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### Citation

Fortuin, E. L. J. (2023). The function of extra negation: insights from the Dutch privative construction. *Functions Of Language*, 30(2), 1-29. doi:10.1075/fol.21047.for

Version: Publisher's Version  
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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3632258>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# The function of extra negation

## Insights from the Dutch privative construction

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This paper provides insight into the phenomenon of extra negation, also known as non-compositional, expletive, or pleonastic negation. It provides a corpus-based analysis of the Dutch negative privative construction, which consists of *zonder* ‘without’ and *niet* ‘not’, in which one negation does not cancel the other. Two basic factors that trigger an extra negation are discussed, and an explanation of why these factors facilitate the use of an extra negation is offered. It is argued that the extra negation has a semantic-pragmatic function that is reminiscent of similar instances of extra negation in Dutch and other languages, specifically sentences consisting of a main clause and a subordinate clause containing a word which expresses implicit negation. It is shown that in complex hypotactic constructions, the extra negation is used to make explicit in the subordinate clause that the presupposition of non-occurrence is rejected.

### 1. Introduction

Standard Dutch is not a negative concord language (see van der Auwera & van Alsenoy 2016, 2018 and van der Auwera & Krasnoukhova 2020 for negative concord constructions).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, as noted by Paardekooper (1975), sentences such as the following, with the negative conjunction *zonder* ‘without’ and an extra negation, are not acceptable:

- (1) *Hij stak over zonder (\*niet) op te letten.*  
he crossed over without (not) pay.attention  
Intended meaning: ‘He crossed the road *without* paying attention.’

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1. Some Dutch dialects, especially in Flanders, can be seen as negative concord languages (for example, West Flemish, see e.g. Vandeweghe 2009). Negative concord will be discussed in Section 2.

Under the right circumstances, however, the use of an extra negation *niet* ‘not’ is fully acceptable for many speakers of Dutch. The following examples are from written Dutch (unless otherwise indicated the Dutch examples are taken from the corpora and the dataset described in Section 3):

- (2) Banken/analisten doen niet zomaar iets, *zonder* daar *niet* beter van te worden!  
‘Banks/analysts won’t do anything just like that, without [lit. *without not*] benefiting from it.’
- (3) Ze zagen het zelfs als een soort provocatie dat een humanitaire organisatie hieraan wilde werken *zonder dat niet* eerst in de eerste levensbehoeften van de bevolking werd voorzien.  
‘They even saw it as a kind of provocation that a humanitarian organization wanted to work on this without [lit. *without not*] first supplying the necessities of the population.’

From the context it is clear that in these cases *zonder* does not negate *niet*. Sentences with *zonder* and *niet* that are instances of logical double negation, such as (4), are in fact relatively rare, probably because they are semantically rather complex:

- (4) Na veel onderzoek bleek ik een posttraumatische aandoening te hebben die *alexia without alglyfia* heet. Dat betekent zoveel als ‘Niet kunnen lezen, **zonder niet** te kunnen schrijven’.  
‘After much assessment, they found out that I had a post-traumatic condition called *alexia without alglyfia*. What that means is ‘Not being able to read, without not being able to write’ [i.e., you can’t read, but nonetheless you can write].’

In sentences with an extra negation such as (2) and (3), the regular rule of logical double negation, where one negation cancels out the other, does not apply. Because of this, the construction can be seen as non-compositional. Sentences with an extra negation have the following form and meaning, where the brackets indicate the boundaries of clauses, which together make up a complex construction. The variable X points to the content of the clause. Note that the order of the clauses may be reversed, and the clause with *zonder* can be analysed as a subordinate clause and the other clause as the main clause:

$$\begin{aligned} [X] [zonder\ dat\ ‘without\ that’ + niet\ ‘not’ + Y_{finite\ verb}] \\ [X] [zonder\ ‘without’ + niet\ ‘not’ + te\ ‘to’ + Y_{infinitive}] \\ ‘X\ is\ the\ case\ in\ the\ absence/with\ non-involvement\ of\ Y’ \end{aligned}$$

In the literature, forms expressing absence—such as *zonder* ‘without’—are called “privative” (see e.g. van der Auwera 2022). I will call the meaning of *zonder* (“in

the absence of/with non-involvement of’) “privative”, and the version of the construction with an extra negation (in which ‘without’ does not negate ‘not’) the negative privative construction.

The negative privative construction can be classified according to the type of negation in the subordinate clause:

- i. *zonder* ‘without’ + *niet* ‘not’
- ii. *zonder* ‘without’ + *geen* ‘no’
- iii. *zonder* ‘without’ + *niets* ‘nothing’, *niemand* ‘no one’, *nooit* ‘never’, *nergens* ‘nowhere’

This paper will focus on sentences with *niet* ‘not’ in the subordinate clause (type i), because they are found relatively frequently in standard Dutch. This is not the case for (ii)–(iii). The types (ii)–(iii) will be discussed briefly in Section 7.

In this paper I will answer the following research questions:

- What is the function of *niet* in the Dutch negative privative (‘V without not V’) construction?
- What factors trigger *niet* in the Dutch negative privative construction and how can this be explained?
- Can the Dutch negative privative construction be linked to similar constructions in Dutch or other languages?

As I will argue, the negative element *niet* in the negative privative construction can be explained with reference to the particular structure and meaning of the construction, specifically the negation of the presupposition that some action can be realized. Although the Dutch negative privative construction cannot be linked directly to similar constructions in Dutch, it does build on a cross-linguistic tendency to explicitly mark negation in specific syntactic contexts, where the speaker wants to emphasize the negative orientation of the sentence (cf. Fortuin 2014). The analysis proposed in this paper can be seen as further evidence for a pragmatic-semantic account of extra (non-compositional, expletive, pleonastic) negation, and the inherent relation between grammatical structure and pragmatic function.

This paper has the following structure. In Section 2 I discuss the existing literature and the possible explanations for why extra negation occurs. Section 3 describes the data collection. Section 4 presents an overview of the main triggers for extra negation. Section 5 offers an explanation of these triggers, and Section 6 examines the difference between uses of the construction with and without extra negation. I then compare the negative privative construction with similar constructions in Dutch and other languages in Section 7, and present a final conclusion in Section 8.

## 2. Previous work, terminology and possible explanations

To my knowledge, no analyses of the Dutch negative privative construction exist, but there are comparable phenomena that have been described. In general, two related phenomena with similarities to the negation in the negative privative construction can be distinguished:

- i. Negative concord
- ii. Expletive negation/pleonastic negation

The term negative concord is used for sentences like the Russian example (5), where the indefinite pronoun *ničego* ‘nothing’ always co-occurs with the sentential negative form *ne* ‘nothing’, expressing a single simplex negative meaning:

- (5) *Ja ne skazal ničego.*  
 I not said nothing  
 ‘I didn’t say anything.’

