers to negative questions: Recall that an n-word answer to a negative question is ambiguous between an NC and a DN reading. The NC reading comes about straightforwardly, as in (8a): the presence of SN in the question licenses its presence in the ellipsis site, which in turn licenses the n-word, similarly to the non-elided version in (1a). The fact that n-words can survive as fragment answers to negative questions should not be a surprise given that the identity condition on ellipsis guarantees the presence of negation at the level of interpretation. What is surprising, however, is the fact that such answers can also receive a double negation interpretation, see (3b). We argue that this interpretation comes about via the LF in (8b).

(8) Q: Cine a venit? A: Nimeni.
     a. [Nimeni [nu a venit]]   negative concord reading
     b. [CN [Nimeni [nu a venit]]]   double negation reading

At this point we need to understand why a DN reading is possible for a fragment n-word, but not for its non-elliptical counterpart (1a). The condition in (5) restricts the covert negation strategy to elliptical structures. Invoking it in (8b), where the elided constituent contains SN, amounts to a DN reading. The reason why a sentence like (1a) cannot have the LF in (8b) is due to the fact that the condition in (5) would be violated, since the material in the vP is spelled out.

Outlook: This paper is a first step towards integrating the interpretation of fragment n-words to positive and negative questions within a larger theory of negative concord. In future work we need to understand the extent of variation within the realm of strict NC languages. In this abstract we discussed Romanian, which appears to allow for both NC and DN readings for fragment n-words to negative questions. Our informants confirm the same behavior for Greek n-words. However, not all strict NC languages allow for ambiguous readings of fragment n-words to negative questions. Polish has been claimed to only allow the DN reading to a question like (8) (de Swart 2010), whereas Serbo-Croatian and Russian (according to our informants) only allow the NC reading. More empirical investigation is needed before reaching firm conclusions on the connections between the interpretation of n-words in elliptical and non-elliptical structures.