

Ways of not being there

French and Italian have productive constructions that express forms of ‘non-existence’ and whose syntactic peculiarity is the absence of verbs, cf. (1)–(4). We analyse them as two types of negated existential verbless sentences that realise different perspective structures (Borschev-Partee 2002), here ‘existential’ is a cover term for existential and locative. In (1) and (3), called **NDSs** (Negated Declarative Sentence) after (Babby 1980), the description is structured around the object named by the noun. In (2) and (4), two **NESs** (Negated Existential Sentence), the situation is looked at from the perspectival centre of the domain of existence and says what is/isn’t there.

- (1) F *Aucun mouvement derrière les murs* (no motion behind the walls)
- (2) F *Pas de divorce ni de séparation officielle*
not of divorce nor of separation official (no divorce and no official separation)
- (3) I *Nessun testimone intorno a lei* (no witness around her)
- (4) I *Niente processo per la truppa* (no trial for the troops)

We account for their clausal interpretation via the generalised quantifier’s definition of determiners as operators that take restrictor and scope arguments and result in a sentence (Keenan 1996). The quantifier fulfills the predicative job otherwise done by the verb, with no need to delete or reconstruct a verbal form at some level of representation. This step allows us to predict also that these sentences only have assertive illocutionary force. The relation of empty intersection and the whole tripartite structure are reanalysed in terms of the interpretive schema \neg BE(THING, LOC) proposed by (Borschev-Partee 2002) for existence and location situations and their descriptions. Referential and thematic restrictions on the interpretation of the quantifiers in (3) and (4), e.g. they can never discharge an agentive role, support the analogy with the existential sentences with genitive of negation in Russian for which the schema was originally proposed. Similar restrictions apply in French. Syntactically, these clauses are matrix small clauses, as claimed for some copular constructions, e.g. (Rothstein 1995). But either the instantiation of THING or LOC act as predicate depending on the perspectival centre adopted, cf. the diathetic alternation in the Russian cases.

General conditions license the reanalysis. BE and THING can never be left understood, but LOC may be covert, which may correspond to spatial locations or to more event-like entities with a temporal dimension. The compatible nature of the arguments in the quantificational tripartite structure and in the existential schema makes it possible to reinterpret one into the other.

The **NDS** cases are not subject to special conditions. The n-words *aucun* (no) and *nessuno* (no) are determiners, can be interpreted as negated existentials and instantiate \neg BE in the existential schema. They regularly form quantifiers with the Ns following them. On the contrary, special conditions apply to **NESs** in both languages. Similarly, recall the genitive of negation in Russian NESs. In French, the existential schema is triggered by *de*, often called pseudo-partitive, which instantiates BE. The negative marker *pas* instantiates the negation. We propose that *de* expresses an intersection relation, not subset as claimed in (Heldner 1992), and that there is no presupposition of existence on the domain of the restrictor. The pseudo-partitive interpretation could be intuitively obtained by inverting first and second arguments, as suggested by the role of perspectival centre of the latter, and understanding N as denoting a subset of ‘things in location’. Next, for Italian, we propose that the presence of an N after *niente* (nothing) triggers the application of the existential schema as a rescue strategy, because *niente* is only a quantifier (the sequence *niente* N is ungrammatical elsewhere). Here it instantiates the operator position and saturates the first argument. The noun after it simply restricts the argument, as nouns can do when incorporating (Chung-Ladusaw 2003). Noun incorporation is not a free option in Italian, but this specific case meets its standard requirements, e.g. the noun does not support discursive links.

The interpretation of a proper noun can be shifted into a property, thus in (5)–(6) it is interpreted as providing a relevant description of the denoted object, while in (7)–(8) it provides the restriction set for the determiner.

- (5) F Pas de Jean à la soutenance (Jean (was) not (among those) at the viva)
- (6) I Niente Gianni a lezione (Gianni (was) not (among those) at the lecture)
- (7) F Aucun Jean à la soutenance (nobody (named) Jean (was) at the viva)
- (8) I Nessun Gianni a lezione (nobody (named) Gianni (was) at the lecture)

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