Van der Auwera & Van Alsenoy (2016, 2018) and Haspelmath (ms.) use the term “negative concord” for such sentences, in which a single (or simplex) negation meaning is expressed both by a clause level negator (for example *not* or Russian *ne*) and by a negative adverb (for example *never*), pronoun (for example *nobody*) or determiner (for example *no*). The Dutch negative privative construction differs from examples like (5) in two ways.

The first difference is that the use of the extra negation is neither automatic nor obligatory. Van der Auwera & Koohkan (2022: 10) also use the term “negative concord” for instances in which the speaker can choose whether to use the extra negation or not, and where the extra negation adds meaning. If the negation only occurs under specific circumstances, Van der Auwera & Van Alsenoy (2016, 2018) use the term “non-strict negative concord”.

The second difference is that *zonder* is a negative conjunction (or preposition) and, as such, differs from clear instances of negative concord like (5) which contain a negative adverb, negative pronoun or negative determiner. Furthermore, the negative meaning of words like *without* is more implicit and more complex than the negative meaning of words like *not*, *no*, *nothing*, etc. Many linguists refer to Clark (1976) with respect to the notion of implicit negation. In Clark’s analysis, implicit negation includes verbs like *forget*, *fail* and *deny*, where the negation is not asserted but presupposed (or implied). It is not fully clear to me how one could establish whether the conjunction *zonder* must be seen as an implicit negative word according to this definition, but the negative meaning of *zonder* does in fact seem more implicit and complex than that of explicit negative words such as *not* or *no*. This is also reflected in the cross-linguistic definition provided

by Oskolskaya *et al.* (2020) of ‘without’, which, according to them, expresses non-involvement of a participant in a situation with the non-involvement predication semantically modifying the situation or a participant of another situation. In the end, the extent to which the negative privative construction in Dutch must be seen as an instance of negative concord depends on the definition of that term.

Another term that is used in the literature is “expletive negation”, specifically in the formal generative linguistic literature. The term “expletive” means that the negative element does not add any negative meaning, and it is used in much the same way as “pleonastic negation”, a term used by Horn (2009). “Pleonastic” indicates that the expression of the negative element is redundant, although Horn mentions that in some cases it could make a semantic contribution, for example with an emphasizing function. Jin & Koenig (2020: 41) give the following definition of expletive negation.

The occurrence of a negator is an instance of expletive negation if (i) it is included in a syntactic dependent of a lexical item (verb, adposition, adverb, or collocation), (ii) it is triggered by the meaning of that lexical item, but (iii) it does not contribute a (logical) negation to the proposition that the syntactic dependent denotes.

Note that in contrast to the definition of negative concord, the definition does not state that the lexical item which triggers the negation has a negative meaning itself. As Delfitto (2020) observes, typical semantic-syntactic environments for expletive negation are: (i) in the complement of verbs expressing fear, prohibition, hindering, avoidance, denial, doubt and, though more restrictively, hope; (ii) in clauses introduced by specific complementizers, such those corresponding to *until*, *without*, *unless*, etc.; (iii) in temporal clauses introduced by *before* (but not by *after*); (iv) in comparative and exclamative clauses. It is clear from the environments listed here that some contexts contain an implicit negative element (for example verbs like *deny*), whereas others, such as forms expressing *before*, do not, even if they share particular semantic features with negative forms (for example, *before* is a context for negative polarity items in various languages). An Italian example with the conjunction *prima di* ‘before’ is given in (6) and an example with the verb *deny* is given in (7):

(6) *Mio padre parlera prima che non lo faccia mia madre.*  
 my father will talk before that not it does.SUBJ my mother  
 ‘My father will talk before my mother does.’

(7) You may *deny* that you were *not* [= that you were] the mean [agent, cause] of  
 my Lord Hastings’ late imprisonment. (Shakespeare, in Jespersen 1917)

The Dutch negative privative construction can be seen as an instance of expletive negation or pleonastic negation in line with Jin & Koenig (2020: 58, 67), but, as I will argue, since the negation is not semantically void—an inherent element in the definition of expletive negation—I prefer to use the term “non-compositional negation” to indicate that one negation does not cancel out the other, and the term “extra negation” to indicate that an additional negation is expressed, which is already contained in the meaning of the form *zonder* itself.

Looking at the type of explanations given for constructions comparable to the negative privative construction, we find two main approaches, while a third one can also be added:

- i. Production (processing) error approach
- ii. Semantic-syntactic approach
- iii. Diachronic approach

The first approach says that the extra, non-compositional negation should be seen as a mistake of the language user, resulting from the difficulty of dealing with multiple negations. Take example (2), repeated here as (8):

- (8) Banken/analisten doen *niet* zomaar iets, *zonder* daar *niet* beter van te worden!  
 ‘Banks/analysts *won’t* do anything just like that, without [lit. *without not*] benefiting from it.’

In this construction we find three negative elements: *niet* ‘not’ in the main clause, and *zonder* ‘without’ and *niet* in the subordinate clause. This is reminiscent of the English construction in (9), with three negative words (in italics), which is discussed by Wason & Reich (1979):

- (9) *No* head injury is *too* trivial *to be ignored*.

This sentence expresses that one should not ignore even the most trivial head injuries, although logically the construction expresses the opposite. The logically correct version would be:

- (10) No head injury is too trivial *to pay attention to*.

Wason & Reich (1979); Paape *et al.* (2020), and Zhang *et al.* (2023) claim that language users find it difficult to handle more than two negations, which leads to incorrect production of negation in the presence of several negations in (9). It remains, however, unclear how they determine what is part of the grammar, and what must be seen as grammatical mistakes. In the case of sentences like (9), most language users do in fact prefer the “incorrect” construction, as was already pointed out by Wason & Reich (1979). Furthermore, as is shown in Fortuin (2014), the use of the “incorrect” construction is not random but can be explained

with reference to the semantic-syntactic structure of the construction and the pragmatic effect to speaker wants to produce, as will also be explained below.

A similar but more nuanced approach to the error account is taken by Horn (2009:406) and Jin & Koenig (2020:57). Horn makes a distinction between instances that are part of grammar (*langue*) and that are therefore obligatory under particular circumstances, and other instances that are not, which must be seen as *parole* violations. In the case of the English construction *No head injury is too trivial to be ignored*, he argues that this is an instance of error due to the many negations (*Triplex negatio confundit*). Jin & Koenig also argue that expletive negation, specifically when it is not entrenched (conventionalized), arises as a production error. A speaker intends to say *p*, but because the meaning of a trigger strongly activates  $\neg p$ ,  $\neg p$  is produced instead. It may indeed be the case that the phenomenon discussed here at least sometimes arises because of the difficulty of handling two negations, but of course, that is not to say that such uses cannot be or become part of the linguistic convention. Furthermore, in cases such as (3), the only negative element in the sentence besides the extra negation is *zonder* ‘without’, but nevertheless the writer has chosen to use an extra negation. Sentences such as these cannot easily be explained in terms of the language error account.

