

Negative indefinites: A typological and diachronic perspective on a Brabantian construction¹

Draft
2003 Helsinki Conference on Dialectology, Diachrony and Typology

Johan van der Auwera
Center for Grammar, Cognition and Typology, University of Antwerp
&
Ludovic de Cuypere
Department of German and General Linguistics, University of Ghent
&
Annemie Neuckermans
Department of Dutch Linguistics, University of Ghent

1. Introduction

In standard Dutch sentential negation is expressed with the adverb *niet*.

- (1) Ik heb hem niet gezien.
I have him not seen
'I have not seen him.'

When the object is an indefinite pronoun, the latter takes a negative form, and we obtain *niemand* 'nobody' instead of the positive *iemand* 'somebody', and the sentential negator is obligatorily absent.

- (2) Ik heb niemand gezien.
I have nobody seen
'I haven't seen anybody.'

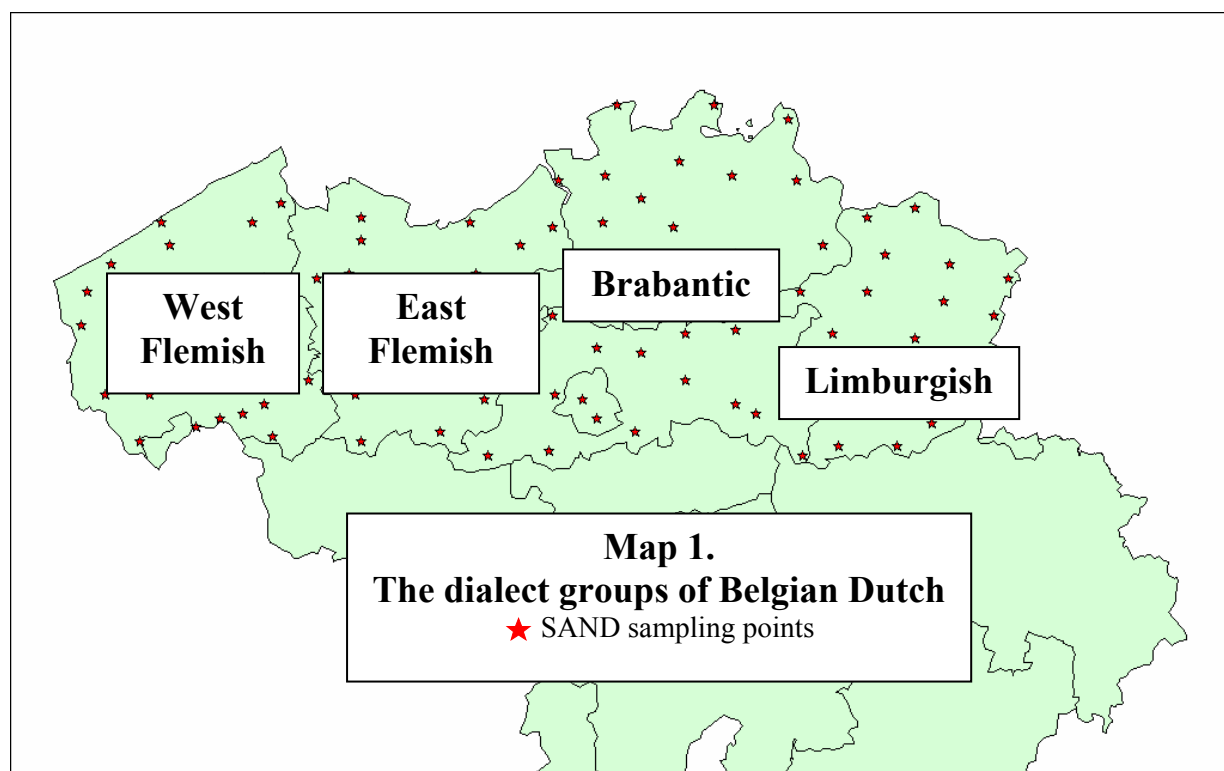
This paper focuses on a pattern found in some Brabantian dialects, in which there is a sentential negator together with a positive indefinite pronoun.

- (3) Ik heb iemand niet gezien.
I have somebody not seen
'I haven't seen anybody.'

In this paper the construction in (3) will be studied from three perspectives, (i) that of the dialectology of the Flemish dialects (section 2), (ii) a historical one (section 3) and (iii) a typological one (section 4).

