

# Comparison of Negation in Two Northern Italian Dialects

Francesca Fornasini

May 23, 2010

## 1 Introduction

Italy still houses a wide variety of local dialects both because of its complicated history of occupation by other European countries, and because its modern, standardized, national language was only widely accepted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, since many of these dialects are not being passed on to the younger generations, there has been increasing interest to catalogue, study, and begin formally teaching these dialects in local schools. I decided to make my own foray into the dialects spoken by the two halves of my family. My maternal grandmother is from Milan and speaks the Milanese dialect, while my paternal grandmother is from a small town in the region of Veneto called Biadene and speaks a Venetian dialect. Biadene is approximately 275 km west of Milan; this distance is equal to that between the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA, and my home in Rockville, MD. But while the differences between the varieties of American English spoken in Maryland and southern Virginia are minimal and are mostly phonetic in nature, the differences between the Italian dialects of my two grandmothers are enormous. If they both speak slowly in dialect with one another, they can gather the gist of what the other is saying; however, there are major lexical, phonetic, and syntactic differences between their native tongues which make communication quite difficult.

I decided to focus on the syntactic differences between these dialects. Prof. Raffaella Zanuttini at Georgetown University put me in touch with two linguists at the University of Padova working on syntactic studies of Italian dialects, Prof. Paola Benincá and Prof. Cecilia Poletto. They gave me a series of questionnaires that they have been

using to gather data from many different dialects; they consist of sentences in Italian that the participants are asked to translate into their native dialect. In order to help my participants translate these sentences in a way that seemed natural to them, I first asked them to tell me a story about their past in their native dialect so as to make them feel more relaxed and natural about the way they spoke their dialect. I recorded both their stories and their translations of the questionnaires, which I later transcribed using the Italian alphabet and approximating the phonetic sounds as well as I could. I had my grandmothers complete six questionnaires, and simply by listening to them, I noticed that one of the clearest differences between the dialects was the way in which they implemented negation. Therefore, I decided to narrow my research to negation in these two dialects. I had five Milanese participants and six Biadonese participants complete a general questionnaire consisting of 154 sentences of various types and another questionnaire consisting of 79 sentences containing some form of negation. The five Milanese speakers were born between 1915 and 1937 in Milan. All the Biadonese speakers were born in Biadene; five of them were born between 1931 and 1945, and one of them was born in 1981. All the participants speak dialect with their family and close friends.

## **2 Background Literature**

Negation is a complex topic, but an interesting one to approach cross-linguistically because it is expressed in some form by all languages. There are different types of negation, which depend on what is being negated in an utterance. For example, constituent negation refers to negation that affects only one constituent of a sentence. Some linguists have defined standard negation as “that type of negation that can apply to

the most minimal and basic sentences” (Payne 1985: 198), which are fairly loose terms. Standard negation often coincides with sentential negation, which occurs when the entire sentence is being negated. Delineating a clear definition of sentential negation has also proven difficult; one of the most common tests for sentential negation is trying to paraphrase a sentence as *I say of X that it is not true that Y* (Payne 1985: 200). Payne claims that “all and only the instances of sentential negation allow this kind of paraphrase” (Payne 1985: 200). Both standard and sentential negation can be implemented in a variety of ways, such as negative verbs, negative particles, negative morphemes, negated quantifiers and adverbials, and inherently negative quantifiers and adverbials (Payne 1985).

Italian and the two Northern dialects I am studying use negative particles as their primary tools for negation. These dialects also possess additional negative constituents; my questionnaires showed that they at least have inherently negative quantifiers (such as the equivalents of *nothing* and *nobody*) and adverbials (such as the equivalents of *never* and *nowhere*). The data I collected did not include sentences with negated quantifiers and adverbials, so additional research could be undertaken exploring these issues.

However, since negative particles are the primary negation tools for these dialects, I focused my research on them. Negative particles or markers can either be invariant or sensitive to the tense, aspect, mood, and type of the predicates they are associated with (Zanuttini 2001: 513). Cross-linguistically there appears to be a preference for preverbal negative particles, and different theories have been postulated to explain why this is so (Dahl 1979). A preverbal particle is one that precedes the finite form of the verb, which is the main verb or the auxiliary, if it is present. Payne refines

this generalization, noting that in SVO, VSO, and VOS languages, the particle almost always precedes the verb, whereas in SOV languages, it is equally likely to precede or follow it (1985: 224).