Another approach is to see non-compositional negation as part of grammar, which has a semantic-pragmatic explanation. This approach is proposed by Jespersen (1917) for “paratactic” negation in older versions of English with verbs like *deny*, as in (7), where an extra negation occurs in the complement clause. In Jespersen’s analysis, the non-compositional negation is triggered to explicitly mark the negation implied by the main verb in the complement clause, creating a paratactic construction. Similar constructions can be found in other languages, such as Finnish with *epäillä* ‘doubt, suspect, suppose’ (Salminen 2018), or constructions of ‘fear’ (Zorikhina Nilsson 2012 for Russian; Dobrushina 2021). In the Dutch privative construction, use of the extra negation is not automatically triggered and the speaker can choose whether to use the extra negation or not. In this respect, the Dutch privative construction is similar to the English ‘No X is too Y to Z’ construction mentioned above. Fortuin (2014) provides a semantic-pragmatic analysis for the ‘No X is too Y to Z’ construction. In this analysis, non-compositional negation has an actual negative meaning and is used by the speaker to provide a negative orientation of the message, and to negate the presupposed idea on the part of the addressee that some action or event can in fact be realized. Precisely because the construction contains an implicit negative element (*too*), the speaker can use the extra negative element (the negative verb, in this case *to be ignored*) to make transparent the negative consequences of the excessive degree indicated in the subordinate clause. According to Fortuin (2014), the negative ‘No X is too Y to Z’ construction builds on general principles of the grammar, and



is linked to similar constructions in English in which the negative verb is presented as the result of the excessive or high degree (resultative *so...that* construction, *too...that/as to* construction).

A somewhat similar type of explanation is suggested within a formal semantic framework by Delfitto (2020) for various types of non-compositional negation (which he calls “expletive negation”) and specifically for the Italian construction with ‘before’ in (6). According to Delfitto, the expletive negation may negate an implied proposition.

Finally, one could also try to explain the negation in diachronic terms, as a remnant from an older stage of Dutch, such as Middle Dutch (see Dobrushina 2021 for a diachronic account of paratactic negation in Russian). In contrast to modern Dutch, Middle Dutch is a negative concord language (see for example Van der Horst 2008). In Middle Dutch (1200–1500) sentential negation is expressed by a complex construction consisting of a preverbal negative marker (*en*) and a negative adverb (*niet*) similar to French *ne...pas*. Negative indefinites are combined with the preverbal negative marker *en*, giving rise to a negative concord construction. In addition, we also find the negative adverb *niet* ‘not’ with verbs such as *verbieden* ‘forbid’ (Van der Horst 2008:1023), which means that Middle Dutch also displays properties of paratactic (expletive) negation. To my knowledge, there are no studies devoted to *sonder* in Middle Dutch, but by searching for *sonder* ‘without’ in the Corpus of Middle Dutch (Corpus Middelnederlands, Version 1.0) the following picture emerges. It is striking that most examples of *sonder* (in its function as preposition [*sonder* + noun] or conjunction [*sonder* + infinitive or *sonder dat* + finite verb]) actually occur without a negative element, as in (11), where we do not find the sentential negative form *niet... en*:

- (11) *Mach ic el yewet spreken sonder dat God settet in mynen mont?*  
 May I other something speak without that God puts in my mouth  
 ‘May I say something else without God putting it into my mouth?’

Although this was a frequently occurring type, there are a few instances where *sonder* occurs with *genen* (‘no’) or *niet...en* (‘not’) in as (12):

- (12) *Die wortel [...] heeft die cracht vanden witten sonder dat niet opwert en*  
 that root has the power of.the white without that not upwards NEG  
*doet spuwen.*  
 does throw.up  
 ‘That root has the power of the white one without making you throw up [if you eat it].’

To give an indication, the search phrase *sonder dat* yielded only one example with *niet*, out of the total of 230 examples.<sup>2</sup>

Complex negation consisting of *en plus niet* was gradually losing ground in the seventeenth century, and became informal or dialectal in the eighteenth century (see Van der Horst 2008: 1298, 1537). The same was true for negative concord constructions such as *noijt niet* ‘never not’ and *nooit geen* ‘never no’, which were avoided in written language from the eighteenth century on (Van der Horst 2008: 1303, 1577). This is reflected in the data with *zonder*. In the corpus *Brieven als Buit*, which spans the second half of the seventeenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century, there is just one instance of *sonder/zonder* with an extra negation out of the total of 229 instances of *sonder/zonder*. The same tendency was found in the Historical Corpus of Dutch (Van De Voorde *et al.* in press). This suggests that the infrequent negative concord with *sonder* found in older stages of Dutch had nearly or completely disappeared by the nineteenth century. Moreover, the specific triggers for negation with *zonder* in modern Dutch are all absent in older stages of Dutch. A good example is (12). This sentence occurs without a negative element in the main clause, and without a focus element such as *ook* ‘also’ in the subordinate clause. As I will show, these factors typically trigger *niet* ‘not’ in modern Dutch. To conclude, it is safe to assume that the modern-day examples of the negative privative construction cannot be seen as a remnant of an older stage of the language.

### 3. Data collection

To gain insight into the construction with *zonder* ‘without’ and *niet* ‘not’, I collected naturally occurring instances of the construction from several different sources of data from the twentieth and twenty-first century. Table 1 gives an overview of the different sources and the number of examples.

My data consists of 165 instances. While only a small percentage of the examples come from internet texts, these data show the same pattern as the data from newspapers. The data also show no difference between the older texts from the twentieth century and texts from the twenty-first century. Almost all of the 165 examples of this construction that I found are acceptable instances of Dutch, and the newspaper articles had also passed editorial correction. For an extra check,

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2. I looked for *sonder* and its (spelling) variants (*sonders, zonder, sondere, sunder, zondere, zunder*) and *geen* and its (spelling) variants (*gene, genen, gheen, ghene, ghenen*). Of these, I found only 11 instances with extra negation. To give an estimate of relative frequency, in total there were 19842 hits of *sonder*.

**Table 1.** Sources of all data on *zonder dat* / *zonder te* followed by a negated verb

Source	Number	Search terms
OpenSoNaR corpus of spoken and written Dutch (Belgian and Netherlandic) (Oostdijk <i>et al.</i> 2018)	9	“zonder dat * niet” “zonder dat * * niet” “zonder dat * * * niet” “zonder dat * * * * niet” “zonder * niet te” “zonder niet * te” “zonder niet te”
Delpher newspaper corpus (Netherlandic Dutch; from the twentieth century)	70	“zonder niet”, “zonder dat PROX niet” <sup>†</sup>
Nexis Uni newspaper corpus (Netherlandic Dutch; from 1990 onwards)	59	“zonder dat” pre/5 niet “zonder niet”
Internet (via Google)	26	“zonder niet” “zonder niet te” “zonder * niet” “zonder dat niet” “zonder daar niet”
Television	1	Attested by coincidence
<b>Total number <i>zonder (dat) niet</i></b>	<b>165</b>	

<sup>†</sup> The search term “zonder dat PROX niet” did not yield any results. This does not mean that the Delpher corpus does not contain instances with “zonder dat + niet” but that automated extraction is not possible in this case.

the examples used in this paper were discussed with two native speakers of Belgian Dutch and two native speakers of Netherlandic Dutch, who confirmed this judgement. However, it is still possible that, if explicitly asked and upon reflection, speakers may reject sentences like these, since they do not adhere to the logical double negation rule taught in school. Fortuin and Van Hugte (in prep.) present a more extensive discussion of the acceptability of the negative privative construction. Their analysis shows that if asked explicitly, there is variation between people in the extent to which they accept such sentences.

