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Negative structures in neo-standard Italian: *non è che* ('it is not that') + S and *mica* ('a crumb') in comparison

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Abstract: In 1994, in a thought-provoking paper focusing on the developments emerging in the renewed standard variety of Italian, Monica Berretta formulated a few previsions concerning the future admittance into the norm of a number of traits, in her own words, “features, or better, clusters of features that, in today’s Italian, appear more likely to succeed in establishing themselves in the ongoing process of language change, since they are both co-occurrent and typologically coherent [*my translation*]”. Those features included the incipient emergence of three negative constructions: *i*) a construction involving the negative operator *mica* (< Latin ‘crumb’), either in post-verbal position without a pre-verbal negative marker (e.g. *Sono mica scemo* ‘I am not a fool’) or *ii*) in pre-verbal position (e.g. *Mica sono scemo* ‘I am not a fool’) and *iii*) a sentential negation entailing the cleft construction *non è che* (‘it is not that’) + S (e.g. *Questo intervento non è che c’entri molto con il programma del congresso...* ‘It is not that this proposal is particularly relevant to the conference’s theme...’), which Berretta considered to be favoured in prognostic terms. In this paper, the occurrences of negative constructions within the KIParla corpus will be compared with the corresponding occurrences in a thirty-hour corpus extracted from the *Teche Rai* data base [www.teche.rai.it], dating back to the 60s, 70s and 80s of the twentieth century. It will be argued that the cleft construction *non è che* + S has hitherto prevailed at the expense of the others (involving the use of the negative operator *mica*), that have specialised to express a few distinctive pragmatic and discursive functions.

Keywords: Neo-standard Italian; negative constructions; spoken language.

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1 Introduction

Since the 1980s, as a result of the gradual rise and expansion of Italian as a spoken variety learned as the language of primary socialization by most of the local population, the standard variety of Italian has been undergoing substantial changes which have been interpreted as a process of *restandardization*, entailing the development of a new standard alongside the ‘traditional’ literary one. This outcome may be understood as part of a process of ‘demotisation’ (Berruto 2017a: 34–35), whereby the new standard “develops the kind of internal variability which is necessary to serve its manifold functions, and becomes stylistically and socially stratified [...], thereby displaying the regional affiliation of its speakers as well” (Auer and Spiekermann 2011: 162). In other words, as Cerruti explains in a recent paper,

[...] as Italian spread across speakers and situations, the standard norm ceased to conform only to the written language and began to be influenced by spoken language as well. Many spoken, informal, and regional features have since come to be used and accepted even in formal and educated speech, as well as partly in formal and educated writing, thereby becoming part of standard usage. (Cerruti 2020: 130)

As the editors of this special issue illustrate in the Introduction, the emergence of a new standard has long been a matter of discussion in a number of dedicated publications (e.g., the essays collected in Cerruti et al. 2017; but cf. also D’Achille 2003 and 2012; Cerruti 2013; Cerruti and Regis 2014; Berruto 2017b; Cerruti 2020). In a thought-provoking paper focusing on the linguistic traits surfacing in the renewed standard norm of Italian, Monica Berretta (2002 [1994]: 379) formulated a few provisions on the future admittance into the standard of “caratteristiche, o meglio insiemi di caratteristiche, che, nell’italiano d’oggi, paiono più inclini ad avere successo nel mutamento linguistico perché tra loro non solo cooccorrenti ma tipologicamente solidali” [features, or better clusters of features that, in today’s Italian, appear more likely to succeed in establishing themselves in the ongoing process of language change, since they are both co-occurrent and typologically coherent]. Berretta was aware that the inclusion in neo-standard Italian of certain “clusters of features” would entail a selection process conditioned by the interplay of both facilitating and constraining factors, including ease of production and perception, isomorphism (i.e. the tendency to favour a one-to-one, biunique association of form and meaning), salience (cf. Cerruti 2020) and typological coherence, i.e. the propensity to single out structural features (or bundles of features) that are generally known to co-occur in languages since they are functionally interdependent.

As far as sentence negation is concerned, Berretta (2002 [1994]) remarked the incipient emergence (alongside standard negation, expressed by the pre-verbal particle *non*) of three negative constructions: *i*) a construction involving the

negative operator *mica* (< Latin ‘crumb’), either in post-verbal position without a pre-verbal negative marker (e.g. *Sono mica scemo* ‘I am not a fool’) or *ii*) in pre-verbal position (e.g. *Mica sono scemo* ‘I am not a fool’) and *iii*) a sentential negation entailing the cleft construction *non è che* (‘it is not that’) + S (e.g. *Questo intervento non è che c’entri molto con il programma del congresso...* ‘It is not that this proposal is particularly relevant to the conference’s theme...’), which Berretta considered to be favoured in prognostic terms.