The preverbal/postverbal distinction appears to be an important one for negative particles; Zanuttini discusses a variety of syntactic features associated with negative particles that depend on their position with respect to the verb (1997). Preverbal negative particles can be further subdivided into two groups: those that can negate a clause by themselves, which I will refer to as self-sufficient, and those that require another negative element in order to negate a clause (Zanuttini 1997: 22). The Italian preverbal negative marker *non* is one of those that can negate a clause by itself. Self-sufficient negative markers differ from non-self-sufficient markers in terms of their placement with respect to clitics. Non-self-sufficient markers occur after all subject clitics (Zanuttini 1997: 29) and before all or some complement clitics (Zanuttini 1997:22). Self-sufficient markers always follow certain subject clitics (called vocalic clitics) but may or may not follow others (Zanuttini 1997: 29), and they occur before all complement clitics (Zanuttini 1997: 22). Furthermore, while non-self-sufficient markers allow the inversion of the subject clitic and the verb in interrogatives, self-sufficient markers do not allow this inversion in most cases (Zanuttini 1997: 52). Zanuttini did find that the self-sufficient, preverbal negative marker *no* in Paduan allows subject clitic inversion to occur in three specific circumstances: in exclamatives containing a WH-word, and in yes/no questions that either contain postverbal *miga* or conjoin a negative and an affirmative interrogative (i.e. *Are they coming or aren't they coming?*) (1997: 53-55).

Self-sufficient preverbal negative markers and postverbal negative markers differ in two substantial ways. In a language that possesses a self-sufficient preverbal marker, a negative element cannot occur by itself unless it c-commands the finite verb; if it does not c-command the finite verb, then the preverbal marker must co-occur with it (Zanuttini 2001: 522). No such restriction exists in a language that possesses a postverbal negative marker (Zanuttini 2001: 522). Furthermore, self-sufficient preverbal markers cannot co-occur with true imperatives, which are imperative forms of the verb that are particular to the imperative and not simply borrowed from another tense or mood (Zanuttini 1997: 121). However, postverbal markers can co-occur with any imperative form (Zanuttini 1997: 121).

Postverbal markers can themselves be subdivided into two categories, presuppositional and non-presuppositional markers. A presuppositional marker negates a proposition that is assumed in the discourse, while a non-presuppositional or regular marker negates a proposition without any particular status in the discourse (Zanuttini 1997: 67). Following the work of Cinque, Zanuttini found the placement of some presuppositional and regular negative markers with respect to the following adverbs: *already*, *no more*, *always*, *completely*, *all*, and *well*. She found that regular postverbal markers tend to follow *already* and precede *no more*, or are even more lowly ranked (1997: 98). For example, she discovered that the Milanese regular postverbal marker *no* follows *already*, *no more*, and *always* (1997:103). In contrast, presuppositional markers almost always appear before *already* (1997: 98). She also observed that the past participle and the infinitive form precede the regular postverbal markers; however, the past participle always follows the presuppositional marker, and the infinitive may or may

not follow it (1997: 103). Thus, presuppositional markers occur in higher positions than regular markers. Finally, when a typically presuppositional marker, such as Milanese *minga*, is instead used like a regular marker, it behaves like a regular negative marker and thus appears after *already* (1997: 100).

Zanuttini uses all these observations to argue for the existence of particular positions in the syntactic tree structure reserved for negative particles. In my own analysis, I simply seek to discuss the different patterns I have observed in the two dialects I studied and compare them to the trends argued for by Zanuttini without delving into a theoretical analysis.

### 3 Data and Analysis<sup>1</sup>

Just as Italian possesses the two negative particles *non* and *mica*, the two dialects I studied possess two negative particles. The negative particles of the dialect of Biadene, which I will refer to as Biadenese, are *no* and *mia*, while the negative particles of Milanese are *no* and *minga*. *Mica*, *mia*, and *minga* probably all originated from the Latin word *mica* which means ‘a crumb’ (Payne 1985:224).

#### 3.1 Negative Particle Types

In Biadenese, *no* is preverbal, occurring before both the main verb and the auxiliary, as shown in examples 1 and 2. The different letters refer to the utterances of different speakers, which are kept consistent throughout this paper; variation in spelling is not particularly important since it is mostly due to the fact that some of these sounds do not correspond exactly to the Italian phonetic alphabet and I tried to represent them as appropriately as I could. Other differences between speakers arise either because certain

---

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will use the following abbreviations: AUX-auxiliary; C-complement; CL-clitic; INF-infinitive; NEG-negative; Paranthesis-optional elements; S-subject

elements are optional or are synonymous or because some have “Italianized” their dialect more than others. However, even if some of them use words from the Italian lexicon rather than their dialect’s lexicon, they still maintain the syntax of their dialect, which is what most concerns me in this study.

- |    |  |    |   |
|----|--|----|---|
| 1. | a. Carlo no ‘l magna frutta.<br>b. Carlo no ‘l magna la fruta.<br>c. Carlo no ‘l magna la fruta.<br>d. Carlo no ‘l magna fruta.<br>e. Carlo no ‘l magna fruta.<br>f. Carlo no ‘l magna a fruta.<br>Carlo NEG S.CL eats (the) fruit<br>‘Carlo doesn’t eat fruit.’ | 2. | a. Carlo no l’ha mangià a fruta.<br>b. Carlo no l’ha magnà fruta.<br>c. Carlo no ha magnà la fruta.<br>d. Carlo no l’ha magnà fruta.<br>e. Carlo no l’ha magnà fruta.<br>f. Carlo no l’ha magnà a fruta.<br>Carlo NEG S.CL has eaten (the) fruit<br>‘Carlo hasn’t eaten the fruit.’ |
|----|--|----|---|

The data above also reveals that *no* is self-sufficient, since it requires no additional negative element to negate a clause. Biadenese *mia*, just like Italian *mica*, is not used very often; when it is used it always co-occurs with *no*, just as *mica* co-occurs with *non*. Both *mia* and *mica* have an emphatic effect and are presuppositional postverbal negative markers. Below are examples of the few occurrences of *mia* in my data. As can be seen, it is optional.