A few observations need to be made about the data. Firstly, my data comprise 38 instances of *zonder dat* (the subordinate clause contains a finite verb) and 127 instances of *zonder te* (the subordinate clause contains an infinitive).<sup>3</sup> While this could be interpreted as a sign that there is a correlation between the use of an

3. Of these, there are 114 with *zonder te*, 10 with *zonder niet al te*, and 3 with *zonder niet + noun*.

infinitival predicate and the negative construction, it should be noted that the data are somewhat skewed: the search function of the Delpher newspaper corpus is unable to extract uses of the privative construction with *zonder dat*. To determine whether the distribution of [*zonder dat* + finite verb] and [*zonder te* + infinitive] in the negative privative construction is similar to that in the regular construction, I looked at 200 randomly selected examples of *zonder (dat)* examples in the OpenSoNaR corpus. On this basis, one can conclude that *zonder te* occurs just over twice as frequently as *zonder dat*. This corresponds with the data on the negative privative construction found in OpenSoNaR and Nexis Uni combined.

Secondly, in three instances *niet* does not occur before a verb, but before a nominal phrase. This is the case in the following example, where *een ploeg zonder verliespunt* ‘a team without one point loss’ (i.e. a team that has not lost any points) implies the idea of possession (a team that has no point loss), and the negation *niet* ‘not’ applies to *tenminste één* (‘at least one’):

- (13) Doordat VSV in 3B met 2–1 verloor van Zaandijk is er in die groep al geen ploeg meer *zonder niet* tenminste één verliespunt.  
 ‘Because VSV in 3B lost 2–1 to Zaandijk, in that group there is no team left without [lit. *without not*] at least one point loss.’

These instances are still included in the 165 examples, despite being syntactically different from the regular instances in the data. Besides the 165 examples, I also collected 7 sentences that are special instances of the construction. I kept these sentences separate because they show specific syntactic properties that set them apart from the other examples.

#### 4. Main triggers for the negation

My dataset shows two clear triggers for extra negation in the subordinate clause. The first trigger is that a negative element or negative attitude is expressed in the main clause. The main clause of the construction often contains an explicit negative element or an implicit negative element or construction with a negative character. In my data, such negative elements occurred in 83% of the sentences. Table 2 shows the types of explicit or implicit negative elements found in the construction. As I will also discuss in Section 6, the association between *zonder* and a negative main clause is more typical for the negative privative construction than for the regular privative construction without *niet*. To give an illustration, in 54 randomly sampled examples from the OpenSonar corpus with *zonder dat* there were only 6 examples with negation or a negative element in the main clause, which amounts to about 11%.

**Table 2.** Negative elements in the main clause

Negation-type main clause	Number
not applicable	27
<i>niet</i> ‘not’	35
<i>geen</i> ‘no’	37
<i>nergens</i> ‘nowhere’	0
<i>niets/niks</i> ‘nothing’	3
<i>niemand</i> ‘no one’	2
<i>nooit</i> ‘never’	12
<i>on-</i> +adj (‘un- + adjective’) (e.g. <i>onverantwoord</i> ‘irresponsible’)	7
negative expression / adjective, e.g. <i>moelijk</i> ‘difficult’, <i>lastig</i> ‘complicated’)	17
<i>of</i> -question/sentence (e.g. <i>het is de vraag of</i> ‘the question is whether’)	6
rhetorical question (with question words <i>hoe</i> ‘how’, <i>wie</i> ‘who’, <i>wat</i> ‘what’, etc.)	15
<i>weinig(en)</i> ‘few’	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>

Sentences with an explicit or implicit negative element in the main clause express that some action will not (or only rarely, by few people, hardly, with difficulty, etc.) be performed in the absence of some other action, which serves as a condition for said action. The main clause of the construction can also be a rhetorical question, which has an implicit negative answer; that is, it expresses a situation or state-of-affairs that the speaker rejects as inappropriate, not understandable, impossible, etc. This inappropriate, non-understandable situation is that some actor or subject fails to do something:<sup>4</sup>

- (14) Wie koopt er nu een bed en matras *zonder* daar *niet* eerst eens op te gaan liggen?

‘Who buys a bed and mattress without [lit. *without not*] even lying on it first?’

The second trigger for the non-compositional negation is the use of an accented focus element in the subordinate clause, as in the following sentence, where we also find a negation in the main clause. In written language, the accent or stress on the focus element is usually not indicated, but in the following example it is indicated by capitals:

4. Instances such as these show similarities to *niet* as in example (36) in Section 7.

- (15) Ik voer geen bespreking meer over testamenten *zonder niet OOK* het levenstestament te berde te brengen.  
 ‘I no longer discuss wills without [lit. *without not*] also mentioning the living will.’

Focus elements appear in 84% of my data. In all cases an accentuation would be natural if read out aloud, or an accentuation is at least possible. There is considerable variation in these focus elements, but expressions that occur more than once are *eerst* ‘first’, *ook* ‘also’, *zelf* ‘self’ and *onmiddellijk* ‘immediately’. In a few instances the accented word may also be part of a complex verb as in example (2) given earlier.

Table 3 gives an overview of the occurrence of these two factors and their combinations.

**Table 3.** Overview of negation-triggering factors in my data collection of *zonder + niet*

	Accented word (focus element) in subordinate clause	No accented word (focus element) in subordinate clause	Total
Negative(-like) element in main clause	116 (70%)	22 (13%)	138 (84%)
No negative(-like) element in main clause	22 (13%)	5 (3%)	27 (16%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>138 (84%)</b>	<b>27 (16%)</b>	<b>165 (100%)</b>

In many instances, the negation in the main clause and the use of focus elements in the subordinate clause co-occur (70% of the data), which suggest that together they strongly facilitate the use of the non-compositional negation. In 13% of my data (22 examples) we find an accented (focus) element without negation in the first part of the construction. Nine of these are instances consisting of the expression *zonder niet al te veel/zeer + noun* ‘without not too much + noun’, for example:

- (16) Je eigen tempo kunnen rijden, *zonder daar niet al te veel* hinder van te ondervinden.  
 ‘To drive at your own pace, without having too much [lit. *without not too much*] trouble.’