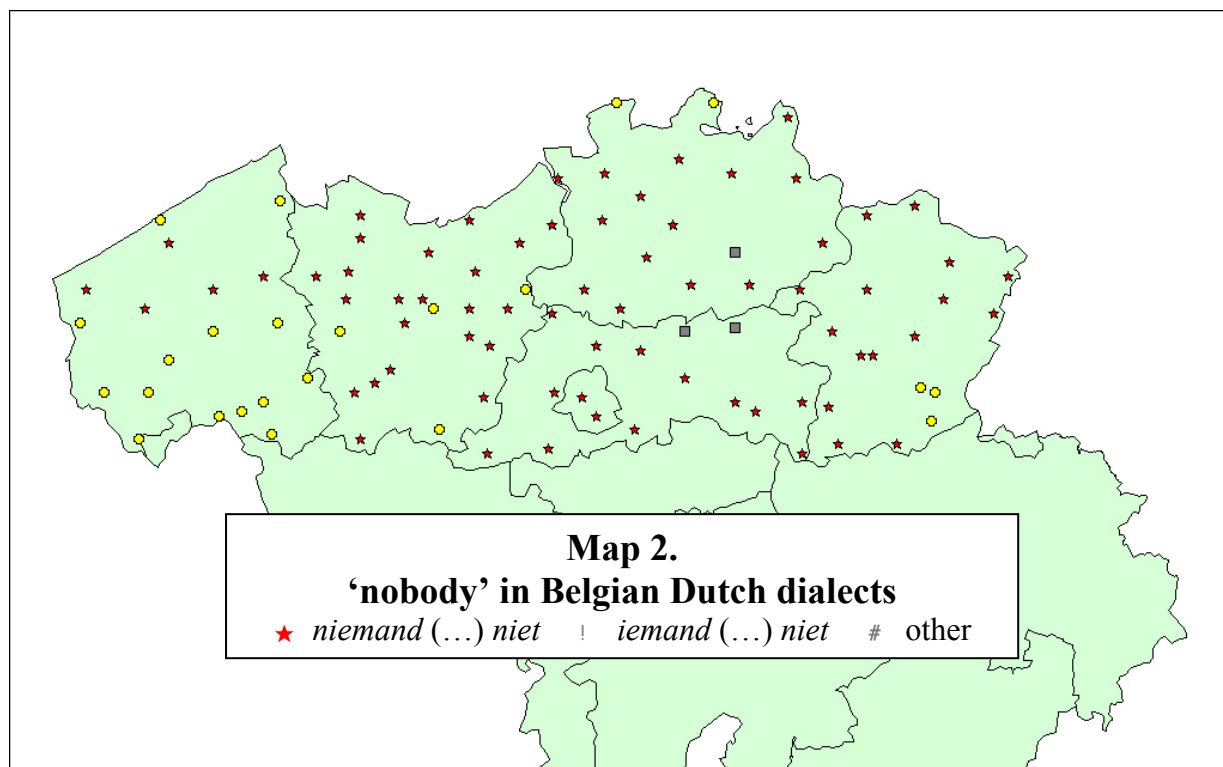
2. Dialectology

The data reported in this paper come out of a recent dialect syntax project, studying not only the Dutch dialects of Belgium, but also those of the Netherlands and the Frisian dialects, and also, though to a lesser extent, the dialects of the north of France.² With respect to negation, the dialects of Belgium show much more variation than those of the Netherlands and than the Frisian ones. For this reason this paper just treats the dialects of Belgium. Those of France are excluded, because they are less well studied and because they essentially continue the West Flemish dialect area. The term ‘Flemish’ could be used for all of the Dutch dialects of Belgium, but in this paper we will abstain from this usage, and use it only in the compounds ‘West Flemish’ and ‘East Flemish’, which refer to two of the big subgroups of Belgian Dutch dialects, the other two being the Brabantic and the Limburgish dialects—see Map 1.



Restricting ourselves to the expression of ‘nobody’, it turns out that the majority of Belgian Dutch speakers, esp, Brabantic and Limburgish, but also East Flemish, prefer a *niemand (...) niet* strategy—see Map 2.³

- (4) Ik heb niemand niet gezien.⁴
 I have nobody not seen
 ‘I haven’t seen anybody.’



The stars stand for *niemand (...) niet*. The squares in the middle of Brabantic stand for the *iemand (...) niet* strategy shown in (3). Some of the circles, including the few Limburgish and Brabantic ones, represent speakers that prefer the standard Dutch *niemand* strategy ((2)). The main competitor, however, represented by most of West and less East Flemish circles is an *en niemand* strategy.

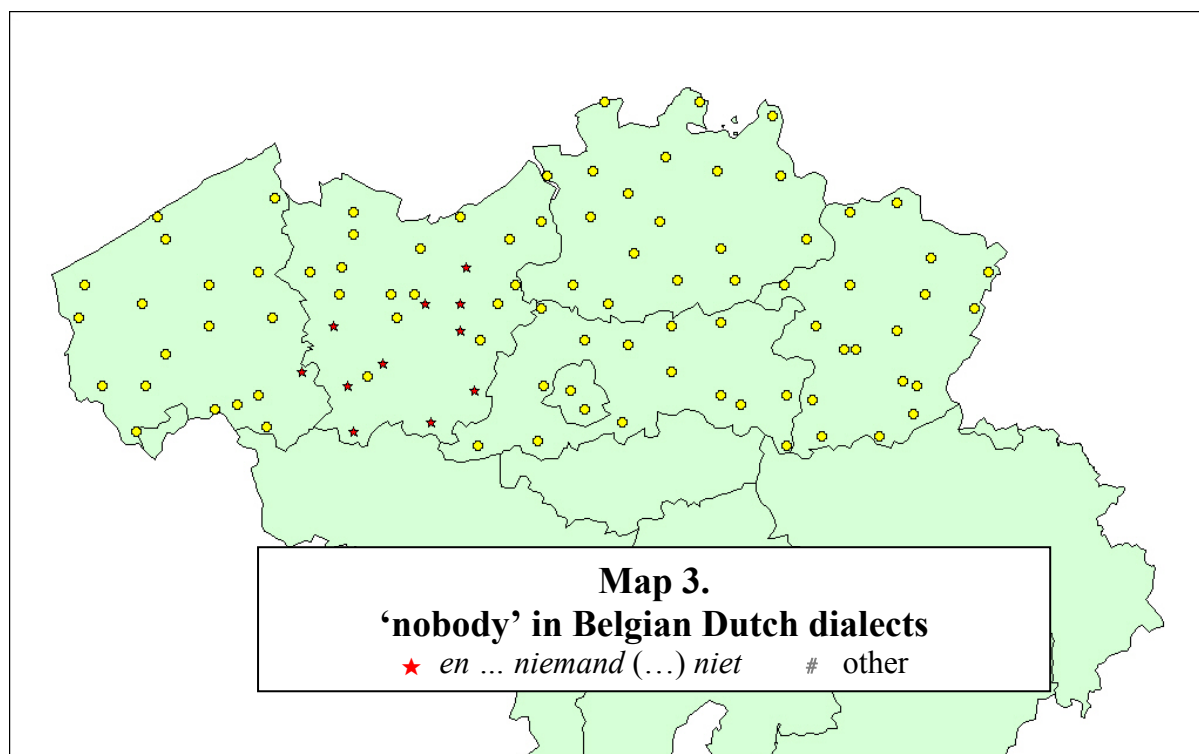
- (5) Ik en heb niemand gezien.
I not have nobody seen
'I haven't seen anybody.'

The element *en* is the old sentential negator, which was superseded by *niet*. in all of Germanic, except precisely in the Dutch Belgian dialects, through a process of strengthening and weakening, known as the "Jespersen cycle" (Dahl 1979) and shown in (6).