- |    |  |    |  |
|----|--|----|--|
| 3. | a. No fà <u>mia</u> fredo qua!<br>b. No fà fred qua!<br>c. No fà <u>mia</u> fredo qua!<br>d. Non <sup>2</sup> farà <u>mia</u> fred qua!<br>e. Non fà <u>mia</u> frede qua!<br>f. Nu a <u>mia</u> fredo qua!<br>NEG <sub>1</sub> <sup>4</sup> does (NEG <sub>2</sub> ) cold here<br>‘It’s not cold here!’ | 4. | a. No crede che Giani el vegne.<br>b. No pense che Giani el vegne.<br>c. No crede che Giani el vegne.<br>d. No crede <u>mia</u> che ‘l <sup>3</sup> Gianni ‘l vegne.<br>e. No crede che Gianni ‘l vegni.<br>f. No crede che Gianni ‘l vegne.<br>NEG <sub>1</sub> believe (NEG <sub>2</sub> ) that Gianni S.CL comes<br>‘I don’t believe that Gianni is coming’ |
|----|--|----|--|

Because of the limited amount of data that I have containing *mia*, I cannot tell whether it follows or precedes auxiliaries.

<sup>2</sup> Speakers c and d used the Italian negative marker *non* instead of the Biadenese marker *no*. This was an error due to translation and not evidence that Biadenese has a third negative marker.

<sup>3</sup> In Biadenese, before proper nouns, some speakers insert ‘l or el, which might either be a repetition of the subject clitic or be a definite article.

<sup>4</sup> NEG<sub>1</sub> indicates *no* and NEG<sub>2</sub> indicates *mia*, which may co-occur in a sentence.

Although the Milanese negative markers are similar in form to the Italian and Biadenese ones, they are quite different. As shown in examples 5 and 6, Milanese *no* is clearly postverbal, occurring both after the auxiliary and the main verb. Milanese *minga* is also postverbal, but when an auxiliary is present, *minga* appears between the auxiliary and the main verb. Like Biadenese *mia*, *minga* is presuppositional, but unlike *mia*, it never co-occurs with the other negative particle. From my data it is not clear when *minga* is preferred to *no*, even though such a preference appears to exist since for certain sentences, all speakers use *no*, for others, all speakers use *minga*, and for others like 5 and 6, different speakers choose different negative particles.

- |    |   |    |  |
|----|---|----|--|
| 5. | a. Carlo le mangia no la fruta.<br>b. Carlo el mangia no la fruta.<br>c. Carlo 'l mangia minga la fruta.<br>d. Carlo el mangia minga la fruta.<br>Carlo S.CL eats NEG <sub>1,2</sub> the fruit<br>'Carlo doesn't eat fruit' | 6. | a. Carlo l'ha mangià no la fruta.<br>b. Carlo l'ha minga mangià la fruta.<br>c. Carlo l'ha minga mangià la fruta.<br>d. Carlo l'ha minga mangià la fruta.<br>Carlo S.CL has NEG <sub>2</sub> eaten NEG <sub>1</sub> the fruit <sup>5</sup><br>'Carlo hasn't eaten the fruit' |
|----|---|----|--|

Thus, although both Biadenese and Milanese are SVO languages, only Biadenese follows the trend indicated by Payne by having a preverbal negative particle as its primary negative marker. Milanese, instead, has two different postverbal particles.

### 3.2 Negative Imperatives

The two dialects clearly differ in the way they handle negative imperatives; based on Zanuttini's work, this difference is to be expected since Biadenese has a preverbal negative particle while Milanese has postverbal negative particles. Example 7a shows one Biadenese speaker's conjugations of the imperative form of 'to speak' for 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular, 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural, 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, 1<sup>st</sup> person plural, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural; example 7b shows the corresponding conjugations of the negative imperative. Examples

---

<sup>5</sup> NEG<sub>1</sub> indicates *no* and NEG<sub>2</sub> indicates *minga*, only one of which can occur in a sentence.



8a and 8b are the conjugations of the affirmative and negative imperative forms of ‘to leave’.

