The rise of expressive negation in a proper noun
The case of Rita in Catalan

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Introduction

Overview

🤔 **A proper noun**, *Rita*, appears to function similarly to *negative indefinites* (≈ *nobody*)

(1) a. *Això s'ho   creurà   **Rita**.*   [Catalan]
   this   CL.REFL=CL.DO= believe.FUT.3SG EPI

   'Nobody is going to believe this / There's no way I'm going to believe this' (lit. 'Rita is going to believe this').

b. *Esto se   lo   va   a   creer   **Rita**.*   [Spanish]
   this   CL.REFL= CL.DO= go.3SG to believe.INF EPI

   'Nobody is going to believe this / There's no way I'm going to believe this' (lit. 'Rita is going to believe this').

c. *Si segueixen   així,   (no) aprovarà   **Rita**.*   [Catalan]
   if   continue.3PL like.this not   pass.FUT.3SG EPI

   'If they continue like this, nobody will pass (the exam) / they won't pass the exam.'

- Undescribed case of apparent **expressive negative indefinites** (Catalan and Spanish),
  henceforth ***Expressive Pseudo (Negative) Indefinites***, or EPIs[1].

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[1]Not to confuse the 'PI' in EPI with more theory-loaded 'Polarity Item'.

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↪ Impressionistic observations suggest *RITA* may interact with negation/antiveridicality in *some* speakers.

- Native speaker consultation (Catalan and Spanish), supplemented by a **grammaticality judgement survey** among 1,344 Catalan speakers, of which 460 use the expression.
    1. Sentential negation
    2. Negative spread
    3. *Absolutely*-modification
    4. Neg-raising predicates
    5. Negative fragments
    6. *Without*-clauses
    7. Other restrictions: focalisation, argument structure.

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- **Descriptive/empirical effort**: syntactic distribution of the proper noun *RITA* as (apparent) EPI and its inter-speaker variation, with particular focus on Catalan.
- Native speaker consultation (Catalan and Spanish), supplemented by a **grammaticality judgement survey** among 1,344 Catalan speakers, of which 460 use the expression.
- The upshot: **A change-in-progress?**
- → *RITA* patterns as a *syntactic* **class of its own**, sharing only some of the traits of existing categories, such as Negative Concord Items, Polarity Items and squatitives.
- → Significant, but *constrained* **inter-speaker variation**: (minimally) 3 consequential groups of speakers.
- → **Comparison** of *RITA* to other **EPIs** in these languages.
- → **Implications** for diachrony and for a syntactic typology of polarity/negative items.

The plan today

1. Introduction

2. Describing RITA: The Data

3. EPIs beyond *RITA*

4. Implications

5. Conclusions

Describing RITA: The Data

The phenomenon: general observations

🤔 **A proper noun**, *Rita* (originally 19th c. singer), appears to function similarly to *negative indefinites* (≈ *nobody*)

(2) a. *Això s'ho   creurà   **Rita**.*   [Catalan]
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    if continue.3PL like.this not   pass.FUT.3SG EPI

   'If they continue like this, nobody will pass (the exam) / they won't pass the exam.' (lit. 'Rita is going to pass the exam')

↪ **Expressive** and **epistemic**, encoding **speaker attitude**: negative attitude towards the likelihood of what is conveyed in the proposition or towards past events.

↪ **Flexible person indexing**.

The phenomenon: general observations

- **Part of a possibly broader phenomenon:** *limited set* of proper nouns and person-referring DPs can behave (at least superficially) similarly.
    - → **Focus primarily on *RITA***

(3)   a.   *Pues vendrá* **el Papa de Roma** *a arreglar*   [Spanish]
       well come.FUT.3SG the Pope of Rome to fix.INF

        las cosas.
        the things

        'Well, nobody is going to come to fix this / 'I'm not coming to fix this.'[2]

   b.   *Això (no) ho farà (ni)* **Déu**.   [Catalan]
       this not CL.DO= do.FUT.3SG not.even God

        'No one is going to do this.'

   c.   *Perdona'm, però les redaccions te les farà* **ta mare**.
       forgive.IMP=CL.DO but the essays CL.IO= CL.DO= do.FUT.3SG your mother

        'Sorry, but I'm not doing these essays / no one is doing these essays.'[3]

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[2] https://x.com/LauritaRMadrid/status/185108997504909313?s=20.
[3] https://x.com/AnaFerrerS/status/521411305102929920?s=20.

The phenomenon: general observations

- Some signs of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation:
  1. **Grammaticalisation**: apparent rise in negative/quantificational and more pronominal interpretations.
     - **Bleaching**: original function as proper nouns/DPs is lost, including reference to a specific individual.
     - **Decategorialisation**: loss of syntactic attributes associated with more lexical categories → loss of personal article *la* before *RITA* in Catalan (otherwise compulsory with proper nouns)[4].
  2. **Pragmaticalisation** (Diewald, 2011): propositional meaning > metacommunicative, discourse interactional meaning.
     - **Novel encoding of negative speaker attitude** → (inter)subjectification (Traugott, 1989).

- Overall, **proper noun** seemingly undergoing *some change*. Its study may be **instructive** in at least three ways:
  - Placement of EPIs in a syntactic typology of negative/polarity items.
  - Development of expressive language (see relevant data in, i.a., Speas and Tenny, 2003; Gutzmann, 2015; Wiltschko and Heim, 2016; Trotzke, 2017; Wiltschko, 2014, 2021).
  - Possible sources of negation/polarity-related items.

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  → **Further formal change** in a subset of speakers who sanction *RITA* in antiveridical contexts

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[4]In *most*, but not all, speakers.

RITA and NCIs

N-words (or Negative Concord Items)

N-words (or Negative Concord Items): an expression α is an n-word iff:

- α can be used in structures that contain sentential negation or another α-expression, yielding a reading equivalent to one logical negation; and

- α can provide a negative fragment answer (i.e., without the overt presence of negation).

Veridicality and non-veridicality

- A propositional operator *F* is **veridical** iff *Fp* entails p: *Fp* $\Longrightarrow$ *p*; otherwise, F is **nonveridical**.

- A nonveridical operator *F* is **antiveridical** iff *Fp* entails *not p*: *Fp* $\Longrightarrow$ ¬*p*.

- **Upcoming**: *RITA*'s behaviour in *antiveridical* contexts, compared to NCIs in Catalan and Spanish.

- I identify (minimally) **five points of difference** between *RITA* and NCIs (**First set of survey data**), but also important **convergences**.

- Catalan and Spanish as Non-strict Negative Concord languages.