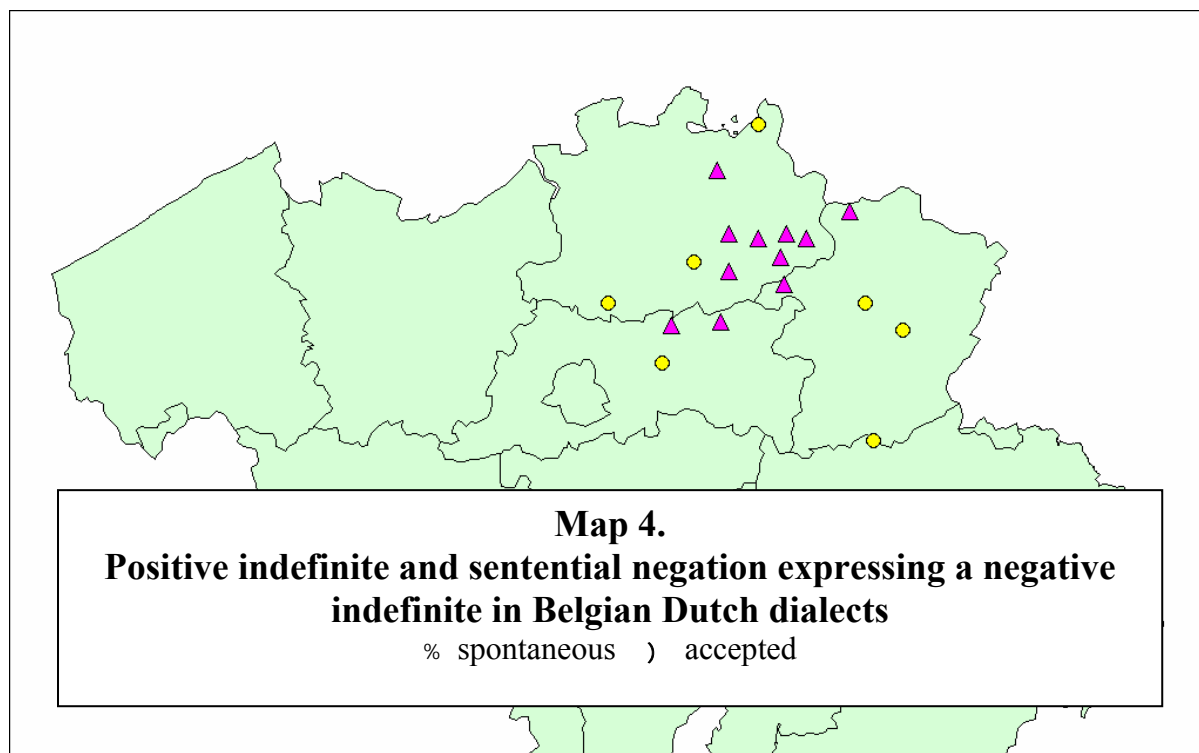
- (6) *en* → *en ... niet* → *niet*

Note that what *en ... niemand* and *niemand (...) niet* have in common is that the negation is expressed twice, one time with a sentential negator *en* or *niet*, and a second time with a negative indefinite. In this respect they differ from the single negation strategy *niemand*, the strategy of standard Dutch, and *iemand (...) niet*, the Brabantic strategy that we will focus on. There is, however, a triple negation strategy, too. It is typical for East Flemish, arguably an area where *en ... niemand* meets *niemand (...) niet*, and here we also find a ... *en niemand (...) niet* strategy, always in addition to either *en ... niemand* or *niemand (...) niet*, illustrated in (7) and mapped on Map 3.

- (7) Ik en heb niemand niet gezien.
 I not have nobody not seen
 'I haven't seen anybody.'



Map 4 takes us back to Brabant. It shows that the area where the combination of a sentential negator and a positive indefinite is accepted is a little bigger than the area in which it is offered spontaneously. We also note that the combination only exists for 'someone not' and 'somewhere not', but not for 'something not' or 'sometime not'.



3. The diachrony of *iemand niet* ‘someone not’

It is clear from Maps 2 and 4 that the *iemand (...)* *niet* construction is surrounded on all sides by the *niemand (...)* *niet* construction. One can imagine three types of relations between the two constructions. Either the two constructions are actually unrelated. The *iemand (...)* *niet* construction is due to a factor α , and the *niemand (...)* *niet* construction is due to a factor β . Alternatively, either *niemand (...)* *niet* is a development of *iemand (...)* *niet*, or, the other way round, *iemand (...)* *niet* is a development of *niemand (...)* *niet*. In scenario (8)a the *niemand (...)* *niet* speakers are the progressive ones, and in scenario (8)b, the progressive speakers are the ones that use *iemand (...)* *niet*. In scenario (8)c neither is more progressive.

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| (8) | a. | α | → | <i>iemand (...)</i> <i>niet</i> |
| | | β | → | <i>niemand (...)</i> <i>niet</i> |
| | b. | <i>iemand (...)</i> <i>niet</i> | → | <i>niemand (...)</i> <i>niet</i> |
| | c. | <i>niemand (...)</i> <i>niet</i> | → | <i>iemand (...)</i> <i>niet</i> |

Scenario (8)a is unlikely. *iemand (...)* *niet* and *niemand (...)* *niet* are formally and semantically very similar - all that distinguishes them formally is a pronoun-initial nasal and the meaning of the construction as a whole is exactly the same. This makes it rather likely that they share a history allowing for the fact that one is a development of the other. The fact that the construction is not available for all indefinites is another argument. What allows the positive indefinite proform is in a close formal as well as semantic relation to the negative proform. We find it for ‘someone’ with positive *iemand* and negative *niemand*, as well as for ‘somewhere’ with positive *ieverans* and negative *nieverans*. For ‘something’ however, we do not find such a pair. The positive form is *iets* and the negative one is *niks*: the two differ more than with a nasal. For ‘sometime’, the picture is not straightforward either. The negative word is *nooit* ‘never’ but there are in fact two positive forms. One is *soms* ‘sometime’ and this

obviously does not form an adequate pair with *nooit*. The other one is *ooit*, which is polysemous between negatively polar ‘ever’ and neutral ‘once’ (Hoeksema 1998, 1999). Which of the two uses would be relevant here? On the one hand, one could argue that the one that is needed to form a pair that is most analogous with the *iemand* - *niemand* and *ieverans* - *nieverans* pairs is the neutral *ooit* ‘once’—for *iemand* and *ieverans* are also neutral. As Hoeksema (1998, 1999) has shown, the ‘once’ use is the more recent one, and whereas it was marginal in Standard Dutch until the second part of the 20th century, at least in Brabantic dialects it was around already in the 19th century, though it is not known whether it was present in the small Brabantic area that might have allowed *iemand (...) niet* to mean ‘niemand’. On the other hand, if a dialect is to develop an *ooit (...) niet* ‘never’ construction, the very fact that the positive element *ooit* already has a negatively polar use would seem to be an asset, but, of course, the construction would not then be analogous with *iemand (...) niet* and *ieverans (...) niet*. In short, in the temporal domain there is no unique formally and semantically analogous positive counterpart to *iemand* and *ieverans* to combine with the sentential negator to mean ‘never’. This concludes the discussion of scenario (8)a and we can hypothesize *niemand (...) niet* and *iemand (...) niet* to be directly related constructions. One is the ancestor of the other.