- |    |    |  |    |  |
|----|----|--|----|--|
| 7. | a. | Parla!<br>Parlè!<br>Parli!<br>Parliamo! <sup>6</sup><br>Che parlino!/Che i parle! <sup>7</sup> | b. | No staa parlar!<br>No stè parlar!<br>No stae parlar!<br>No stè parlar!<br>Che n’i stae parlar!<br>(That) NEG (S.CL) AUX talk.INF |
|    |    | General form: (That) (S.CL) speak  |    |  |
| 8. | a. | Parti!<br>Partite!<br>Che ‘l parte!<br>Partion!<br>Che i parte!                                | b. | No stè partir!<br>No stè partir!<br>No sta partir!<br>No stè partir!<br>Che n’i stae partir!<br>(That) NEG (S.CL) AUX leave.INF  |
|    |    | General form: (That) (S.CL) leave  |    |  |

Since the only imperative data I have is from a single speaker who was uncertain about certain conjugations, it would be helpful to get data from other Biadenese speakers regarding the imperative. It also remains to be ascertained whether the affirmative imperative forms are true forms that are unique to the imperative, or suppletive forms that appear in other tenses. Nonetheless, it is clear that while the affirmative imperative consists of different conjugations for each person, preverbal *no* cannot co-occur with these forms; the negative affirmative thus consists of the negative particle, an auxiliary, and the infinitive of the main verb. If all the affirmative imperative forms are true imperatives, then this data merely reinforces Zanuttini’s generalization that self-sufficient, preverbal negative particles cannot co-occur with true imperatives. If some of the affirmative imperative forms are suppletive forms, then Zanuttini’s generalization

---

<sup>6</sup> For the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural, the speaker simply used the Italian imperative form because she could not remember the one in dialect. However, she informed me that the Biadenese form consisted of a particular conjugation and not an infinitive. For the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural, she was also uncertain, and provided the Italian form followed by a different form which she believed to be the dialect. The speaker also resorted to the Italian imperative form for the affirmative, 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural of ‘to leave’.

<sup>7</sup> The imperative form of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural and occasionally of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular seems to require being preceded by *che* ‘that’ and a subject clitic. I have included these elements in the general form using paratheses.

could be expanded to say that some preverbal negative particles also cannot co-occur with suppletive forms and can only co-occur with the infinitive.

In contrast, Milanese negative imperatives do not require the infinitive. In fact, the affirmative and negative imperative forms are almost always identical, as can be seen in examples 9 and 10, which are the Milanese parallels of examples 7 and 8.

- |     |    |  |    |   |
|-----|----|--|----|---|
| 9.  | a. | Parla!<br>Parlì!<br>Che 'l parla! <sup>8</sup><br>Parlèm!<br>Che parlin!<br>General form: (That) (S.CL) talk | b. | Parla no!<br>Parli minga!<br>Che 'l parla no!<br>Parlèm no!<br>Che parlen minga!<br>(That) (S.CL) talk NEG <sub>1,2</sub>         |
| 10. | a. | Partìs!<br>Partì!<br>Che 'l parta!<br>Partèm!<br>Che partìsen!<br>General form: (That) (S.CL) leave          | b. | Partìs no!<br>Partì minga!<br>Che 'l partìs minga!<br>Partèm minga!<br>Che partìsen no!<br>(That) (S.CL) leave NEG <sub>1,2</sub> |

It is possible that the forms which are not preserved between the affirmative and negative imperative by this speaker may actually be preserved as well; more data needs to be acquired to definitively determine whether the affirmative forms are true imperatives and whether any of the negative forms actually differ from the affirmative ones. Whatever the case may be, this data still stands in striking contrast with the Biadenese data; the postverbal negative markers clearly interfere far less with the imperative form than preverbal markers do.

### 3.3 Subject Clitic Inversion and Negative Particle Raising in Interrogatives

Milanese and Biadenese also differ in their handling of interrogatives; while Biadenese inverts the position of the subject clitic and the main verb in some

---

<sup>8</sup> In all imperative forms, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular seems to always require *che* (that) followed by a subject clitic to precede the main verb. The 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural only seems to require *che* to precede the main verb. Thus, Biadenese and Milanese seem to share some similarities with regards to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person imperative.

interrogatives, this inversion is never triggered in Milanese. In Biadenese, as can be seen in examples 1, 2, and 4, the subject clitic precedes the main verb and the auxiliary in regular sentences. Examples 11 and 12 further solidify this trend, ensuring that this ordering is true in sentences that contain a negative particle as well as those that do not.

- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 11. | a. Te se tí che te a compra sempre.<br>b. Se ti che te so sempre. <sup>9</sup><br>c. Te se ti che te a compra sempre.<br>d. Te se ti che te a compra sempre.<br>e. Te se ti che te a crompra sempre.<br>S.CL is you that S.CL C.CL buys always<br>'You're the one who always buys it.' | 12. a. No compre mai mele.<br>b. No te ciolt mai pom.<br>c. No te compra mai mele.<br>d. No te compra mai i pom.<br>e. No te compra mai pomi.<br>NEG (S.CL) buy never (the) apples<br>'You never buy (the) apples.' |
|-----|--|---|

However, in affirmative interrogative sentences, a modified version of the subject clitic can follow the main verb. More research needs to be undertaken to determine whether this inversion, exemplified in 13 and 14, is predictable based on certain properties of the language.