(4) a. **(**No**) vino*   ***nadie**.*   [negative doubling; Spanish]
not   come.PST.3SG   n-body

'Nobody came.'

    b. ***Nadie***   *(****no***) vino.*   [no negation with pre-verbal NCIs]
n-body   not   come.PST.3SG

'Nobody came.'

    c. ***Ningú***   *(**no**) menja.*   [optional negation with pre-verbal NCIs; Catalan]
n-body   not   eat.3SG

'Nobody eats.'

RITA and NCIs: sentential negation

🗣 **First point of divergence**: *RITA* is most commonly used **_without_ sentential negation**, even if postverbal, or negation + NCI *ni*.

(5)   a.   *N'estic   farta.   El   farà   **Rita** aquest*   [Catalan]
           CL.REFL=be.1SG   fed.up   CL.DO= do.FUT.3SG   EPI   this

           projecte.
           project

           'I'm fed up. I'm not doing this project / there's no way I'm finishing this project.'

      b.   *Los perros de los vecinos   solo hacían   que*   [Spanish]
           the dogs   of the neighbours only do.IMPF.3SG that

           *ladrar esta noche. Evidentemente, (no) ha   dormido   (ni) **Rita***
           talk.INF this night obviously   not AUX.HAVE.3SG sleep.PTCP not.even EPI

           'The neighbours' dogs were barking constantly last night. Obviously, we couldn't sleep at all.'

RITA and NCIs: sentential negation

❗ It can nonetheless **co-occur with sentential negation for *some* speakers**.
- *RITA* is gradually sanctioning sentential negation in some speakers.

(6) a. ***No*** *s'aixecarà* ***Rita*** *demà.*   [Catalan]
not CL.REFL=wake.up.FUT.3SG EPI tomorrow

'There's no way we're waking up (on time) tomorrow.'

b. ***No*** *vindrà* ***Rita*** *al* *gimnàs!*
not come.FUT.3SG EPI to.the gym

'Nobody is going to come to the gym / I'm not coming to the gym!'

c. *Lo* *de la* *multa* ***no*** *se* *lo* *cree*   [Spanish]
the of the fine not CL.REFL= CL.DO= believe.INF

Rita la Cantaora*.*
EPI

As for the fine, nobody is believing this / I'm not going to believe this.'[5]

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[5] `https://x.com/AgoneyCarmel/status/1326535312193937409?s=20`.

- Highly statistically significant difference between acceptability of clauses with sentential negation *vs ni*-accompanied *RITA* ($W = 26386, p < .0001$). **However**, significant proportion of speakers judged the former as "Good" or "Very good".

Responses with sentential negation and NCI "ni"
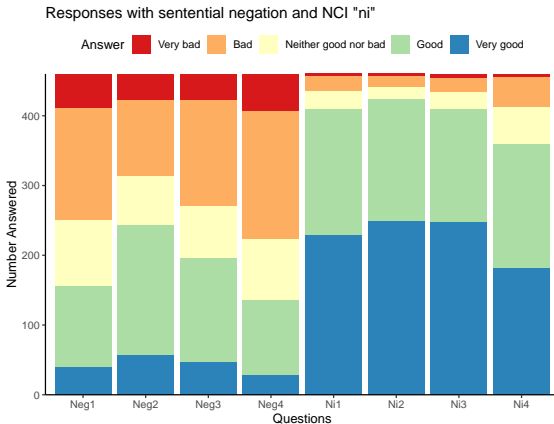
RITA and NCIs: positional restrictions and focalisation

~ Negation *can* (but need not) precede postverbal *RITA* for some speakers; for others, it is entirely ungrammatical. NCIs, in contrast, *require* negation when postverbal.

🕊 **Second point of divergence**: **positional restrictions** on *RITA* which do not apply to Catalan/Spanish NCIs.

↪ Preference for *RITA* as *subject*, specifically ***postverbal* subject**. If **preverbal**, it must be **focalised** and receive **emphatic prosody**.

(7) a. *?***Rita** *trobarà*   *feina aquí.*   [Catalan]
        EPI   find.FUT.3SG work here

   (intended) 'Nobody will find a job here' (alternative reading: 'Rita will find a job here.'[6])

   b. ***RITA*** *trobarà*   *feina aquí*
        EPI   find.FUT.3SG work here

     'NOBODY will find a job here / There's no way I'll find a job here' OR 'RITA will find job here (not someone else).'

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[6]Although odd and only marginally acceptable because of the lack of personal article.

RITA and NCIs: sentential negation

- Significantly higher proportion of acceptability of *RITA* when focalised pre-verbally ($\chi^2(1) = 5.8359$, $p < .016$).

Rita with and without focalisation
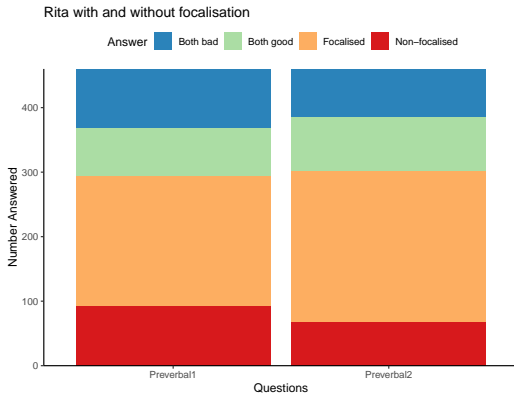
- **Postverbal** subjects known to display **focal properties** in Cat./Sp. (i.a., Belletti, 2004; Ortega-Santos, 2008; Etxepare and Uribe-Etxebarria, 2008; Forcadell, 2013) → ***preverbal RITA* appears to have kept this requirement**, unlike canonical preverbal (topical) subjects in these languages.

RITA and NCIs: argument structure and *ni*

💭 **Third point of divergence**: **argument structure preferences** on *RITA* (dependent on the presence of NCI *ni*) which do not apply to Catalan/Spanish NCIs.

- Postverbally and without *ni/no*: transitive and unergative frames preferred, compared to unaccusatives. *RITA* dispreferred as *object*.
- With *ni*: differences disappear; all contexts rated as "Good" or "Very good".