When it comes to choosing between scenario (8)b and (8)c, one should choose (8)b. First of all, the earliest attestations of *iemand (...) niet* date from the 20th century (Pauwels 1958), whereas those of *niemand (...) niet* date from the 15th century (Neuckermans in preparation). Secondly, there is a plausible scenario for how *niemand (...) niet* could be the input for a change to *iemand (...) niet*, but there is none for how *iemand (...) niet* could be the input for a change to *niemand (...) niet*. The plausible scenario is represented in (9).

(9) en ... niemand → niemand → niemand (...) niet

The first and second stage shown in (9) are parallel to the second and third stages of the regular Jespersen cycle ((6)). The third stage of (9) shows the reintroduction of the sentential negator, subject to a universal preference for employing a sentential negator in the expression of negative indefinites. The existence of this preference has been argued for by Haspelmath (1997: 200-205; cp. also Weiss 2002: 88). A persuasive illustration, also used by Haspelmath (1997: 205) comes from French.

(10) ne ... personne → personne → pas personne

The first stage of (10) shows standard French, the second stage progressive colloquial French, and the third one the even more progressive Québec French. Note that the very fact that Brabantic *iemand niet* dispenses with the negative indefinite and keeps the sentential negator, is also in accord with the universal preference hypothesis. (11) adds the final stage to the Brabantic scenario.

(11) en ... niemand → niemand → niemand (...) niet → iemand (...) niet

Thus (11) shows both the genesis of *niemand (...) niet* and the further development of *niemand (...) niet* to *iemand (...) niet*.

There is no such scenario with *iemand (...) niet* as an input to *niemand (...) niet*. True, the positive form *iemand* has to have a place in a total scenario as well, for it is a component of *niemand*, together with the sentential negator *en*.

(12) en ... iemand ... → iemand (...) niet → niemand (...) niet

However, there is no development from the *iemand* of *ne iemand* to the *iemand* of *iemand niet*. What happened was that *ne iemand* univerbized into *niemand*, which was then subject to the universal preference for a sentential negator and gave rise to *en niemand*, which is stage one of (11) (see also van der Auwera & Neuckermans 2004a,b).

- (13) en ... iemand → ... niemand → ~~iemand (...) niet~~ → ~~niemand (...) niet~~
 → en ... niemand → niemand → niemand (...) niet → iemand (...) niet

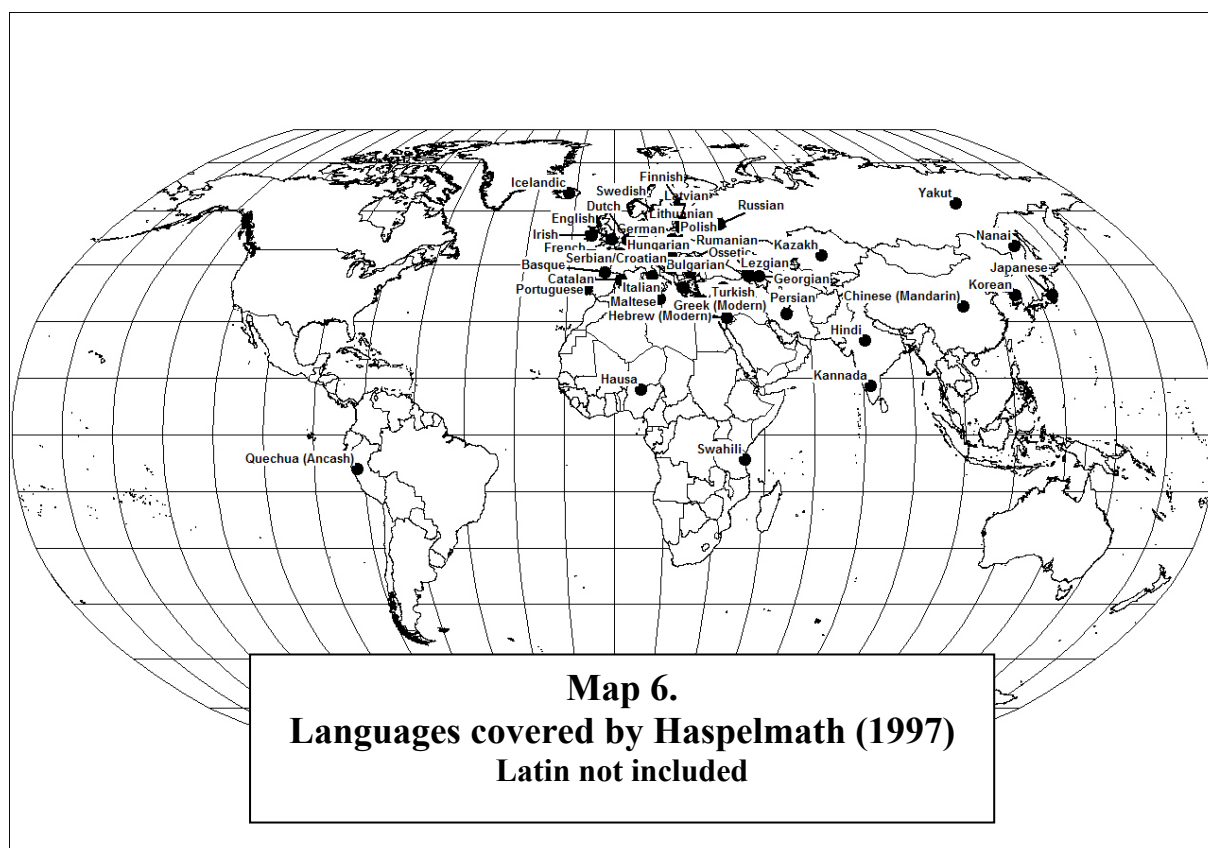
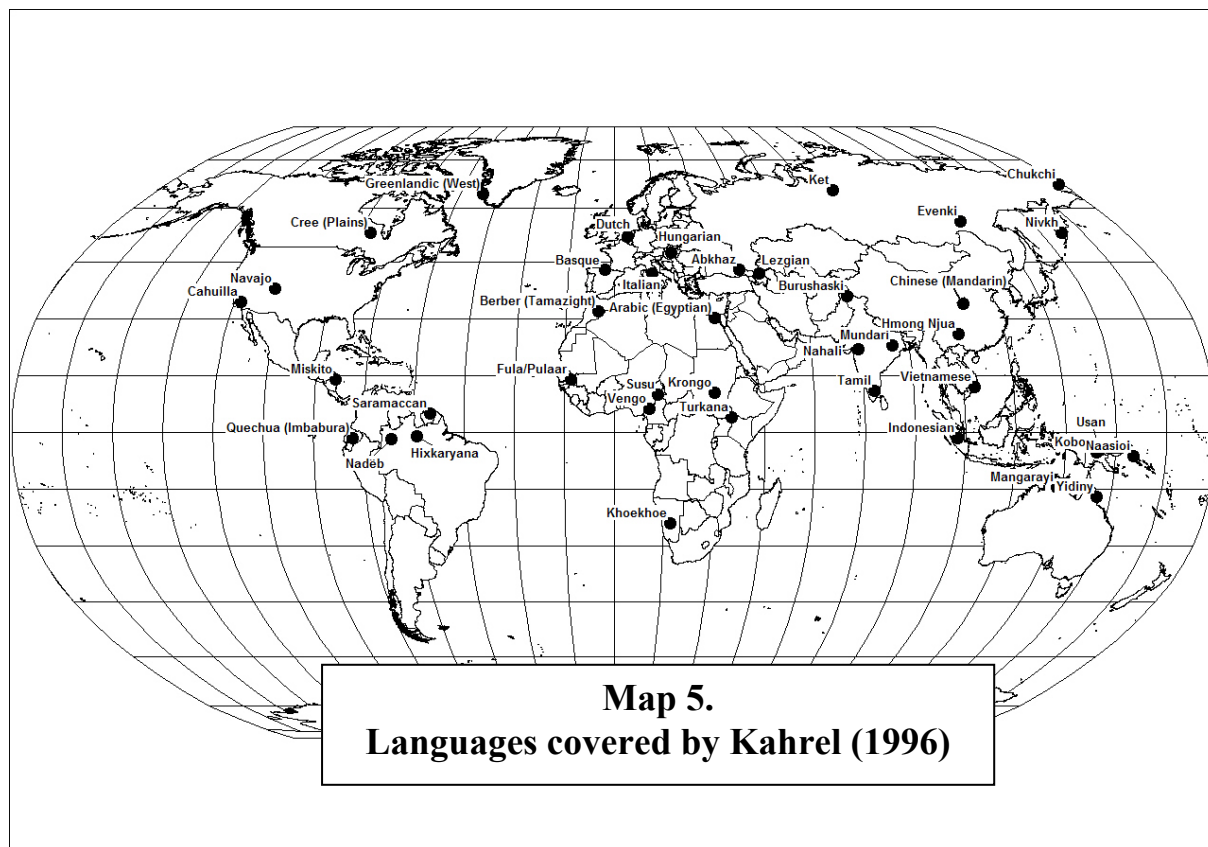
The general conclusion on the diachrony of *iemand (...) niet* is therefore that it is a further development of the *niemand (...) niet* construction.