- |     |   |     |  |
|-----|---|-----|--|
| 13. | a. Chi te vol vedar?<br>b. Chi vò tu vedar?<br>c. Chi vò tu vedar?<br>d. Chi vò tu vedar?<br>e. Chi vò tu vedar?<br>Whom S.CL <sub>1</sub> want S.CL <sub>2</sub> see.INF <sup>11</sup><br>'Whom do you want to see?' | 14. | a. Tu compri? <sup>10</sup><br>b. Ti te o compra? / A cio tu?<br>c. Ti a compri tu? / A compri tu?<br>d. Ti a compri tu? / A compri tu?<br>e. Ti te a compra? / Te a compra?<br>(You) S.CL <sub>1</sub> C.CL buy S.CL <sub>2</sub><br>'Do you buy it?' |
|-----|---|-----|--|

Thus, as can be seen above, there are two ways of forming a grammatical affirmative interrogative. One preserves the ordering found in regular sentences, while the other inverts the position of the subject clitic and the main verb and modifies the subject clitic from *te* to *tu*. I have not found any literature that describes a language with such optional structures; it is possible that the form with inversion is the original Biadenese form and

<sup>9</sup> This speaker may have mistranslated the utterance; I am not sure what the verb they used means.

<sup>10</sup> This is the only translation that does not fit the pattern; it is practically identical to the Italian interrogative, and therefore I assume that the speaker simply got confused.

<sup>11</sup> I will now start referring to the subject clitic *te* we have previously seen as S.CL<sub>1</sub>. S.CL<sub>1</sub> and S.CL<sub>2</sub> cannot co-occur, but at least one of them is required for the utterance to be grammatical.

that the non-inverted form is a result of modern Italianization of the dialect. Further research is required to determine the grammaticality of the non-inverted form, and also to ascertain whether the subject clitic *tu* appears in other constructions or is particular to interrogatives.

However, a standard interrogative containing a negative particle never exhibits subject clitic inversion, as shown in examples 15 and 16.

- |     |  |     |   |
|-----|--|-----|---|
| 15. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. No 'l vien?</li> <li>b. No 'l viegn?</li> <li>c. No 'l vien?</li> <li>d. No 'l viegn?</li> <li>e. No 'l vien?</li> </ul> | 16. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Chi no te vol vedar?</li> <li>b. Chi o che no te vol vedar?</li> <li>c. Chi no te vol vedar?</li> <li>d. Chi o che no te vol vedar?</li> <li>e. Chi no vol vedar?<sup>12</sup></li> </ul> |
|     | <p>NEG S.CL comes<br/>'Isn't he coming?'</p>   |     | <p>Whom (C.CL that) NEG (S.CL) want see.INF<br/>'Whom do you not want to see?'</p>  |

The preverbal negative particle thus appears to prevent subject clitic inversion in some way. Thus, except for the fact that subject clitic inversion in affirmative interrogatives appears somewhat optional, Biadenese resembles other dialects with preverbal negative particles like Paduan that Zanuttini studied. In fact, there is at least one special case in which Biadenese allows subject clitic inversion to occur with a negative interrogative, and it is one of the exceptions that Paduan possesses as well. This special instance consists of an utterance that conjoins an affirmative and a negative interrogative.

- 17.
- a. Te va o no te va?
  - b. Va tu o sta tu?<sup>13</sup>
  - c. Va tu o sta tu?
  - d. Va tu o no va tu?
  - e. Va tu o no va tu?
- S.CL<sub>1</sub> go S.CL<sub>2</sub> or NEG S.CL<sub>1</sub> go S.CL<sub>2</sub>  
'Are you going or aren't you going?'

---

<sup>12</sup> Since one speaker did not include the subject clitic *te*, I delineated it as optional, but more data should be gathered to confirm its status.

<sup>13</sup> Both utterances 17b and 17c do not involve a negative particle. Their parsing and translations are:  
Go S.CL<sub>2</sub> or stay S.CL<sub>2</sub>  
'Are you going or are you staying?'

18. a. Te a compra o no te a compra?  
 b. A ciò tu o no a ciò tu?  
 c. A compri tu o no a compri tu?  
 d. A compri tu o no a compri tu?  
 e. A compri tu o no a compri tu?  
 S.CL<sub>1</sub> C.CL buy S.CL<sub>2</sub> or NEG S.CL<sub>1</sub> C.CL buy S.CL<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘Are you buying it or aren’t you buying it?’

As can be seen above, only speaker (a) chose not to invert either subject clitic, indicating that perhaps this non-inverted form is less preferable to the inverted form. All other speakers inverted the subject clitic and the main verb in both the affirmative and the negative interrogatives. Thus, when a negative and an affirmative interrogative are joined together, the preverbal negative particle no longer inhibits subject clitic inversion. It would be interesting to study whether Biadenese also allows subject clitic inversion to occur with a negative marker in the other instances allowed by Paduan.