(8) a. *El farà Rita aquest examen .* [Catalan]
    CL.DO= do.3SG.FUT EPI this exam

    'There's no way we're/I'm doing this exam.'

  b. *L'aire condicionat no va. Treballarà Rita.*
    the-air coinditioning not work.3SG work.3SG.FUT EPI

    'The air-con isn't working. I'm not working today!/There's no way we can work today!'

  c. *Mira qué cola de coches. Llegará Rita a tiempo!* [Spanish]
    look what queue of cars arrive.3SG.FUT EPI on time

   'Look at the car queue! No way we're arriving on time.'

  d. ??*Llamaré (a) Rita, no estoy de humor!*
    call.1SG.FUT DOM EPI not be.1SG in mood

    'I'm not going to call anyone/them/him, I'm not in a good mood!'

- Statistically highly significant differences between argument structure frames, and differences between exclusion/inclusion of NCI *ni*.

Responses with verbs with different argument structure with/without NCI ni
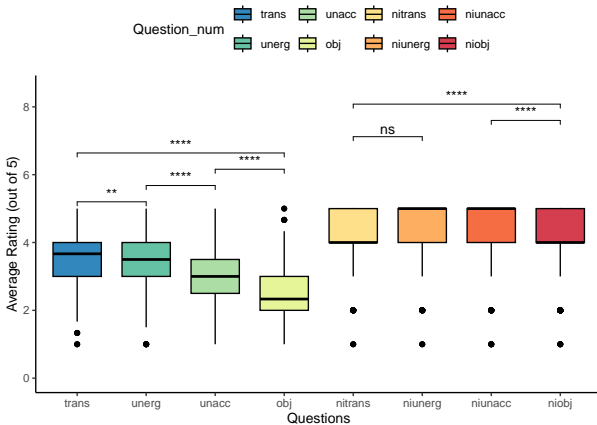
RITA and NCIs: *absolutely*-modification

🗩 **Fourth point of divergence**: NCIs in various Romance languages permit **absolutely/almost modifiers** under negation (see Quer, 1993, Giannakidou, 2000). This does not carry over to *RITA*, with or without sentential negation.

(9) a. *No*   *he*   *vist*   **absolutament/quasi**   *ningú.*   [Catalan]
         not   AUX.HAVE.1SG   see.PTCP   absolutely/almost   no-one

         'I have seen absolutely/almost no-one.'

     b. *No*   *he*   *visto*   **absolutamente/casi**   *nadie.*   [Spanish]
         not   AUX.HAVE.1SG   see.PTCP   absolutely/almost   no-one

         'I have seen absolutely/almost no-one.'

(10) a. * *(No)* *he*   *vist*   **absolutament/quasi**   *Rita.*   [Catalan]
         not   AUX.HAVE.1SG   see.PTCP   absolutely/almost   EPI

         (intended) ≈ 'I have seen absolutely/almost no-one.'

     b. * *(No)* *he*   *visto*   **absolutamente/casi**   *Rita.*   [Spanish]
         not   AUX.HAVE.1SG   see.PTCP   absolutely/almost   EPI

         (intended) ≈ 'I have seen absolutely/almost no-one.'

RITA and NCIs: expressivity and epistemicity

🖐 **Fifth point of divergence**: *RITA* is **expressive** in nature, conveying **negative speaker attitude** towards an event or action. Canonical NCIs (and other types of negative indefinites more broadly, such as NPIs or negative quantifiers), can be uttered in discourse-neutral contexts.

- **Other restrictions:** possible **tense/aspectual restrictions** (pending further study)

(11)   a. ✓✓*A aquest ritme, aprovarà Rita l'examen.*   [Catalan]
       at this rate pass.FUT.3SG EPI the-exam

       'At this rate, no one is going to pass the exam.'

   b. ✓*A aquest ritme, aprova Rita l'examen.*   [Catalan]
       at this rate pass.3SG EPI the-exam

       'At this rate, no one is going to pass the exam.'

   c. ?*Va aprovar Rita l'examen!*   [Catalan]
       go.AUX.3SG pass.INF EPI the-exam

       '(Of course) no one passed the exam!'

- Overall:
  1. Behaviour with sentential negation (notwithstanding inter-speaker variation)
  2. Positional restrictions and focalisation
  3. Argument structure restrictions
  4. (Possibly) tense/aspectual restrictions
  5. *Absolutely*-modification
  6. Expressivity and epistemicity
  → **In these respects, *RITA* ≠ NCIs.**

- **Next**: **points of convergence** in antiveridical contexts, namely neg-raising predicates, negative spread, negative fragment answers and *without*-clauses. **Second set of survey data**

RITA and NCIs: neg-raising predicates

- NPI-licensing properties of neg-raising predicates (*think*, *believe*, *suppose*, etc.)

(12) a. I **don't** think he lifted **a finger** to help. [neg-raising predicate]

  b. *I **don't** mean that he lifted **a finger** to help. [non-neg-raising predicate]

👍 **First point of convergence**: **grammaticality** of *RITA* with **neg-raising predicates** (13a) vis-à-vis predicates that do not involve neg-raising (13b).

(13) a. *No crec que vingui **Rita**.* [neg-raising; Catalan]
        not think.1SG that come.SUBJ.3SG EPI

      'I don't think (absolutely) anyone will come / I think (absolutely) no one will come.'

  b. **No dic que vingui **Rita**.*
        not say.1SG that come.SUBJ.IMPF.3SG EPI

      '(intended) I am not saying that anyone/no-one came.'

RITA and NCIs: neg-raising predicates

- Highly statistically significant difference between acceptability of *RITA* with neg-raising verbs *vs* non-neg-raising ones ($W = 73484, p < .0001$).

Rita with neg−raising and non−neg−raising verbs
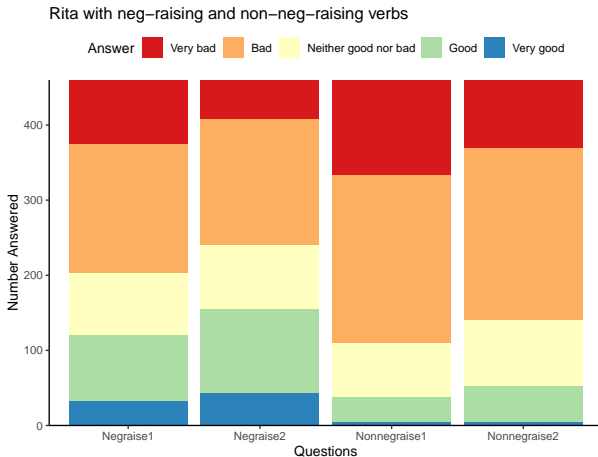
RITA and NCIs: negative spread

- In non-strict Negative Concord languages, a pre-verbal n-word can sanction a postverbal one, without requiring sentential negation, Sp. ***Nadie** comió **nada*** 'Nobody ate anything' (lit. 'nobody ate nothing').