4. The typology of *iemand (...) niet* ‘someone not’

The micro-variation of Dutch negative indefinites confronts us with at least five strategies.

- (14) a. niemand
 b. en ... niemand
 c. niemand (...) niet
 d. en ... niemand (...) niet
 e. iemand (...) niet

This is fairly representative already of the macro-variation of the expression of negative indefinites in the world at large. The macro-variation is explicitly dealt with in three recent works, viz. Kahrel (1996), Haspelmath (1997), both of which also build on Bernini & Ramat (1996), and Weiss (2002). The language coverage of the three studies differs significantly: Kahrel (1996) works on a balanced world-wide sample of 40 languages (Map 5) Haspelmath (1997) works on two samples. He offers an in-depth study of a Eurocentric sample of 40 languages (Map 6), one of which is Latin, against the background of balanced world-wide sample of another 100 languages. Weiss (2002) draws on a Eurocentric sample of 15 languages (Map 7).



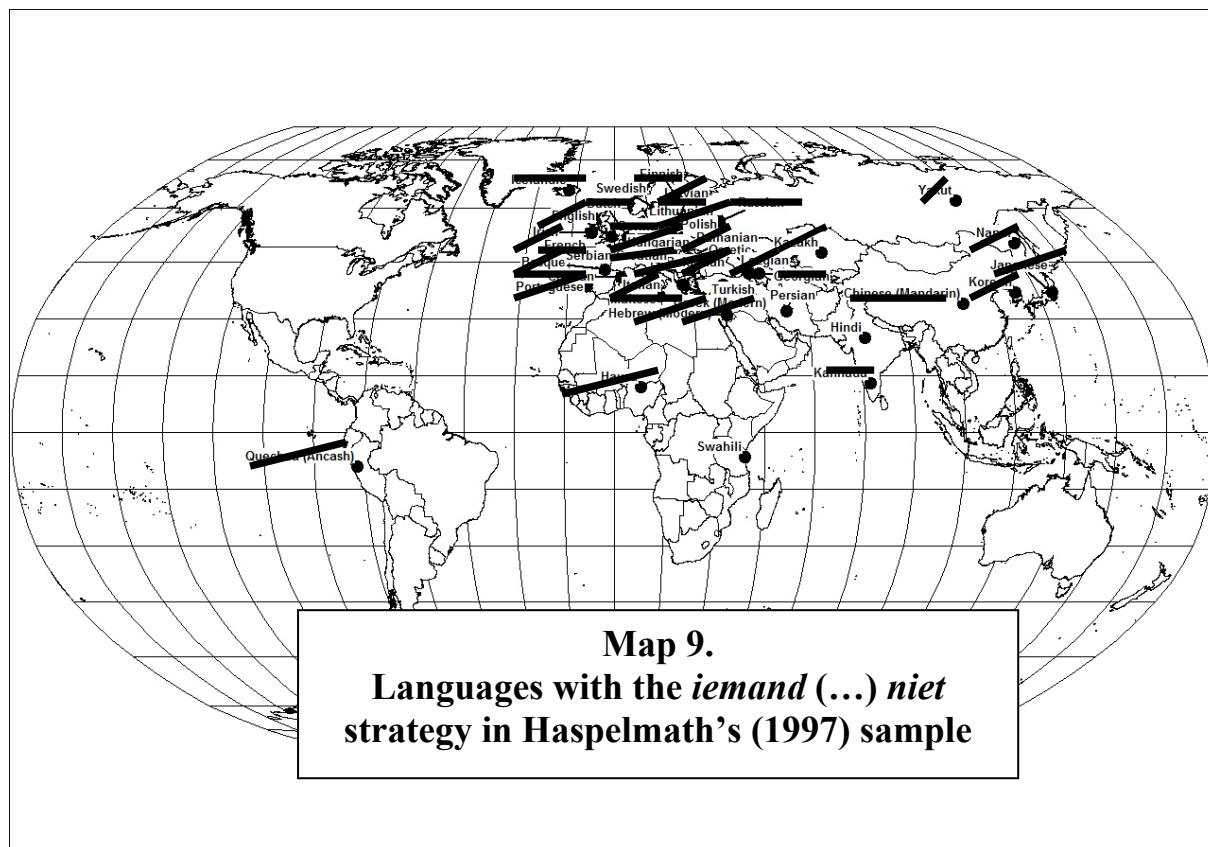
Of course, in Dutch, all that is necessary to get from *niemand (...) niet* to *iemand (...) niet* is the elision of one consonant. It remains to be seen how close positive and negative indefinites are, crosslinguistically. In English or German, they are close too, but not close enough.