In accordance with Zanuttini’s observations, I have found no evidence of subject clitic inversion occurring in Milanese, which only utilizes postverbal negative markers. Examples 5, 6, 19 and 20 demonstrate that the subject clitic precedes the main verb and the auxiliary in both affirmative and negative sentences.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>19. a. Te se ti che te la cumpret semper.<br/>         b. Te se ti che te la cumpret semper.<br/>         c. Te se ti che te la cumpret semper.<br/>         d. Te se ti che te la cumpret semper.<br/>         e. Te se ti che te la cumpret/toeuvet semper.<br/>         S.CL is you that S.CL C.CL buys always<br/>         ‘You’re the one who always buys it.’</p> | <p>20. a. Te cumpret mai i pom.<br/>         b. Te cumpret mai i pom.<br/>         c. Te cumpret mai i pom.<br/>         d. Te cumpret mai pom.<br/>         e. Te cumpret mai dei pom.<br/>         S.CL buy never (the) apples<br/>         ‘You never buy (the) apples.’</p> |
|--|---|

However, unlike Biadenese, the subject clitic and the main verb never switch positions in interrogatives. Examples 21 and 22 demonstrate explicitly that subject clitic inversion does not occur in affirmative interrogatives; examples 23 and 24 demonstrate that it also does not occur in conjoined interrogatives, while example 25 shows that it does not occur

in negative interrogatives with a simple verb. This observation begs the question, why does this inversion occur in interrogatives in one dialect but not in another, and is this inversion predictable? Research on this matter may already have been undertaken, and if so, it would be interesting to apply its conclusions in the cases of Milanese and Biadenese.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>21. a. Chi l'è che te voeuret vedè?<br/>         b. Chi te voeuret vedè?<br/>         c. Chi l'è che te voeuret vedè?<br/>         d. Chi l'è che'l voeur vedè?<sup>14</sup><br/>         e. Chi l'è che te voeuret vedè?<br/>         Who C.CL is that S.CL want see.INF<br/>         'Who is it that you want to see?'</p>  | <p>22. a. Ti te la cumpret? / Te la cumpret?<br/>         b. Ti te la cumpret/toeuvet?<br/>         c. Ti te la cumpret? / Te la cumpret?<br/>         d. Ti te la cumpret?<br/>         e. Ti te la cumpret?<br/>         You S.CL C.CL buy<br/>         'Do you buy it?'</p> |
| <p>23. a. Te vet o te ve no?<br/>         b. Te vet o te ve no?<br/>         c. Te vet o te ve no?<br/>         d. Te vet o te ve no?<br/>         e. Te vet o te ve no?<br/>         S.CL go or S.CL go NEG<br/>         'Are you going or aren't you going?'</p>   | <p>25. a. El ven no?<br/>         b. El ven no?<br/>         c. El ven no?<br/>         d. El ven no?<br/>         S.CL comes NEG<br/>         'Isn't he coming?'</p>  |
| <p>24. a. Te la cumpret o te la cumpret no?<br/>         b. Te la cumpret o te la cumpret no?<br/>         c. Te la cumpret o te la cumpret no?<br/>         d. Te la cumpret sí o te la cumpret no?<br/>         e. Te la cumpret o te la cumpret no?<br/>         S.CL C.CL buy (yes) or S.CL C.CL buy NEG<br/>         'Are you buying it or aren't you buying it?'</p> |  |

However, even though subject clitic inversion does not occur in Milanese interrogatives, the negative particle does seem to raise above its usual position when there is an auxiliary verb present in addition to the main verb. Examples 26, 27, and 28 are all interrogatives containing an auxiliary followed by an infinitive. In 26, *minga* appears in its normal position, between the auxiliary and the main verb, but strangely *no* appears in

---

<sup>14</sup> The subject clitic and conjugation of *want* are different in this speaker's translation. The meaning of this utterance is 'Who is it that he wants to see?'

that position as well, although it usually follows the main verb. In 27, both *no* and *minga* raise above the auxiliary, and in 28, *minga* raises above the second of two auxiliaries. However, since *minga* only appears once in between the auxiliary and the main verb, and *no* only appears once above the auxiliary, it may be that these positions are not the most grammatical. If these two instances are actually due to erroneous translations, then a consistent pattern emerges; when an auxiliary is present in a negative interrogative, whatever negative particle is being used is raised by one position relative to its normal position in the sentence. Thus, *no*, which usually follows the main verb, raises above the main verb but not beyond the auxiliary, while *minga*, which usually follows the auxiliary, raises above the auxiliary.