👍 **Second point of convergence**: pre-verbal (focalised) *RITA* turns out, again, grammatical in **negative spread** contexts for varieties of Catalan (NB: Spanish judgements).

(14) a. *A aquest ritme,* ***RITA*** *aprovarà*   [negative spread; Catalan]
    at this   rate   EPI   pass.FUT.3SG

    cap *examen.*
    no   exam

    'At this rate, nobody will pass any exams / there's no way anyone is passing any exams.'

  b. ??*Esto huele   fatal.* ***RITA*** *se   va   a   comer*   [Spanish]
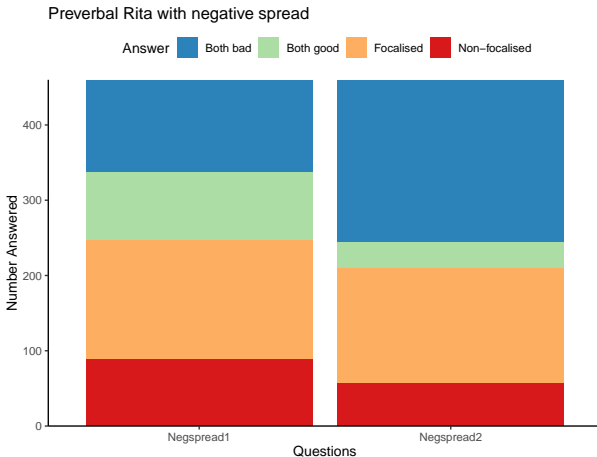   this smell.3SG terrible EPI   CL.REFL= go.3SG to eat.INF

    nada.
    nothing

    'This smells terrible. There's no way we're eating any of this.'

RITA and NCIs: negative spread

- Participants generally prefer focalisation (32%), 15.6% the non-focalised version. Rest like neither (34.9%) or both (12.9%).

Preverbal Rita with negative spread

RITA and NCIs: negative spread

- How can we tell the previous examples involve genuine negative spread?

→ Constrast between *RITA* and *other proper nouns* in Catalan (e.g., *Joan*).

(15)   *A   aquest ritme, **en Joan** *(no) aprovarà   **cap** examen.*   [Catalan]
      at   this   rate   the John not   pass.FUT.3SG no exam

      'At this rate, John won't pass any exams.'

- **Potential discrepancy** in the formal make-up of *RITA* vis-à-vis other proper nouns in Cat.

↪ Whatever formal properties *RITA* is acquiring (e.g., some inherent negative force or negation-related features), they are 'enough' to sanction structures with apparent negative spread.

RITA and NCIs: negative fragment answers

- Catalan/Spanish NCIs, which can serve as **negative fragments**, e.g., Cat. *Qui s'ha menjat el pastís? **Ningú** '*Who ate the cake? Nobody'. (Weak) NPIs, on the other hand, cannot, cf. English *Who did you talk to? *Anybody.*

👍 **Third point of convergence**: *RITA* patterns like NCIs here.

(16) a. *A: Qui vindrà   a córrer?*   [isolated answer; Catalan]
       who come.FUT.3SG to run.INF

       'Who is going running (with me)?'

   b. *B: **Rita!** (Amb aquesta calor...).*
       EPI with this   heat

       'Nobody! / I'm not coming! (given this heat...).'

RITA and NCIs: *without*-clauses

- **Without-clauses** as another antiveridical context that licenses NCIs:

(17) a. *El   partit es   va   acabar   <u>sense</u> *que*   [Catalan]
          the match CL.REFL= AUX.PST.3SG finish.INF without that

   *els   equips concedissin   **cap** gol.*
   the teams concede.SUBJ.IMPF.3PL no   goal
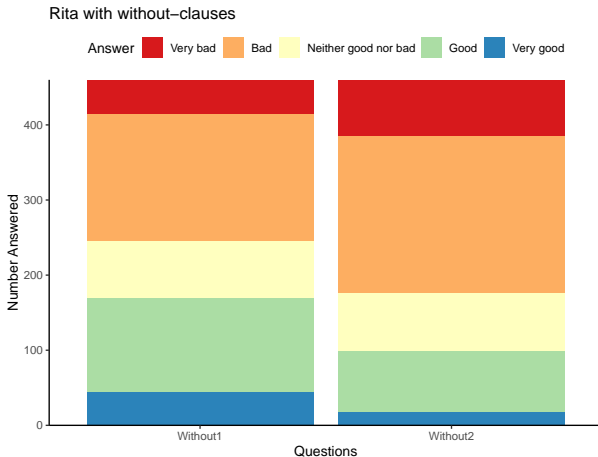
   'The match ended without the teams conceding any goal.'

   b. *Intenta levantarte   <u>sin</u>   despertar*   [Spanish]
      try.IMP get.up.INF=CL.REFL without wake.up.INF

   *a   **nadie**, por   favor.*
   DOM no-one   please

   'Try to get up without waking up anyone, please.'

RITA and NCIs: *without*-clauses

👍 **Fourth point of convergence (maybe)**: Judgements hard to obtain, but **potentially grammatical given appropriate context**.

(18) a. *A: A   en Joan el   devia   veure marxar*   [Catalan]
            DOM the John CL.DO= should.IMPF.3SG see.INF leave.INF

   tothom,   no?
   everyone no

   'Everyone must have seen John leave, right?'

   b. *B: Què va! El   tio va   marxar   <u>sense</u> que   se*
         INTJ   the guy AUX.PST.3SG leave.INF without   that CL.REFL=

   *n'adonés   **Rita**!*
   CL.PART=notice.SUBJ.IMPF.3SG EPI

   'Not at all! The guy (somehow) left without anyone/a single person noticing!'

RITA and NCIs: *without*-clauses

- 169 and 98 participants rated the two examples as 4-5 across the two questions. Around 50% of the 460 did not accept them.

Rita with without–clauses

A change-in-progress?

- *K-means clustering*: finding coherent participant profiles[7].

Group	Affirmative	Negation	*Ni*	Neg-raising	*Without*-clauses	*N*
1	3.258065	1.956452	4.154839	1.693548	1.764516	155
2	4.065476	3.202381	4.328869	2.633929	2.681548	168
3	2.660000	3.395000	3.910000	3.740000	3.320000	50
4	4.402299	4.063218	4.678161	4.074713	3.959770	87

Table 1: Four clusterings of participants obtained based on their ratings

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[7] Appropriate number of clusters determined with the aid of `fviz_nbclust()`. `set.seed()` of 123 adopted.