- (16) a. nobody ... not → *obody ...not
 b. niemand (...) nicht → *iemand (...) nicht

And even if they are close for this or the other language, for most languages of the world little is known about the diachrony of the elements in question. In other words, the fact that the postulated change is not as yet hypothesized for any other language is not that surprising.

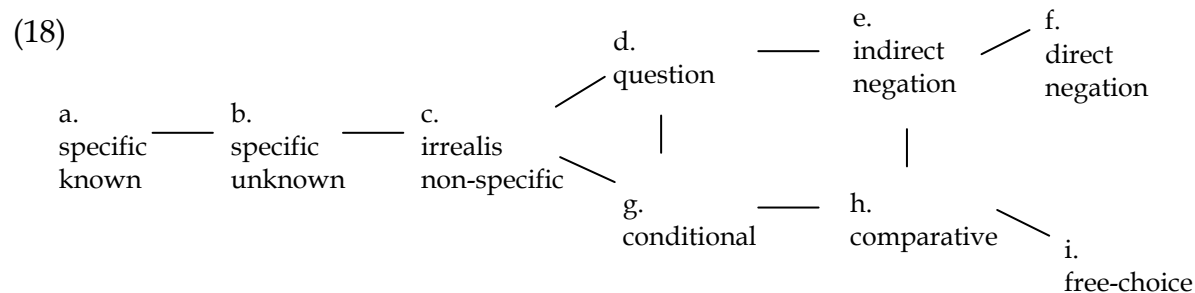
This brings us to the second question, that of the rarity of the *iemand (...) niet* strategy, and here the answer is totally different. At least according to Kahrel (1996), it might actually be the most frequent strategy in the world at large. Of the forty languages of his sample, 27 languages (or 67,7 %) languages use it, though sometimes not as the only strategy. There are four other strategies. Examples in pseudo-English and frequencies (Kahrel 1996: 36-37) are given in (17) and the spread of the *iemand (...) niet* strategy is shown in Map 8.

- | | | | |
|------|----|--|--------|
| (17) | a. | John not bought something.
sentential negator + ordinary indefinite | 67,7 % |
| | b. | John not bought anything
sentential negator + 'special' indefinite | 22,5 % |
| | c. | John bought nothing.
only negative indefinite | 12,5 % |
| | d. | John not bought nothing.
sentential negator + negative indefinite | 12,5 % |
| | e. | There is nothing that John bought.
negative existential | 17,5 % |



One can notice two things.⁵ First, the *iemand (...) niet* strategy is certainly not the most frequent strategy. On the contrary, we only find it in five out of Haspelmath's 40 languages, viz., in Hindi, Persian, Swahili, Swedish and Turkish. Second, Haspelmath's 40 language sample is heavily Eurocentric.⁶ It appears, therefore, that if Kahrel's hypothesis about the world wide spread may still be allowed to stand, perhaps it is simply not a frequent strategy in Europe or in Standard Average European. Indeed, the only European languages that allow *iemand (...) niet* in the Haspelmath sample are Swedish and Turkish, and of these neither is very Standard Average European (if we start from the hypotheses in van der Auwera 1998 and Haspelmath 2001) and Turkish less so than Swedish. This hypothesis fits with Kahrel's claims. He studies only four European languages, viz. Basque, Dutch—Standard Dutch, of course—Hungarian and Italian and neither uses an *iemand (...) niet* strategy.

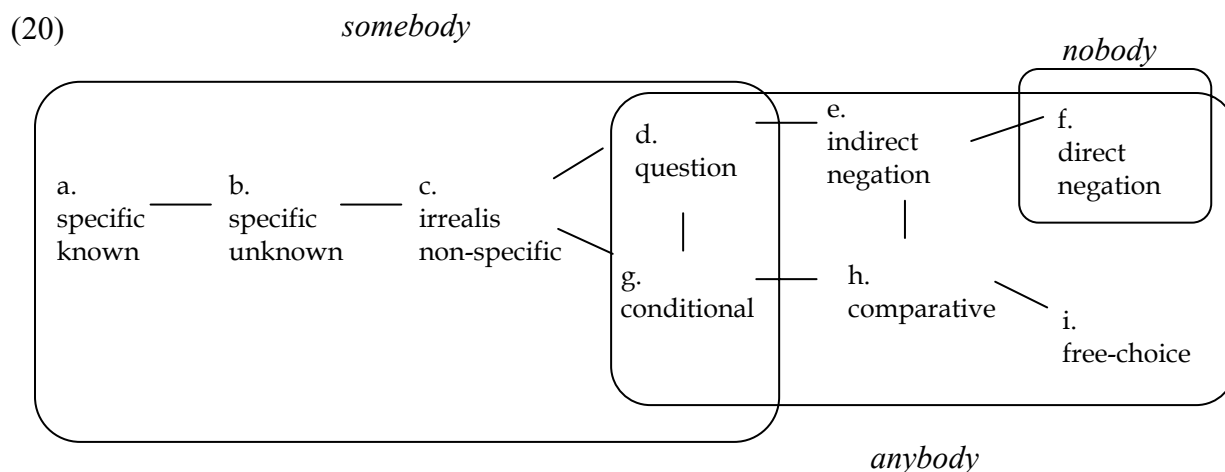
The second thing is that Haspelmath (1997: 192-200) criticizes Kahrel's classification, i.e. the one shown in (17). Leaving aside type (17)e, which is irrelevant for our purposes also, he argues that the way to classify the negative strategies should involve the semantic map in (18).