The aim of this paper is to assess Berretta’s hypothesis, especially as far as the expansion of the cleft construction *non è che* + S is concerned. In Section 2, an overview of the various standard and substandard uses of the above-mentioned negative constructions will be provided, drawing upon the recent analysis carried out by Squartini (2017), Spina (2019), and Cerruti (2020) among others. In Section 3, the occurrences of negative constructions within the KIParla corpus (Mauri et al. 2019) will be compared with the corresponding occurrences in a thirty-hour corpus extracted from the *Teche Rai* data base [www.teche.rai.it], dating back to the 60s, 70s and 80s of the twentieth century¹. It will be argued that the cleft construction *non è che* + S has hitherto prevailed at the expense of the others (involving the use of the negative operator *mica*), that however have specialised to express distinctive pragmatic and discursive functions.

2 Negative constructions in neo-standard Italian

2.1 Negative constructions with *mica* (< Latin ‘crumb’)

At least since Jespersen (1917), it is well-known that in some Romance languages the original pre-verbal negative particle may be reinforced by adding a post-verbal element with an original lexical meaning, which in the course of time becomes grammaticalized as a post-verbal negative operator. In Italian, the co-occurrence of the post-verbal particle *mica* (< Latin ‘crumb’) with the pre-verbal particle *non* fits this interpretation. As Bernini and Ramat explain, discontinuous negation with *mica* in post-verbal position has long become accepted into the standard to convey “a particular adversative meaning on the pragmatic level; its use [...] implies that the speaker presupposes that whatever he is denying is on the contrary considered true or understood as realizable by his interlocutor” (2012 [1996]: 17). In (1), for

¹ See Section 3.1 and the Appendix for an outline of the contents of this corpus.

instance, the speaker presupposes that his/her interlocutor is suggesting that s/he ought to pay attention to what people say:

- (1) Io **non** posso **mica** stare a badare a quello che
 PRO.1SG.NOM NEG can-PRES.1SG mica pay attention to what
 dicono, lascio dire!
 say-PRES.3PL let-PRES.1SG say-INF
 'I cannot pay attention to what they say, I let them say!'
 (*Teche Rai* data base, 1973)

- (2) lì sta scritto che è delusa dal
 there be-PRES.3SG written that be-PRES.3SG(POLITE) disappointed by_DET
 corso di studi, ma **non** la tratteniamo **mica**
 degree program but NEG 3.SG.ACC(POLITE) hold_back-PRES.1PL mica
 a forza
 with strength
 'You wrote [lit. there it is written] that you were disappointed by the degree
 program, but we are not holding you back against your will'
 (KIParla Corpus, BOA1018)

In a similar way, the words uttered by the teacher quoted in (2) imply that the interlocutor (a student) could have quit the degree program if she was disappointed, she had no reason to believe that she would be held back against her will. Note that the latter idea has not been explicitly expressed in the previous interactional turns, it is rather a conversational implicature that is ruled out by resorting to the *non ... mica* discontinuous construction.

An analogous interpretation had already been formulated by Cinque (1991 [1976]: 314), who remarked that “affiancando il *mica* al semplice *non* il parlante vuol negare una aspettativa da parte di qualcuno piuttosto che una asserzione. *Mica*, cioè, ha un contenuto puramente presupposizionale” [by adding *mica* to pre-verbal *non* the speaker denies someone else's expectation rather than a certain assertion. In other words, *mica* conveys a purely presuppositional content]. Hence, *mica* is resorted to in order to deny an inference somehow associated to the words uttered in the previous interactional context, either by the interlocutor or by the speaker himself/herself.

In direct questions and requests, this discontinuous negation may function as a politeness, face-saving device “by suggesting that the interlocutor may reply negatively, thus freeing him from the obligation to fulfil the request” (Visconti 2010: 947), as in extract (3a):

- (3) a. **Non** hai **mica** una sigaretta?
 NEG have-PRES.2SG mica a cigarette
 'Do you have a cigarette?'
- b. **Non** è **mica** stupido, Marco vs.
 NEG be-PRES.3SG mica fool
 *Per caso (non) è stupido, Marco.
 by chance NEG be-PRES.3SG fool
 'Marco is not a fool'
- c. **Non** mangiare **mica** quella roba! vs.
 NEG eat-INF mica that stuff!
 *Non mangiare per caso quella roba!
 NEG eat-INF by chance that stuff
 'Don't eat that stuff!'

Cinque (1991 [1976]: 315) observes that, when occurring in requests similar to (3a), *mica* could be replaced by a mitigating expression like *per caso* 'by chance', which suggests that the speaker does not really expect a positive answer, but thinks it may be worth a try. On the contrary, in affirmative (3b) and imperative sentences (3c) the insertion of *per caso* 'by chance' would not be acceptable.