26. a. Chi è che te voeuret no vedè?  
 b. Chi te voeuret vedè no?<sup>15</sup>  
 c. Chi l'è che te voeuret no vedè?  
 d. Chi l'è che te voeuret no/minga vedè?  
 e. Chi l'è che voeur no vedé?<sup>16</sup>  
 Who (C.CL) is that (S.CL) want NEG<sub>1,2</sub> see.INF  
 'Who is it that you don't want to see?'
27. a. Con chi te minga pudù parlà?  
 b. Con chi te no podut parlà?  
 c. Con chi te minga podù parlà?  
 d. Con chi te minga pudù parlà?  
 With whom s.cl. NEG<sub>1,2</sub> could speak.INF  
 'With whom could you not speak?'

---

<sup>15</sup> This utterance differs from that of other speakers in both the fact that it is missing the sequence (S.CL is that) and that the negative marker appears after the infinitive verb. Whether this form truly is grammatical should be investigated since it differs from all other similar utterances.

<sup>16</sup> The translation of this utterance actually is 'Who is it that he doesn't want to see?'

28. a. Che rob che te minga riesì a fà?  
 b. Cusè che te se minga riuscì a fà?  
 c. Quali rott te se minga riesì a fà?  
 d. Che rob l'è che te se minga riesì a fà?  
 What<sup>17</sup> (that) S.CL (were) NEG<sub>2</sub> able to do  
 'What were you not able to do?'

Both Milanese and Biadonese seem to require constituent movement in some interrogatives. In Biadonese, subject clitic inversion occurs in affirmative interrogatives and conjoined interrogatives. In Milanese, both negative particles appear to raise by one position when they are used in an interrogative with an auxiliary and a main verb.

### 3.4 Other Negative Constituents

A final, clear way in which Biadonese and Milanese negation differs regards the relationship between negative particles and other negative constituents in an utterance. In accordance with trends pointed out by Zanuttini, negative constituents which do not c-command the finite verb must co-occur with a preverbal negative particle in Biadonese; no such restriction is imposed on negative constituents in Milanese since it uses postverbal negative markers.

Negation in Biadonese does not always require a negative particle. For example, in 29 (except 29d), the Biadonese word for *nobody* can occur by itself.

29. a. Nesùn è vigniste qua.  
 b. Nesuno è vegnist qua.  
 c. Nisuni è vignisti qua.  
 d. No vegniste qua nesuni.  
 e. Nesùn è vegneste qua.  
 f. Nesuno è vigniste qua.  
 Nobody has come here  
 'Nobody has come here.'

---

<sup>17</sup> In dialect, *what* was translated in a variety of ways: a. what thing, b. what, c. which thing, d. what thing C.CL. is



Although the translation into English of 29d is the same as that for all the other utterances, the parsing of 29d is:

NEG come here nobody

Thus, a negative constituent can appear by itself if it precedes the verb, but if it appears after the verb, some other negative constituent, typically the negative particle, must appear before the verb. I do not have enough data to confirm that the negative constituent must c-command the verb and not merely precede it, but all my data agrees with this deduction of Zanuttini's. Further evidence that a negative constituent must always precede the verb for a Biadenese utterance to be grammatical can be found in examples 12, 30, 31, and 32.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>30. a. No n'è rivà nesùn?<br/>         b. No è rivà nesuni?<br/>         c. No è rivà nesuni?<br/>         d. No n'è rivà nisuni?<br/>         e. No è rivà nisuni?<br/>         f. No l'è rivà nesùn?<br/>         NEG (S.CL) has arrived nobody<br/>         'Has nobody arrived?'<br/>         or 'Hasn't anybody arrived?'</p> | <p>31. a. Che nesuni fai nient!<br/>         b. Che nesuni fai nient!<br/>         c. Che nesùn el fai nient!<br/>         d. No da far niente nesuni!<sup>18</sup><br/>         e. Che nesuni fai niente!<br/>         f. Che nesuno fai nient!<br/>         That nobody (S.CL) does nothing<br/>         'Let no one do anything!'<br/>         or 'Everyone, don't do anything!'<br/>         or 'Let everyone do nothing!'</p> |
| <p>32. a. No piove pì.<br/>         b. No piove da un toc.<br/>         c. No piove pì.<br/>         d. No piove pì.<br/>         e. No piove pì.<br/>         NEG rains no-more<br/>         'It's not raining anymore' or 'It rains no more'</p>  |  |

Example 30 shows that the c-commanding principle applies to interrogatives containing negative constituents. Example 31 demonstrates that this principle applies in imperatives, and also that the negative constituent that c-commands the verb does not

---

<sup>18</sup> The translation of this utterance is the same as the others, but its parsing is:  
 NEG to do.INF nothing nobody

have to be the negative particle. Finally, examples 12 and 32 show that this principle applies not just to negative quantifiers, such as *nobody* and *nothing*, but also to negative adverbials, such as *never* and *no-more*. Also, as evidenced by the multiple translations of each utterance, this c-commanding principle leads to a certain amount of inherent ambiguity in such Biadonese utterances, because it creates double negatives.