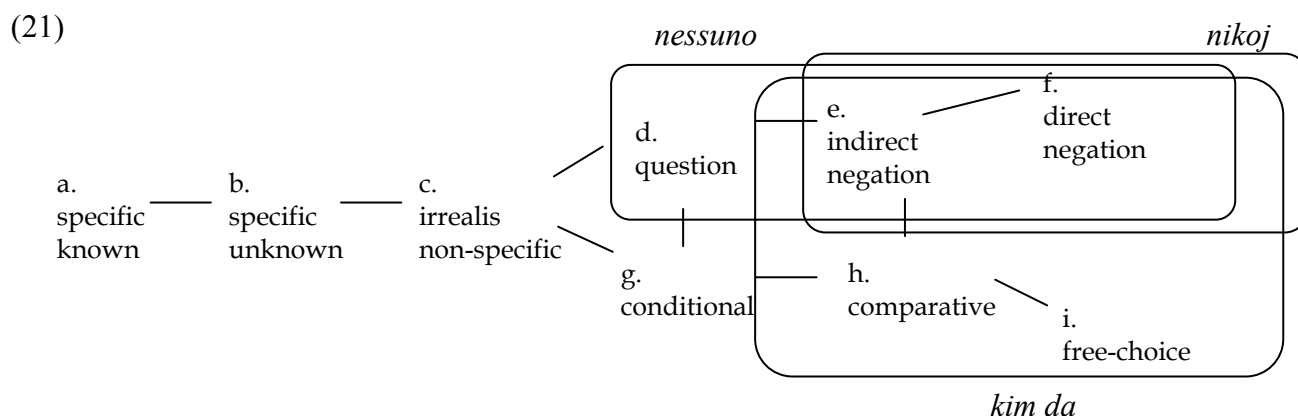
(18) lists nine uses of indefinite pronouns. They are illustrated in (19).

- (19) a. *Somebody* called you while you were away: guess who?
 b. I heard *somebody*, but I couldn't tell you who.
 c. Please ask *somebody* else.
 d. Did *somebody/anybody* tell you about it?
 e. I don't think that *anybody* knows the answer.
 f. I haven't seen *anybody*./ I have seen *nobody*.
 g. If you see *somebody/anybody*, tell me immediately.
 h. He is better than *anybody* else in the group.
 i. *Anybody* can solve this problem.

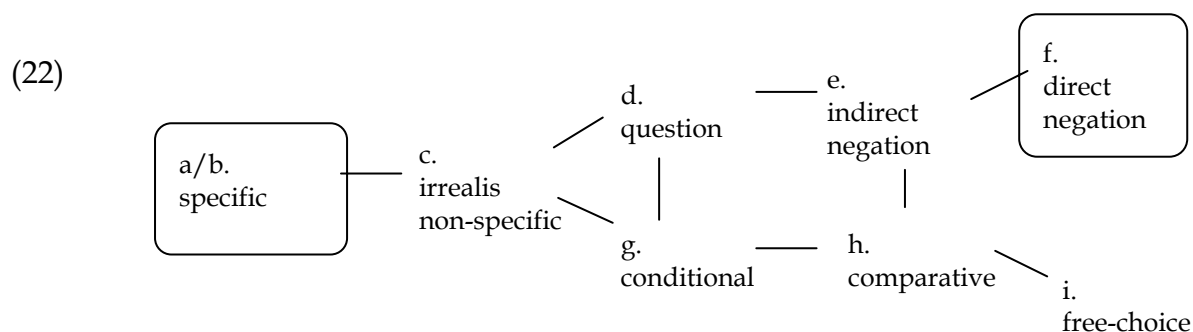
The idea is that there are as many types of negative pronoun strategies as there are markers covering the direct negation use (18)f and any selection of contiguous uses. Thus English has the (18)f type *nobody* as well as the (18)d-e-f-g-h-i type *anybody*. *Somebody* is an indefinite pronoun as well, but its use does not extend to (18)f, hence it is not negative.



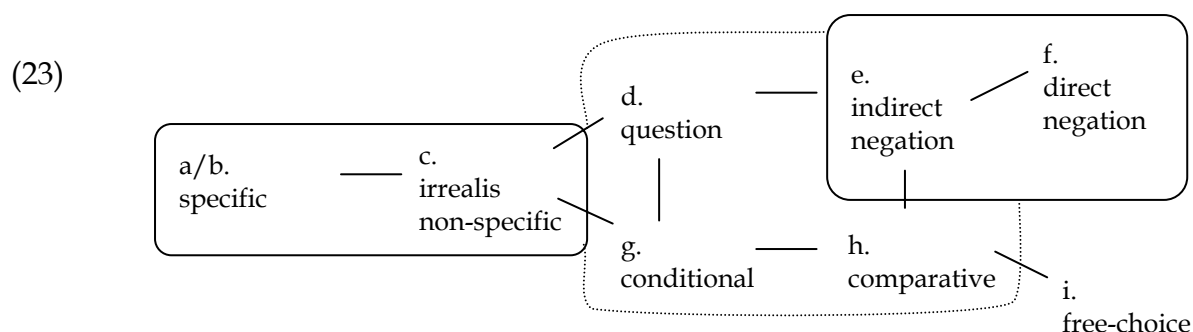
Bulgarian *nikoj*, however, is yet a third type of negative pronoun—it is of the (18) type (Haspelmath 1997: 262-263); Italian *nessuno* is a fourth, (18)d-e-f type (Haspelmath 1997: 267-269); Yakut *kim da* a fifth type (18)e-f-h-i (Haspelmath 1997: 289-291), and so on.