[8] Plausibly includes those speakers that only sanction *RITA* if it has the accompanying personal article. The survey did not address this variant of the expression (due to unawareness of its existence on my part).

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1	3.258065	1.956452	4.154839	1.693548	1.764516	155
2	4.065476	3.202381	4.328869	2.633929	2.681548	168
3	2.660000	3.395000	3.910000	3.740000	3.320000	50
4	4.402299	4.063218	4.678161	4.074713	3.959770	87

Table 1: Four clusterings of participants obtained based on their ratings

- **Group 1** → *RITA* OK only with NCI *ni* (34%).
- **Group 2** → *RITA* OK in affirmative and with NCI *ni* only (37%).
- **Group 3** → *RITA* bad-ish everywhere (11%)[8].
- **!** **Group 4** → *RITA* OK everywhere (incl. some/all antiveridical contexts) (19%).

---

[7] Appropriate number of clusters determined with the aid of `fviz_nbclust()`. `set.seed()` of 123 adopted.

[8] Plausibly includes those speakers that only sanction *RITA* if it has the accompanying personal article. The survey did not address this variant of the expression (due to unawareness of its existence on my part).

A change-in-progress?

Participant Clustering Plot
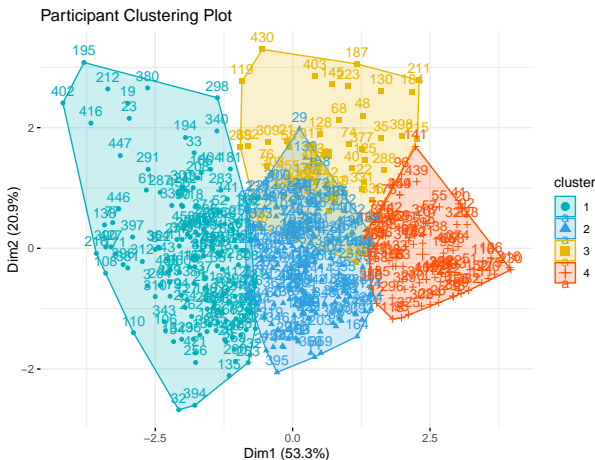
- Significant proportion of speakers allowing either *RITA* with *all* antiveridical contexts explored (negation, neg-raising, negative spread, without-clauses); or with *some* of them.
- Assuming *RITA* with negation is diachronically more recent → gradual grammaticalisation for *RITA* → **a change-in-progress?**

- *RITA* matches the distribution of NCIs to a significant extent, due to its compatibility with antiveridical contexts:
  1. Sentential negation (for some speakers)
  2. Neg-raising predicates
  3. Negative spread (in Catalan, at least)
  4. Negative fragments
  5. *Without*-clauses (maybe)
- Only *partial* match.
  1. Inter-speaker variation w.r.t. antiveridicality.
  2. Pre-verbal focalisation requirement.
  3. Argument structure restrictions
  4. Incompatibility with *absolutely*-modification.
  5. Expressivity, speaker-attitude orientation.

→ **RITA is not an NCI, but may be undergoing some formal change in several speakers, gradually causing points of convergence with NCIs.**

RITA and (weak) PIs: non-veridical contexts

- A broad definition of Polarity Items (encompassing strong and weak) is given below (Giannakidou, 2001, 669).

Polarity Items

A linguistic expression α is a *polarity item* iff:

- The distribution of α is limited by sensitivity to some semantic property β of the context of appearance; and

- β is (non)veridicality, or a subproperty thereof: $\beta \in$ {veridicality, nonveridicality, antiveridicality, modality, intensionality, extensionality, episodicity, downward entailingness}.

- **Next:** *RITA* also does not fit the typology of **weak PIs**.

RITA and (weak) PIs: non-veridical contexts

- PIs licensed in non-veridical contexts: this includes questions, conditionals, imperatives, habituals, etc.

(19)   a.   *Si tienes*   ***cualquier*** *problema, por favor*   [conditional; Catalan]
           if   have.2SG   any   issue   for favour

           llámame.
           call.IMP=CL.IO

           'If you have any issues, please call me.'

     b.   *Que vol*   ***res?***   [interrogative]
           Q   wants   anything

           'Does s/he want anything?'

     c.   *Ho va veure abans que* ***ningú*** *ho veiés.*   [*before*][10]
           it   AUX   saw   before that   anybody   it   see.SUBJ.3SG

           'S/he saw it before anybody did.'

(Tubau et al., 2023, 12)

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[10] NB: *before*-clauses have also been analysed as antiveridical, so the example above can be contested. I simply copy Tubau et al. (2023)'s exposition here.

RITA and (weak) PIs: non-veridical contexts

🗨 **Key point of divergence**: *RITA* **ungrammatical** in **non-veridical** contexts.

(20) a. *Si truca ***Rita****, avisa'm.*   [conditional; Catalan]
     if   call.3SG EPI   warn.IMP=CL.DO

     (intended) 'If anyone/nobody calls, let me know.'

   b. *Que *vindrà* ***Rita****?*   [interrogative]
       that.INT want.3SG EPI

       (intended) 'Is anyone/nobody coming?'

   c. *Lo *vio* *antes que se diera*   [*before*; Spanish]
       CL.DO= see.PST.3SG before that CL.REFL= give.IMPF.SUBJ.3SG

       cuenta ***Rita****.*
       count EPI

       (intended) 'S/he saw it before anybody realised.'

→ **The above then disqualifies *RITA* as a weak PI.**

RITA and squatitives: also not a match

- **Squatitives** (Horn, 2001): English expressions of *scatological* origin (*jack shit, (diddly) squat, fuck-all*, etc.).

(21)   a.   I <u>didn't</u> sleep **squat** last night.

       b.   There have been a couple of veterans who have done **squat** since they've been here.

(Horn, 2001, 186)

- Labelled **'quasi-NPIs'** in Horn (2001), behaving both like **NPIs** in (21a) (e.g., English *anything*), and like **negative quantifiers** (e.g., English *nothing*) in (21b), bringing their own negative force.

RITA and squatitives: also not a match

✓ Licensed in **antiveridical** contexts (sentential negation, neg-raising, etc.).

(22) a. He <u>doesn't</u> know **jackshit/fuck all**. [sentential negation]

    b. He knows **jackshit/fuck all**.

(23) a. I <u>don't</u> <u>think</u> he brought **jackshit**. [neg-raising predicate]

    b. *I didn't <u>say</u> he brought **jackshit**. [non-neg-raising predicate]

(24) **Nobody** said **fuck all**. [negative spread]

(Thoms et al., 2017)

✗ In **non-veridical** contexts, *only* the *negative quantifier reading* can be obtained, the NPI-reading is lost.