This expression must be seen as a partly set expression, which also occurs without an infinitive in phrases like *zonder niet al te veel moeite*, lit. ‘without not all too much effort’, i.e. ‘easily’. Both of these non-compositional constructions are related to compositional sentences without *zonder*, such as *Ik zou me daar niet al te veel zorgen over maken* (lit. ‘I would have not all too many worries about that’, i.e. ‘I would not worry too much about that’). In (3) and in the following sentence, however, we find a regular case without a negative element or evaluation in the main clause and a focus element in the subordinate clause, showing that an accented word in the subordinate clause can be enough in itself to trigger the extra negation:

- (17) Dat is typisch de stoere blanke westerling die denkt dat hij vrede brengt op de wereld met zijn atoom macht, en zo ook uw soort die spreekt in de naam van vrijheid en de andere van geweld te verwijten *zonder zelf niet* in eigen boezem te kijken!  
 ‘That is typical of the tough white westerner who thinks that he brings peace to the world with his atomic power, and that is the same for your kind who speaks in the name of freedom and accuses others of violence without critically examining himself [lit. *without not himself* looking into his own bosom].’

In 13% of my examples, we find a negative element in the main clause but no accented focus element in the subordinate clause, which shows that a negative element or evaluation alone can suffice to trigger the extra negation. The absence of a focus element is seen in some sentences without a special syntactic structure, such as (18):

- (18) Bij ons aan tafel gaat *geen* maaltijd voorbij *zonder niet* te corrigeren over het smakken.  
 ‘In our house *no* meal goes by without [lit. *without not*] correcting (the children) about the smacking.’

However, in most instances these sentences have a specific syntactic structure:<sup>5</sup>

- i. A parallel syntactic structure where *niet* carries an accent;
- ii. Sentences where no predicate is expressed, and which can be seen as elliptical constructions;
- iii. A subordinate clause consisting of a matrix clause and a complement clause introduced by an *of*-clause (‘whether’ clause).

First, the negation can be triggered by the prosodic pattern of the sentence and corresponding semantic-syntactic structure, which is indicated here with capitals:

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5. These are based on a set of 7 examples from the subcorpus.

- (19) *OOIT zag je een doos ZONDER te weten wat een doos was. En NU kun je nooit meer een doos zien zonder het NIET te weten.*  
 once saw you a box without to know what a box was and now can  
 you never again a box see without it not to know  
 ‘Once you saw a box without knowing what a box was. And now you can *never* see a box again without [lit. *without not*] knowing it.’

In order to reflect or rather mirror the contrastive structure of the first sentence, the writer uses a non-compositional negation in the second sentence. The other two types were classed as special instances of the construction. In one sentence the negation was due to the special syntactic structure of the sentence (called “focus appendix” by van der Wouden 2000):

- (20) *En in een bibliotheek staat het lelijk wanneer de boeken van een schrijver, die bij elkaar moeten komen staan, niet in een volmaakte rij gezet kunnen worden, zonder dat er een enkele uitsteekt, niet naar boven en niet naar voren.*  
 ‘And in a library it looks quite ugly if the books of a specific writer, which must be put together, can’t be put together in a perfect line, *without* a single one sticking out, *neither* upwards *nor* forwards.’

In this sentence, the expression of *niet* is necessary if the speaker does not want to repeat the verb (*uitsteken* ‘stick out’) and the subject of the sentence. In two sentences of the third type, the negative element *niet* does not occur before the verb in the subordinate clause, but is part of the verb in the complement of that clause, introduced by *of* ‘whether’:

- (21) *Sindsdien gaat geen deur nog open zonder dat gecheckt wordt of Lola niet in contact kan komen met uv-stralen.*  
 ‘Since that time no door opens *without* checking *whether* Lola can [lit. can *not*] come into close contact with UV rays.’

In this case, the clause with *of* ‘whether’ facilitates the negation, since it presupposes a choice between ‘yes’, and ‘no’.

In my data, I found only five examples of the construction without any of the negation-triggering elements discussed above (3%). Consider the following sentence:

- (22) *Hij had diezelfde avond bovendien een stevige hand in het enige doelpunt van Celta de Vigo gehad door in de derde minuut naast de doorgebroken aanvaller Edu te blijven lopen zonder hem niet aan te vallen.*  
 ‘He also played an important role in Celta de Vigo’s only goal that same evening, in the third minute, by continuing to run alongside the attacker Edu, who had broken through, without tackling [lit. *without not tackling*] him.’



Example (22), which is from a newspaper, is potentially ambiguous between a compositional and non-compositional reading, even though the larger context makes clear that the negation is non-compositional. Sentences like these are not acceptable for most speakers of Dutch (see also Fortuin & van Hugte in prep.).

## 5. Explanation of the triggers for the extra negation

In the previous sections, I have given an overview of the negation-triggering factors in the construction. In this section, I will answer the following questions:

- Why do most sentences occur with negation/negative evaluation in the main clause?
- Why do most sentences occur with accented elements in the subordinate clause?

Horn (1991, 2009) notes specifically that the “illogical” readings expressing what he terms hypernegation are more frequent when the main clause is negated. He offers no explanation for this, but as I discussed in Section 2, there is a large group of scholars that consider the occurrence of extra negation an error which is the result of the difficulty of handling two negations (in this case the negation in the main clause and *zonder*) (see for example Maldonado & Culbertson 2021 for the difficulty of double negation for language users). The “language error” explanation as such does not, however, explain instances with focus words, and it does not easily account for instances where we find expressions indicating a negative attitude in the main clause such as ‘it is difficult’ (about 10% of my data), or a rhetorical question (about 9%) instead of a regular negator. I suggest to explain the frequent occurrence of negative words in the main clause differently, accounting for both triggers (negative element main clause and focus elements subordinate clause). What both triggers have in common is that the sentence negates a presumed presupposition of non-occurrence on the part of the addressee (hearer or reader).

In sentences with a negation in the main clause, the construction indicates that some action cannot be performed in the absence of another action. Sentences with negation in the main clause always go against some idea that one can in fact perform the action in the absence of another action. *Niet* makes the presupposition explicit that one can in fact perform the action and not perform another action:

- (23) Banken doen *niet* zomaar iets, *zonder* daar *niet* beter van te worden.  
 ‘Banks won’t do anything just like that without [lit. *without not*] benefiting from it.’  
 → presupposition: ‘banks do things and do not benefit from it’

The reason why the use of extra negation is helpful for the language user is probably twofold. First, the subordinate clause contains an implicit negative element (*zonder*) which less directly indicates a negative meaning, and second, the construction is a complex construction where the negation in the main clause negates the negation in the subordinate clause. By using an extra negation in the subordinate clause, the construction becomes more transparent, such that it is clear that the negator in the main clause negates the *niet* in the subordinate clause (cf. Maldonado & Culbertson 2021 who show that English language learners find negative concord constructions easier than logical double negation).