In contrast, like other languages with postverbal negative markers, Milanese does not impose this c-command restriction on negative constituents. As can be seen in examples 33 and 34, no matter whether the Milanese equivalent for *nobody* precedes or follows the verb, no other negative constituent appears with it. Examples 20 and 36 demonstrate that negative adverbials, just like negative quantifiers, can occur by themselves in an utterance. Example 35 is somewhat perplexing because it contains a double negative, even though Milanese does not require a negative constituent to c-command the verb. Thus, it is unclear why Milanese would opt to allow two negative constituents which are not negative particles to co-occur.

- |     |  |     |   |
|-----|--|-----|---|
| 33. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Nissùn gh'è vegnù chi.</li> <li>b. Nessùn l'è vegnù chi.</li> <li>c. Nessùn gh'è vegnù chi.</li> <li>d. Nissùn l'è vegnù chi.</li> </ul> <p>Nobody S.CL has come here<br/>'Nobody has come here'</p>                                       | 34. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Gh'è rivà nissùn?</li> <li>b. Gh'è rivà nessùn?</li> <li>c. Gh'è rivà nissùn?</li> <li>d. Gh'è rivà nissùn?</li> </ul> <p>S.CL has arrived nobody<br/>'Has nobody arrived?'</p>     |
| 35. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Che nissùn faga nient!</li> <li>b. Che nessùn faga nient!</li> <li>c. Che nessùn faga nient!</li> <li>d. Che nissùn faga nient!</li> </ul> <p>That nobody does nothing<br/>'Let nobody do anything!'<br/>or 'Let everyone do nothing!'</p> | 36. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Pioeuv poeu.</li> <li>b. Pioeuv poeu.</li> <li>c. Pioeuv poeu/ Pioeuv minga.</li> <li>d. Pioevu pù.</li> <li>e. Pioeuv poeu.</li> </ul> <p>Rains no-more<br/>'It rains no more'</p> |

Overall, there appears to be less ambiguity in Milanese utterances containing negative constituents that do not c-command the verb. However, further data needs to be gathered

to determine whether Milanese differentiates between utterances such as ‘*Has nobody arrived?*’ and ‘*Hasn’t anybody arrived?*’.

Thus, because Biadenese always requires that any utterance containing a negative constituent must have a negative constituent that c-commands the verb, it often makes use of double negatives. As indicated by Zanuttini, this requirement seems linked to the fact that Biadenese has a preverbal negative marker. Instead, Milanese, which uses postverbal negative markers, does not impose this requirement on negative constituents and thus it uses double negatives only in certain cases.

#### **4 Conclusions**

In this paper, I have delineated many of the descriptive differences between Milanese and Biadenese in terms of negation. I have found that Biadenese possesses the preverbal negative particle *no*, which occasionally co-occurs with the postverbal presuppositional marker *mia*. Instead, Milanese makes use of two different postverbal negative particles, regular *no* and presuppositional *minga*, which never co-occur. My data has agreed with many of Zanuttini’s generalizations about how languages with preverbal negative particles differ from languages with postverbal negative particles when forming negative imperatives, affirmative and negative interrogatives, and utterances containing other negative constituents. In addition, I have discovered that some form of negative particle raising seems to occur in Milanese negative interrogatives, and that Milanese sometimes requires double negatives, even though it does not generally require a negative constituent to c-command the finite verb.

I have pointed out areas where my data requires further clarification and confirmation, especially with regards to distinguishing subject clitics, *complement*

clitics, and auxiliaries from one another, and determining when they are obligatory. In order to determine whether my imperative data fits Zanuttini's generalizations or actually provides certain exceptions to them, an investigation to find out whether the affirmative imperative forms in both Biadonese and Milanese are true or suppletive forms should be undertaken. Further research is also required to determine whether the two different structures of Biadonese affirmative interrogatives I have found are equally grammatical or if one is due to the Italianization of the dialect.

Finally, one possible area of research not covered by my data would be to figure out the relative placement of each negative marker with regards to Cinque's adverbs. One Biadonese speaker mentioned that subject clitic inversion also seems to occur when an adverb appears preverbally in a sentence such as '*Today I went to the store*'; finding other situations in which subject clitic inversion occurs could help us not only to understand this inversion better, but also to establish why preverbal negative particles interfere with it. Thus, although there is still much work to be done, I hope to have pointed out some of the most interesting aspects of negation in Milanese and Biadonese, and to have shown how a comparative study can be very useful in determining the key features associated with the positions of negative markers.

### Works Cited

- Dahl, Ö. (1979). Typology of sentence negation. *Linguistics* 17, 79-106.
- Payne, J. R. (1985). Negation. In *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*.  
*Volume I: Clause Structure*, ed. Timothy Shopen, Cambridge, 197-242.
- Zanuttini, R. (2001). "Sentential Negation". In *The Handbook of Contemporary*

*Syntactic Theory*, eds. Mark Baltin and Chris Collins, Blackwell, 511-535.

Zanuttini, R. (1997) *Negation and Clausal Structure: A Comparative Study of Romance*

*Languages*, Oxford University Press.