Haspelmath's point is well taken. The semantic map, its predictions and its inherent classification is persuasively argued. However, we would argue that it does not invalidate the essential idea behind Kahrel's claim about the high frequency of the *iemand (...) niet* strategy. Kahrel's claim in (17)a can be cast in terms of Haspelmath's theory as saying that that 67,7 % of the languages of his sample use the same pronoun to express direct negation and specific, whether known or unknown—Kahrel (1996) does not distinguish between the two. This claim is represented in (22).



Kahrel (1996) has not investigated any of the uses in between specific and direct negation. Yet this does not make Kahrel's claim uninterpretable within the Haspelmath map. On the contrary, if Haspelmath's map is right, then the contiguity requirement predicts that the pronouns shown on (22) are also used for irrealis non-specific and indirect negation, and then either at least (i) question or (ii) conditional and comparative.



In sum, Kahrel's hypothesis that the strategy of expressing direct negation with the help of the ordinary positive, specific pronoun is highly frequent is interpretable within Haspelmath's framework and still stands.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we analyzed a construction peculiar to a Brabant dialect of Dutch. Different from Standard Dutch and the other dialects of Belgian Dutch 'nobody' is expressed with the sentential negator *niet* 'not' and with a positive pronoun *iemand* 'somebody'. We have argued that this *iemand (...) niet* 'somebody not' strategy resulted from a *niemand (...) niet* 'nobody not' strategy. The change is typologically unattested elsewhere, but the new strategy may well be the world's favorite.

Notes

- 1 The work of Ludovic de Cuypere is funded by the Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Vlaanderen (Fund for Scientific Research Flanders) and that of Annemie Neuckermans was funded by the Vlaams-Nederlands Comité voor Nederlandse taal en cultuur (Flemish-Dutch Commission for Dutch language and culture).
- 2 The project ran from 2000 to 2003, it was called ‘SAND’ or ‘Syntactische Atlas van de Nederlandse Dialecten’, and it was funded by the Vlaams-Nederlands Comité voor Nederlandse taal en cultuur (Flemish-Dutch Commission for Dutch language and culture). On the Flemish side data have been gathered by Annemie Neuckermans, as well as by Gunther De Vogelaer (Ghent) and Vicky Van Den Heede (Antwerp). Help came from the whole binational SAND team, but especially from Magda Devos (Ghent), Guido Vanden Wyngaerd (Brussels) and Sjef Barbiers (Amsterdam). This article extends the analysis offered in van der Auwera and Neuckermans (in press), and it will be put in wider context in the doctoral work by Ludovic De Cuypere on the iconicity of multiple negation, and in the doctoral work on negation in the Belgian Dutch dialects by Annemie Neuckermans. For the Brabantian data, we also thank Luc Draeye (Louvain).
- 3 The bracketed dots mean that *niemand* and *not* do not form a cluster, though they may and often do follow each other. In this paper, we will abstain from studying the word order properties of the various constructions.
- 4 There will be no attempt at rendering the dialect data in a morpho-phonologically correct format. All the words will be spelled with the Standard Dutch orthography. There are only two words that we need and that Standard Dutch does not have, viz. *ieverans* and *nieverans*, words for ‘somewhere’ and ‘nowhere’—*ergens* and *nergens* in the standard language.
- 5 In the case of Mandarin and perhaps also Quechua Kahrel (1996) Haspelmath (1997) analyse the data in a different way. In the comparison below, we gloss over such differences.
- 6 The same points can be made about Weiss (2002). His 15 language sample is even more Eurocentric and there is not a single *iemand niet* language.

References

- Bernini, Giuliano & Paolo Ramat (1996) *Negative sentences in the languages of Europe*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Dahl, Östen (1979) “Typology of sentence negation”, *Linguistics* 17: 79–106.
- Haspelmath, Martin (1997) *Indefinite Pronouns*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Haspelmath, Martin 2001. “The European linguistic area: Standard Average European”. In *Language typology and language universals: Sprachtypologie und sprachliche Universalien: La typologie des langues et les universaux linguistiques: An international*

- handbook: Ein internationales Handbuch: Manuel international*, Martin Haspelmath, Ekkehard König, Wulf Oesterreicher and Wolfgang Raible (eds.), 1492-1510. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Haspelmath, Martin (in press) "Negative indefinite pronouns and predicate negation", Martin Haspelmath, Matthew Dryer, David Gil & Bernard Comrie (eds.), *The World Atlas of Language Structures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hoeksema, Jack (1998) "On the (non)loss of the polarity sensitive Dutch *ooit*", *Historical Linguistics 1995. Selected Papers from the 13th International Conference on Historical Linguistics, Manchester, August 1995. Volume 2: Germanic Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 101-114.
- Hoeksema, Jack (1999) "Aantekeningen bij *ooit*, deel 2: De opkomst van niet-polair *ooit*". *Tabu* 29: 147-172.
- Kahrel, Peter (1996) *Aspects of negation*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Amsterdam.
- Neuckermans, Annemie (in preparation) *Negatie in de Vlaamse dialecten*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Ghent.
- Pauwels, J. L. (1958) *Het dialect van Aarschot en omstreken*. Brussel: Belgisch Interuniversitair Centrum voor Neerlandistiek.
- van der Auwera, Johan with Dónall P. Ó Baoill. (ed.). 1998. *Adverbial constructions in the languages of Europe*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- van der Auwera, Johan & Annemie Neuckermans (2004a) "Jespersen's Cycle and the Interaction of Predicate and Quantifier Negation in Flemish", *Typology meets dialectology. Dialect Grammar from a Cross-Linguistic Perspective*. ed. by Bernd Kortmann. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 454-478.
- van der Auwera, Johan & Annemie Neuckermans (2004b) "Een Oost-Vlaamse driedubbele negatie", In: *Dialectsyntaxis in bloei*. ed. by Sjef Barbiers, Magda Devos & Georges De Schutter. Gent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal-en Letterkunde [Theme issue *Taal en Tongval* 15-16], 143-157.
- van der Auwera, Johan & Annemie Neuckermans (in print) "On the typology of *no one*", *Leuvense Bijdragen* 92.
- Weiss, Helmut (2002) "Indefinite pronouns. Morphology and syntax in cross-linguistic perspective", *Pronouns - Grammar and representation*. ed. by Horst J. Simon & Heike Wiese. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 85-107.