(25) a. *Did he say fuck all?

    b. *The last person to say fuck all was John.

(All fine on NQ reading)

RITA and squatitives: also not a match

(26) a. He knows <u>absolutely</u> **fuck all** about this.   [*absolutely* modification]

    b. He kens <u>absolutely</u> **nihin** aboot this.

(Thoms et al., 2017)

(27) I published this a year ago and **fuck all** has   [pre-verbal squatitives]
been done[11]

RITA and squatitives: also not a match

- **Partial** overlap with *RITA*:
  1. They are also licensed in antiveridical contexts, like *RITA*.
  2. Janus-nature of squatitives (with/without negation) only partly true for some Cat./Sp. speakers.
  3. Squatitives can get NQ-reading in non-veridical contexts, but not NPI-reading. *RITA* cannot get either.
  4. Squatitives are *not* person-referring, whilst *RITA* necessarily refer to a person/human collective.
  5. *RITA* disallows *absolutely*-modification.
  6. Little focalisation/positional constraints with squatitives (even if usually postverbal).

→ ***RITA* does not behave like squatitives either.**

Table 2: Comparison of the behaviour of NCIs, PIs, squatitives and RITA

	NCIs	**PIs**	**Squatitives**	**RITA**
Licensing via antiveridical operators	✓	✓	✓	Some
Licensing via non-veridical operators	✗	✓	✗	✗
Pre-verbal focalisation requirement	✗	✗	✗	✓
Argument structural restrictions	✗	✗	✗	✓
Embeddability	✓	✓	✓	✓
Absolutely-modification	✓	✓	✓	✗
Expressivity	✗	✗	✓	✓
Speaker-attitude orientation	✗	✗	✗	✓

→ *RITA* – a **syntactic class of its own**, but whose patterning is nonetheless ***constrained*** and ***systematic*** (notwithstanding substantial inter-speaker variation).

- **Resulting challenge**: how should we incorporate *RITA* (especially in more 'advanced' speakers) in a syntactic typology of negation/polarity items?

EPIs beyond *RITA*

- General behaviour of EPIs (negative indefinite-like with speaker attitude orientation) **observed in a wider range of DPs and proper nouns**.

EPI	Language(s)	Original denotation/translation
Rita (la Cantaora)	Cat./Sp.	19th century Spanish singer/artist
El Papa de Roma	Cat./Sp.	'The Pope of Rome', head of the worldwide Catholic Church
Déu, Dios	Cat./Sp.	'God'
La teva/te/ta mare, Tu madre	Cat./Sp.	'Your mother'
El teu pare, Tu padre	Cat./Sp.	'Your father'
El Tato	Cat./Sp.	19th century Spanish bullfighter (Antonio Sánchez 'el Tato')
Txapote	Spanish	Former member of the 'hard wing' of *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA)
En Pere Vamba	Catalan	King of the Visigoths from 672 to 680
Josep el fuster	Catalan	Reference to St Joseph of Nazareth

Table 3: (Incomplete) list of EPIs in Catalan and Spanish

→ I now show ***RITA* is at a more advanced grammaticalisation stage** (at least w.r.t. my variety/Group 4) than other EPIs.

EPIs beyond *RITA*

- Like *RITA*, *postverbal* EPIs sanctioned, for many speakers, both in affirmative contexts and with *ni*.

- Sentential negation with nobody-type reading only available with NCI *ni* (like Group 1/2 with *RITA*).

(28) a. **_No_** *lo* *va* *a* *comprar* **(**ni**)*   **_tu madre_**.   [Spanish]
      not CL.DO= go.3SG to buy.INF   not.even EPI

      'No one is going to buy this / I'm definitely not buying this.' Literal readings: 'Not even your mother will buy this.'

    b. **_No_** *es* *saltarà* *classe* **(**ni**)*   **_Déu_***!*   [Catalan]
      not CL.REFL= jump.3SG class   not.even EPI

      'No one is skipping class / I'm definitely *not* skipping class.' Literal reading: 'Not even God is skipping class.'

EPIs beyond *RITA*

- If sentential negation used without *ni*, we get **double negation readings**.

(29) a. *A: Tienes demasiados videojuegos, no te compres* [Spanish]
   have.2SG too.many videogames not CL.IO= buy.SUBJ.2SG

  el nuevo FIFA. Guarda el dinero para otra cosa.
  the new FIFA save.IMP the money for other thing

 'You have too many videogames, don't buy the new FIFA game. Save this money for something else.'

 b. *B: *¡**No** lo va a comprar **tu madre**! Llevo tiempo esperándolo.*
   not CL.DO= go.3SG to buy.INF EPI bring.1SG time waiting=CL.DO

 (intended) 'No one is going to buy this.' Alternative reading: 'I'm going to buy it anyway (regardless of what you are telling me)! I've been waiting for it for a long time' (double negation reading).

EPIs beyond *RITA*

- If sentential negation used without *ni*, we get **double negation readings**.

(30) a. *A: Fes   el favour d'anar   a classe aquesta*   [Catalan]
      make.IMP the favour to-go.INF to class   this

   tarda,   que   tens   examen divendres.
   afternoon that.CONJ have.2SG exam   Friday

   'Please go to class this afternoon, you have an exam on Friday.'

   b. *B: *No es   saltarà   classe Déu! Jo ja   no puc*
      not CL.REFL= jump.3SG class EPI I already not can.1SG

   més.
   more

   (intended) 'I'm definitely *not* skipping class.' Alternative reading: 'I'm skipping class for sure (regardless of what you are telling me), I've had enough' (double negation reading).

EPIs beyond *RITA*

- **Single negation readings is a feature specific to *RITA*** for some speakers.
- The same holds for **other antiveridical contexts** (neg-raising, neg spread), where other EPIs are **ungrammatical**.
- **Non-veridical contexts** (questions, conditionals...) sharply **ungrammatical**.
- Only pattern alike in negative fragments (for some speakers consulted).

(31) a. *A: ¿Quién piensa   solucionar esto?*   [fragment answer; Spanish]
          who   think.3SG fix.INF   this

     'Who is going to fix this?'

    b. *B: ¡Tu madre / el Papa de Roma / Dios!...*
          EPI

     'No one! / I'm not going to do this', etc.

→ ***RITA* singled out**, in the present Cat./Sp. varieties, as an EPI potentially **further advanced** in the process of grammaticalisation and pragmaticalisation.