A similar explanation can be given for the occurrence of accented focus elements. Consider sentence (3) repeated here as (24):

- (24) Ze zagen het zelfs als een soort provocatie dat een humanitaire organisatie hieraan wilde werken *zonder dat niet* EERST in de eerste levensbehoeften van de bevolking werd voorzien.  
 ‘They even saw it as a kind of provocation that a humanitarian organization wanted to work on this without [lit. *without not*] first supplying the necessities of the population.’

The function of the accent is to negate the presupposition that something is not the case (see e.g. Keijsper 1985 for an analysis of focus accent in terms of ‘not not’). Clear cases are sentences with a “contrastive accent”, where there is always a contrast between the referent of the accented element and some other element that contrasts with it:

- (25) I see a MAN (not a WOMAN).

If a word such as *eerst* ‘first’ is accented, the accent also negates a relevant alternative idea that the speaker is attributing to the addressee. For example:

- (26) You have to do that FIRST.

By stressing *eerst* (‘first’) the speaker explicitly goes against the idea that ‘not first’ (for example ‘later’) is the case. This is also what happens in sentence (24). Sentences with an accented (focus) element negate the presupposition that some condition does not apply: you might think that you can realize some action without doing another action, but that is not the case. These accented or focus elements facilitate the use of an extra negative element, since the negative element explicitly negates the presupposition that these conditions (doing something without doing

something else as well) do not apply. Furthermore, *niet* and the accented word form a constituent which indicates that *niet* is not applied directly to the verb, hence not giving rise to an actual compositional reading of the negation.

There are probably additional factors that limit the use of the negation in the construction. An example is that *niet* cannot occur before a bare noun, that is, a noun without a determiner (*de, het, een*). This is why (27a) with accented *ergens* ‘somewhere’ is acceptable, but the same sentence without *ergens* (27b), where *niet* occurs immediately before a bare noun, is much less acceptable:

- (27) a. *Maar evengoed kan ik echt Duitsland niet door zonder niet*  
 but still can I really Germany not through without not  
*ERGENS pfifferlingen supe te hebben geeten.*  
 somewhere chanterelle soup to have eaten  
 ‘But still I cannot pass through Germany without [lit. *without not*] having eaten chanterelle soup somewhere.’
- b. *Maar evengoed kan ik echt Duitsland niet door zonder niet*  
 but still can I really Germany not through without not  
*pfifferlingen supe te hebben geeten.*  
 chanterelle soup to have eaten  
 ‘But still I cannot pass through Germany without [lit. *without not*] having eaten chanterelle soup.’

The phenomenon described here is in fact due to a general rule of Dutch grammar, which stipulates that a bare noun requires the use of *geen* ‘no’, and *niet* is not acceptable. However, as I will show later, the use of *geen* is not possible or is at least very marked in the negative privative construction. Besides this factor there are probably also other syntactic factors which limit the use of extra negation.

## 6. Comparison with compositional sentences

As I have shown, instances of the non-compositional privative construction typically occur with a negation or negative element in the main clause and an accented focus element in the subordinate clause, or less frequently with either one of these factors. These properties are not part of the behavioural profile of the compositional construction without extra negation. If we compare, for example, 100 randomly selected instances of the non-compositional construction with 50 randomly selected instances of the regular construction with *zonder* ‘without’ from the OpenSoNaR corpus of spoken and written Dutch,<sup>6</sup> the difference is

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6. With the search phrase “zonder te + infinitive”.

immediately clear. In the sample of 50 compositional instances there is just one example with an accented focus element in the subordinate clause, and just 8 instances with a negative element in the main clause (which is about 16% of the sample, versus 83% in the corpus of non-compositional instances). This is not to say, however, that if a speaker uses a negative element in the main clause, (s)he will normally use extra negation in the subordinate clause. To give an example, in the OpenSoNaR corpus there are no instances with *nooit* ‘never’ in the main clause and an extra negation in the subordinate clause, whereas we do find sentences like the following, without extra negation:

- (28) Hij is nog *nooit* weggebleven *zonder te bellen*.  
 ‘He has *never* stayed away *without calling*.’

The explanation is that the compositional construction is the more frequent standard option, whereas the non-compositional construction is pragmatically specialized and more infrequent. In the same vein, the use of an accented focus element does not necessarily entail the use of an extra negation in the subordinate clause. This can be illustrated by looking for the phrase *zonder niet ook* ‘without not also’ and *zonder ook* ‘without also’ in the OpenSoNaR corpus of spoken and written Dutch. In the whole corpus we find no instances with extra negation and five instances without extra negation, four of which also contain a negation in the main clause, which underlines that the use of *ook* is in fact related to the use of negation in the main clause. To get an even better idea of the relative frequency and type of usage, I also looked for uses in the Delpher corpus of newspapers of the twentieth and twenty-first century and collected instances with extra negation and instances without extra negation with the focus element *ook*, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Zonder ook* ‘without also’ with and without extra negation

	Instances with negation in main clause	Instances without negation in the main clause
<i>zonder ook</i>	18	14
<i>zonder niet ook</i>	13	0

First, it should be remarked that both in the positive and negative version of the construction in Table 4 there are many instances with negation in the main clause. The association with negation in the main clause is not typical for *zonder (dat)* in general, but probably has to be explained in terms of the meaning

of *zonder* in combination with *ook*.<sup>7</sup> In combination with *ook*, the construction readily indicates that ‘situation x does not occur, if situation y does not occur as well, contrary to what one might expect’. Notwithstanding this general association with negation in the main clause, the frequencies show that there is an association between the use of an extra negation in the subordinate clause and a negative element in the main clause in sentences with accented *ook* ‘also’. At the same time, in absolute terms, sentences with extra negation and *ook* ‘also’ are less frequent than similar instances without extra negation. Grammar provides the Dutch speaker with two constructions that have a very similar message, although the non-compositional version is the less common one, due to its more specialized semantic-pragmatic character. Consider the following sentence, where we find all the negation-triggering contexts (negation in main clause, accented focus element in subordinate clause):

- (29) De voorliefde van de Oostenrijkse ‘Gefreiter’ voor het militaristische Pruisen van Frederik de Grote ging zover dat hij *nergens* zijn kamp opsloeg *zonder niet ook* een portret van de verlichte despoot te installeren.  
 ‘The predilection of the Austrian ‘Gefreiter’ [Austrian military rank] for the militaristic Prussia of Frederick the Great went so far that he did *not* set up camp *anywhere without* [lit. *without not also*] also installing a portrait of the enlightened despot.’

Example (29) indicates that even in a situation where you would not expect this, the military person installs a portrait of Frederik the Great. Here the use of an extra negation is highly appropriate and natural. This can be compared to sentences with a negation in the main clause and a focus element in the subordinate clause without extra negation in the subordinate clause, for example:

- (30) Zoals vermeld kon men deze groepen [Dionysosgroepen] *niet* verwijderen *zonder ook* de tabernakels zelf te vernietigen.  
 ‘As mentioned, we could *not* remove these groups [statues of Dionysos] *without alsodestroying* the tabernacles themselves.’ (about an archeological site)

In this case, the speaker asserts in a more neutral manner that one cannot do something without doing something else as well. Even though in contexts like (29) the extra negation is quite natural, uses such as these may be less acceptable for some speakers of Dutch, specifically when pointed out to them explicitly, because of the normative rule of logic learned at school that one negation cancels the other (see also Fortuin & Hugte in prep. for further discussion).

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7. Compare Reuneker (2016) for conditional *zonder* as opposed to *als niet* ‘if not’.

## 7. Relations with other constructions

As I remarked above, in the Dutch privative construction we encounter the negative form *niet* ‘not’. In standard (written) Dutch, similar instances with *zonder* and other negative elements such as *geen* ‘no’, *niemand* ‘no one’, *nooit* ‘never’, etc. are much less frequently used. The frequency of these forms is shown in Table 5, which combines the data from Nexis Uni and OpenSoNaR.

**Table 5.** Other negative forms with *zonder* ‘without’

	Nexis Uni	OpenSoNaR	Total	Neg in main clause
<i>zonder geen</i> (‘without no’)	10 (2 <i>zonder geen enkel</i> ‘without no single’)	6 (5 <i>zonder geen enkel</i> ‘without no single’)	16	0
<i>zonder dat geen</i> (‘without that no’)	0	0	0	0
<i>zonder niets</i> (‘without nothing’)	5	1	6	1
<i>zonder dat niets</i> (‘without that nothing’)	0	0	0	0
<i>zonder niemand</i> (‘without no one’)	1	1	2	0
<i>zonder dat niemand</i> (‘without that no one’)	5	1	6	1*
<i>zonder nergens</i> (‘without nowhere’)	1	0	1	0
<i>zonder dat nergens</i> (‘without that nowhere’)	0	0	0	0
<i>zonder nooit</i> (‘without never’)	0	0	0	0
<i>zonder dat nooit</i> (‘without that never’)	0	0	0	0

\* Two examples could be said to have a negative evaluation in the main clause, even though this is not fully clear.

The data in Table 5 show that the alternative negative elements occur in the privative construction less frequently than *niet* ‘not’.<sup>8</sup> Even though more research would be necessary, I expect that for most speakers of standard Dutch, these instances are not seen as standard Dutch. But more importantly, sentences with *zonder* and other negative forms behave differently from sentences with *zonder* and *niet*. They do not occur with focus particles (with the exception of the phrase *zonder geen enkel* ‘without a single’), and there is no association with negation in the main clause, as is illustrated by the following example:

- (31) *Zonder dat niemand* het wist, en ongetraind, schreef hij zich in voor de 40 kilometer.  
 ‘Without anyone [lit. *without no one*] knowing it, and without training, he registered for the 40 kilometer run.’

Still, it can be argued that these sentences implicitly negate the presupposition of non-occurrence. Such sentences show properties of sentences that can be found in colloquial Dutch, where a negative indefinite can occur with *niet* (van der Wouden 2021) such as the following instance, where the negation has an emphasizing function (Zeijlstra 2010), stressing that there really is no one that will believe that:

- (32) *Dat gelooft toch niemand niet.*  
 that believes PRT no one not  
 ‘No one will believe that.’

The reason why the combination *zonder niet* behaves differently from *zonder* plus other negative forms and is considered more acceptable for many people is not fully clear to me. Perhaps the restriction of expletive negation to sentential negation (instead of ‘nobody’, ‘nowhere’, etc.) is a more general property of expletive (extra) negation cross-linguistically. In their cross-linguistic study, Jin and Koenig (2020) only provide examples translated with *not*. It could be argued that the restriction to sentential negation mirrors the most basic or abstract use of *zonder* (*dat*) X ‘without X’, where *zonder* (*dat*) negates the proposition expressed by the subordinate clause, and not a location (‘nowhere’), time (‘never’), etc. There are two further explanations of the data.

First, many of the sentences with *zonder niet* contain a focus element in the subordinate clause such as *ook* ‘also’. Such focus elements can readily co-occur with *niet* ‘not’, but not with other negative words (*\*niemand ook*, *\*nooit ook*, etc.).

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8. In the two corpora there are 68 examples with *zonder* (*dat*) followed by *niet*, and 31 examples with *zonder* (*dat*) and other negative elements. In order to draw further conclusions, it would be necessary to look at the ratio between instances with and without extra negation.

Second, the negative word *niet* ‘not’ differs from the other negative words in that the other negative words have an affirmative counterpart, for example *niemand* ‘no one’ versus *iemand* ‘someone’. It could be argued that the necessity to explicitly mark the negative orientation with a negative word is less strong with the negative forms other than *niet* since the idea of sentential accent (‘not not’) can also be expressed by accenting the pronoun. For example, in (31) the emphasizing function of *niemand* could also be realized by accenting the pronoun *iemand* ‘someone’. In addition, exactly because the other negative words have an affirmative counterpart, the use of a negative word probably stands more out for most language users, which may also mean that there is more normative pressure not to use it.

Even though the negative privative construction is a rather isolated construction in Dutch, we do find other constructions in Dutch that share properties with the negative privative construction. Consider the following sentence in which the matrix clause indicates that what is said in the content clause is not true either:

- (33) *Wat niet wil zeggen dat ze geen intimiteit meer kennen, want dat is niet noodzakelijk hetzelfde.*

*Het wil evenmin zeggen dat iemand niet pas op latere leeftijd echte seksualiteit kan ontdekken en exploreren.*  
 it wants neither say that someone not only at later age real  
 sexuality can discover and explore

‘That doesn’t mean they don’t know intimacy anymore, because that’s not necessarily the same thing. Nor does it mean that someone can only discover and explore real sexuality at a later age.’  
 (Nexis Uni)

In this construction we find a negative element in the main clause (*evenmin* ‘neither’), an implicit negative element in the subordinate clause (*pas* ‘only’, ‘not earlier than’), and an extra (non-compositional) negation:

- (34) [*evenmin* ‘neither’ + *het wil zeggen* ‘it means’]<sub>matrix clause</sub> [*dat* ‘that’ + *niet* ‘not’ + *pas* ‘only’ + Pred]<sub>content clause</sub>

The negation in the content (subordinate) clause echoes the negation in the matrix (main) clause, thereby emphasizing the negative orientation of the construction as a whole: ‘it is not the case that one can only discover and explore real sexuality at a later stage.’ The construction in (33) is less frequently found in corpora and less entrenched than the negative privative construction. Nevertheless, it shows the same general pattern that we find in the negative privative construction.