Implications

- Plausible **cline of grammaticalisation** across EPIs.

→ **EPIs and Group 1/2 only**: negative reading as **pragmatic result**, e.g. implicature. Least grammaticalised.

→ **In Group 4**: interaction with **polarity/negation**, possibly via grammaticalisation of relevant [*F*]s.

→ **In all cases**: interaction with **left-peripheral** [*F*]**s** (focalisation, expressivity).
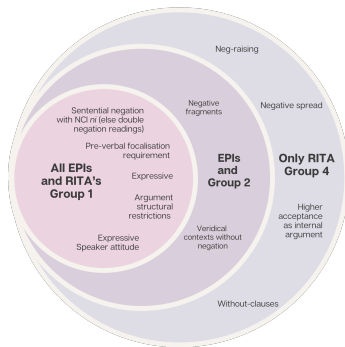
Figure 1: Euler diagram of EPIs' distribution across items and speaker groups

Implications: Why Rita is Interesting

- **Formal implications**:
  - In more 'advanced' speakers, how do we model *RITA*'s behaviour in antiveridical contexts (e.g., negative spread)?
    See Zeijlstra (2004), Deal (2022), Tubau et al. (2023) and many others for analyses that ascribe some negation-related features or inherent negative force to items behaving in this way.

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- **Diachronic implications**:
  - *Complexifies* the existing polarity/negation landscape.
  - **Taboo words** are **well-studied** as sources of expressive (grammaticalised) forms of negation
    (see, i.a., Postma, 2001; Hoeksema and Napoli, 2008; Napoli and Hoeksema, 2009; Gutzmann, 2015; Sailor, 2017, 2020; Sailer, 2018; Erschler, 2023).
  - Common nouns, '**minimisers**' and other sources of negative indefinites **also well-studied**
    (Haspelmath, 2001).
  - However, *little* to *no* literature on *proper nouns* and/or person-referring expressions (though cf. Collins and Postal, 2012; Song et al., 2023, on 'imposters' and non-canonical pronouns).

Implications: Why Rita is Interesting

Why and How Rita? Some diachronic suggestions

- **Conventionalisation** of an **implicature**: 'Rita will do this' + > 'No one/I won't do this (Rita can/will or Let someone else do this)'
- → Facilitated by the denotations of EPIs: religious and/or power-associated entities.
- → Suggests a subset of proper nouns serve as particularly good candidates.
- ! **Unusual diachronic profile**:
  - Little to **no sociolinguistic conditioning**, esp. across Groups that use *RITA* (age, geographic, gender).
  - Unlike Jespersen's Cycle developments.

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  - Unlike Jespersen's Cycle developments.
- → I propose these **idiosyncrasies** could be down to the **acquisitional context** in which *RITA* arose.

Implications: Why Rita is Interesting

- *RITA* (and EPIs) entirely absent in child-directed speech.
- ***Adult-driven* change**. Highly impoverished (and variable) input → more likely **varied syntactic 'categorisation' of *RITA*** across speakers of the same generation.
  - Adults appear good at learning *sociolinguistically-conditioned* variation, but do not regularise unconditioned alternations (Hudson Kam and Newport, 2009).
  - Adults induce more variable systems than children (Hudson Kam and Newport, 2005)
  - Children, but not adults, seem to behave as predicted by Tolerance Principle (Schuler, 2017).
  - Adults reproduce more inconsistencies in the input (Austin et al., 2021).

→ *RITA*, and comparable phenomena, informative re (distinctive) profile of some adult-driven changes and which conditions affect manifestation of morphosyntactic cycles.

Conclusions

Conclusions

- Novel case-study of ***proper noun*** undergoing formal change and **acquiring negation/quantificational/pronominal characteristics**.
  - Survey data reveals minimally 3/4 groups of speaker profiles, plausibly at distinct 'grammaticalisation' stages.
  - Particular significance of Group 4.
  - Comparison with other EPIs indicates inter-item variation, esp. w.r.t. *RITA*.
- Outstanding Qs:
  - Syntactic model of *RITA*'s distribution, across and within groups.
  - EPIs placement in a syntactic typology of negation/polarity.
  - How does the distribution of Catalan *RITA* compare to Spanish *RITA*?
  - More in-depth comparison with crosslinguistically similar phenomena.
- → **Overall:**
  - Linguistically peculiar phenomenon, with formal and diachronic/typological implications; worthy of further study.
  - Expands our grasp of grammaticalisation/pragmaticalisation pathways of expressive material and open new research avenues on diachronic sources of polarity/negation items.

Thank you!

Gràcies, gracias!

Slides 🖥️→

SCAN ME

- **Group 4 most permissive w.r.t. argument structural contexts**
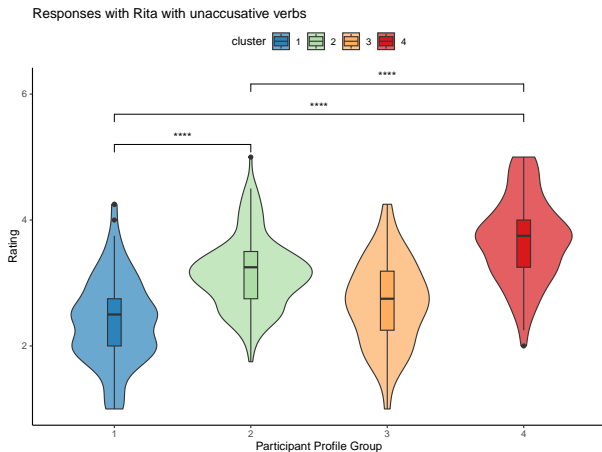
Responses with Rita with unaccusative verbs

- **Group 4 most permissive w.r.t. argument structural contexts**

Responses with Rita as direct object
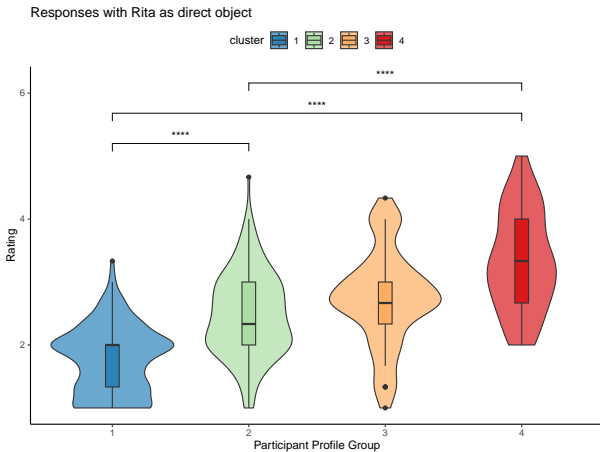
- **Group 4 most permissive w.r.t. argument structural contexts**

Responses with verbs with different argument structure with/without NCI ni (Group 4)

- **Group 4 most permissive w.r.t. argument structural contexts – compare *ALL* groups**

Responses with verbs with different argument structure with/without NCI ni
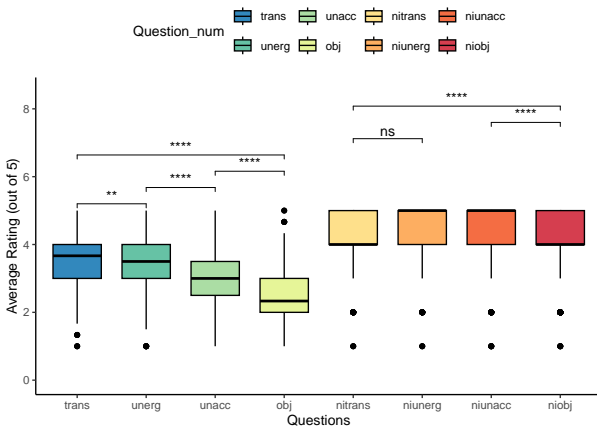
RITA – Group 4 in more depth

- **Groups 2 and 4 most clearly exhibit focalisation restriction**, compared to Group 1 ($p < .001$)
- ↪ However, **Group 4 presents higher acceptance of *non-focalised* pre-verbal *RITA*** ($p = .03$).
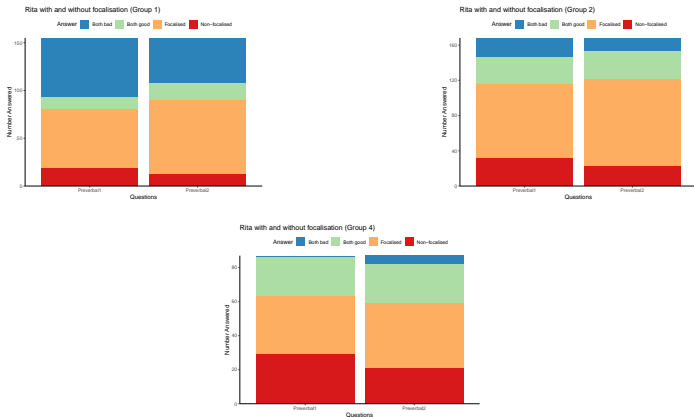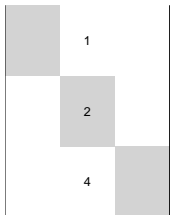
Figure 2: Focalisation with *RITA* across Groups 1, 2 and 4

RITA – Group 4 in more depth

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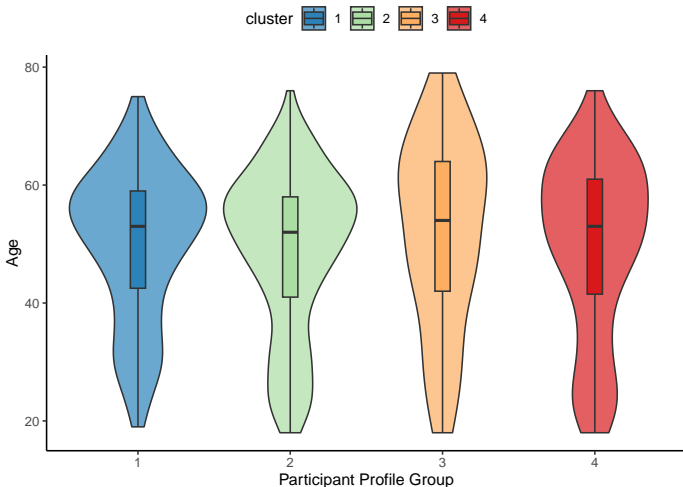

Focalisation with pre–verbal Rita by Group

# Inter-speaker variation not age-conditioned

- **Sociolinguistic profile**: No significant differences in age across cluster groups.

Responses with verbs with different argument structure with/without NCI ni

Geographical distribution of Group 4

- **Sociolinguistic profile**: Group 4 scattered around regions in Catalonia (apparent gap in northwestern Catalonia is due to sparcity of participants from that area).
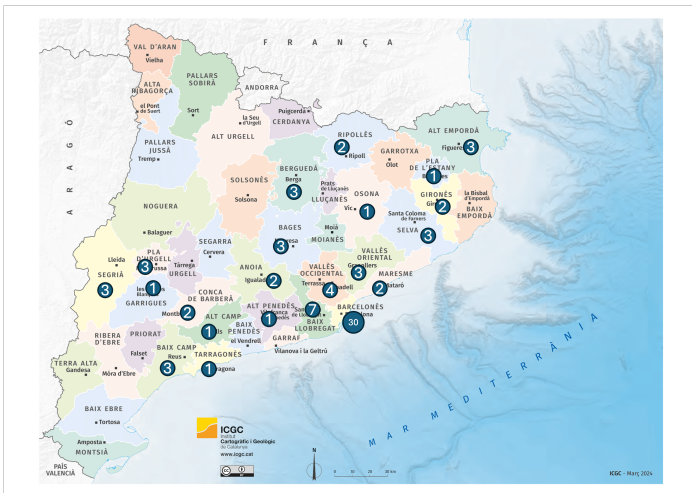
Who is Rita?

- 19th century Spanish singer/artist
- Article in *La Razón* sheds some light on the origin behind the expression and the 'I'-centred nature of *Rita*

  *The figure of Rita la Cantaora remained for posterity in Spanish popular culture, not so much for her work as a singer and dancer, but because of an expression that became a popular proverb. Apparently, **her passion for the work was such that she was willing to perform wherever she was asked**, regardless of the money she earned for performing, and even to perform additional shows, whether asked by the owner of a 'tablao' or the organizer of a private party. She was so famous that even her own colleagues recommended her services when they did not offer them enough money to perform themselves. In this way, **the expression que lo haga Rita la Cantaora 'let Rita la Cantaora do it' was coined to refer to all those occasions in which one is not willing to perform an action**[12].*

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[12] My own translation from: `https://www.larazon.es/cultura/historia/quien-fue-rita-cantaora-que-mencionamos-cuando-trabajo-nos-gusta_2024012865b5fca3c3cb30000108c092.html`. Accessed 2 March 2024.

Who is Rita?

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