Another type of construction where we find an extra negation is the construction with a negated verb of amazement in the matrix clause and an extra negation in the content clause, as in (35):

- (35) *Het zou me niet verbazen als hij niet snel daarna ook in een nieuw carrièrebootje is gestapt.*  
 It would me not amaze if he not soon after also in a new career boat has stepped  
 ‘I would not be surprised if he stepped into a new career boat [i.e. had a new career] soon after that.’ (Nexis Uni)

In this construction, the matrix clause does not negate the content clause as in (33), but the matrix verb itself is negated, and the situation given in the content clause is presented as something that, contrary to expectation, is likely to occur. As such, the semantics of the matrix predicate is diametrically opposite to the predicates that trigger expletive (paratactic) negation as given by Delfitto (2020). The explanation for the extra negation can be found, I think, in the meaning of the predicate in the main clause which expresses that the speaker would not be surprised if some situation X was the case, implicitly negating the idea that ‘not X’ is the case. The idea of ‘not X’ is reflected in the structure of the content clause. As such the content clause expresses the presupposition which the speaker negates. This use of reminiscent of the use of *niet* ‘not’ in yes-no questions, where the speaker does not negate the content of the sentence, but indicates that (s)he suspects that what (s)he asks is true:

- (36) *Ging jij niet weg?*  
 ‘Didn’t you go away?’

The Dutch private construction also shows similarities to other constructions in other languages that have the form:

- (37) [negation + Pred]<sub>main clause</sub> [implicit negation + ‘not’]<sub>subordinate clause</sub>

A good example is the English ‘No X is too Y’ construction as in (9), which also occurs in German, Danish and Greek, and probably many other languages (see Fortuin 2014 and Paape *et al.* 2020, and references cited there). This construction has in common with the Dutch privative construction that we find a negative element in the main clause (*no*), and an implicit negative element (*too*) in the subordinate clause. By expressing an extra negation here, the speaker makes the negative orientation of the message explicit, negating any presupposition on the part of the addressee that some action could in fact be realized (in this case, ignoring trivial head injuries). This construction also shows similarities to paratactic negation, as in (7) above. Such constructions have the following structure:

(38) [negative Pred]<sub>main clause</sub> [‘not’ Pred]<sub>subordinate clause</sub>

This suggests that the negation arises in various languages for the same functional or communicative reasons, although there are also language-specific reasons as to why and how far the extra negation becomes a part of the conventionalized form-meaning structure of the language. Interestingly, the triggers for the extra negation are to some extent reminiscent of the occurrence of the extra, expletive negation in the Italian ‘before’ construction, as discussed by Delfitto (2020). Even though the negative privative construction is not part of a family of constructions in Dutch, it is part of a cross-linguistic phenomenon, which exists in various languages independently of each other, and which can be explained in semantic-pragmatic and functional terms.

## 8. Conclusion

In this paper I have offered an analysis and explanation of the occurrence of extra or non-compositional (expletive) negation in the Dutch privative construction, where *zonder* ‘without’ sometimes occurs with *niet* ‘not’. The analysis provides insight into this specific construction, but also sheds light on extra or non-compositional negation in general.

By expressing the negative element in the subordinate clause of the privative construction, the speaker makes the negative orientation of the message explicit and negates the addressee’s presupposition of non-occurrence (cf. Fortuin 2014 and Delfitto 2020). Besides this, the negation is sometimes triggered by semantic-syntactic factors, specifically to facilitate a particular information structure and associated syntactic structure. As I suggested, the non-compositional negation is not readily explained as a performance error due to difficulty of dealing with multiple negations (as proposed for example by Wason & Reich 1979 and Paape *et al.* 2020, for a similar English construction).

There are two semantic factors that contribute to non-compositional (extra) negation in the construction: (i) a negation or negative evaluation in the main clause and (ii) the presence of accented focus elements in the subordinate clause, with which the negation co-occurs. Both of these factors can be related directly to the basic function of the non-compositional negation. Sentences with negation in the main clause always go against some idea that one can in fact perform the action in the absence of another action. *Niet* ‘not’ makes explicit the presupposition that one can actually perform the action and not perform another action. Similarly, the focus elements negate the presupposition that some condition does not apply. In addition to the two factors mentioned here, non-compositional

negation is sometimes triggered by the particular syntactic form of the sentence, specifically a contrastive structure and meaning of the sentence. The presence of these factors and the associated meaning of the negative version of the construction also explain how the negative version of the construction differs from the positive version of the construction.

Whether or not the speaker expresses the extra negative element is a choice, which is pragmatically-semantically and sometimes syntactically motivated. However, as I have shown, there are almost no contexts in which the extra negative element is obligatory. This can be explained with reference to the rather subtle semantic-pragmatic function of extra negation, and with reference to the stricter rules of normative grammar, which discourages the use of extra negation.

Considering the more widespread use of extra or non-compositional negation in other languages, including instances where we also find three negative elements, it seems that extra negation in the Dutch privative construction is the result of more general communicative-cognitive principles that apply cross-linguistically. An important general factor seems to be that, under certain circumstances, language users prefer to make the negative orientation of the message explicit in the context of implicit negation, such as *without*, especially in sentences with a complex syntactic structure (cf. Jespersen 1917). The analysis proposed in this paper provides further insight into the nature of negation in natural language. Negative words in natural language do not behave as negative operators in logic, which only reverse the truth value of a proposition. Instead, negative forms are form-meaning elements available within the linguistic structure, which occupy a place in the semantic-syntactic structure of the sentence, and which play a part in the way the speaker (or author) wants to get a particular message across to the addressee (reader). This is also clearly reflected in the case of the Dutch privative construction. First, with regard to implicit negation, such as *zonder* ‘without’, there is no dedicated negative element such as *niet* ‘not’ that negates the idea of occurrence of a situation as expressed by the predicate. From a communicative perspective, such implicit negation is less clear than negation expressed by negative forms like *niet* ‘not’. Especially in contexts where the speaker wants to counter an expected presupposition of not-acting attributed to the addressee, the speaker can use an extra negation to make the negation of the predicate explicit and to emphasize it. Second, in some contexts, an extra negation (*niet* ‘not’) is expressed because of the need for a negative form that is either accented and/or part of a parallel syntactic structure. Both instances (communicative clarity/intersubjective function and negative elements as placeholders of a particular syntactic structure) are typical of natural language, and not part of logic. While I have pointed at similar phenomena in other languages, further research could focus more systematically on these two properties in a larger set of languages. In addition, further

research could focus on the issue of the development of constructions that can be seen as linguistic conventions, and the impact of normative attitudes and language processing on such conventions.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments which all helped me to improve my analysis. I would also like to thank Thom van Hugte for his help with the corpus research, editor Martin Hilpert for his suggestions, and Ronny Boogaart for his critical comments on a draft version of the paper.

## Corpora used

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## Publication history

Date received: 9 November 2021  
 Date accepted: 20 May 2023  
 Published online: 4 July 2023