Negative imperative utterances containing *non ... mica* presuppose that the addressee would surely carry out a certain action if the speaker did not ask him/her not to do so. This explains why, unlike (4a), (4b) would not be considered a well-formed polite invitation (cf. Cinque 1991 [1976]: 316), despite being grammatically acceptable:

- (4) a. **Non** lasci la sua cartella qua, per favore.
 NEG leave-PRES.SUBJ.2SG DET your folder here please
 'Do not leave your folder here, please'
- b. ?**Non** lasci **mica** la sua cartella qua, per favore.
 NEG leave-PRES.SUBJ.2SG mica DET your folder here please

A final interesting point emerging from Cinque's (1991 [1976]) discussion is that discontinuous *non ... mica* negation may occur in appositive relative clauses (i.e., in relative clauses that convey additional information about a head whose reference has already been established, like 5a) but, as a rule, it is not acceptable in restrictive relative clauses, i.e., in relative clauses that enable the identification of a certain referent by restricting the predication to the (set of) element(s) specified in the clause itself (5b).

- (5) a. Tuo cugino, che **non** è **mica** uno stupido,
 your cousin REL NEG be-PRES.3SG mica a fool
 ha rifiutato di collaborare.
 AUX.PRES.3SG refuse-PAST_PART to collaborate-INF
 ‘Your cousin, who is not a fool, refused to collaborate’
- b. *Quella è la ragazza che **non** vuole **mica**
 that-F.SG be-PRES.3SG DET girl who NEG want-PRES.3SG mica
 essere invitata a ballare
 be-INF invited-PAST_PART to dance-INF
 ‘That is the girl who does not want to be invited to dance’

Cinque (1991 [1976]: 318) believes that the explanation of this difference lies in the fact that, unlike the propositional content of an appositive relative clause, which is comparable to an assertion and could be omitted without compromising the identification of the head (in 5a, *your cousin*, whose reference has already been established), the propositional content of a restrictive relative clause (in 5b, ‘there is a girl who does not want to be invited to dance’) needs to be presupposed as true to make the sentence meaningful. The presence of a discontinuous negation would call into question that presupposition, thus making the sentence incoherent.

As for post-verbal *mica*, the first structure mentioned by Berretta (2002 [1994])², its use is generally restricted to sub-standard varieties of Italian spoken in the Northern regions of the country, where the national language is in close, long-term contact with Italo-Romance dialects that adopt a post-verbal negative particle as the standard, unmarked strategy to express sentential negation. The use of post-verbal *mica* without pre-verbal *non* tends to be associated with uneducated speakers whose competency in the national language is heavily interfered with the local dialect, and hence, stigmatised (e.g., Ruffino 2006; Guerini 2011). Other scholars (e.g., Regis 2017: 163–64) documented its presence in literary texts as a stylistic choice aimed at imitating Northern Italo-Romance dialect structures. Its occurrence seems to have recently become more tolerated (cf. Ballarè 2015), especially in direct questions³, as suggested by (6), the closing line of the advertising campaign (jokingly) promoting the radio program *Forrest* (which was run shortly after Mario Draghi was appointed Prime Minister of Italy in February 2021):

² Discontinuous *non ... mica* negation was omitted from Berretta’s (2002 [1994]) discussion because, in the 1990s, its inclusion in the standard was already taken for granted (e.g., Serianni 1989: 428).

³ On the peculiar discursive functions fulfilled by *mica* in direct questions, see Squartini (2017). Cinque (1991 [1976]: 319), on the other hand, believes that direct questions with post-verbal *mica* as the only negative operator are the result of the elision of pre-verbal *non* in casual, spontaneous speech.

- (6) Ma quello che cammina sulle acque è **mica** Mario Draghi?
 but that-M.SG who walk-PRES.3SG on_the water be-PRES.3SG mica Mario Draghi
 ‘Isn’t that guy walking on the water Mario Draghi, is he?’
 (Closing line of the ad campaign of the radio program *Forrest*, Rai Radio 1,
 March 2021)

The negative construction entailing the use of *mica* in pre-verbal position, on the other hand, was already mentioned by Rohlfs (1966–69: III, 305) as “gaining more and more ground” in the 1960s, and it “is now regarded as standard in some reference grammars” (Cerruti 2020: 133). As Cerruti illustrates, this structure “seems to specialise in denying Hearer-new content” (2020: 135), that is to say, propositional content that is not known to the hearer, which may (or may not) be Discourse-old, i.e., textually or contextually evoked by discourse elements or inferred on the basis of shared knowledge. In extract (7), for instance, the negated content (‘a certain agreement can be depicted as ‘political’) is not known to the hearer and the speaker blames the choice of the adjective ‘political’ as indicative of not having a complete understanding of the on-going situation:

- (7) **Mica** si può dire ‘politico’ così,
 mica IMPERS can-PRES.3SG say-INF political like that,
 bisogna conoscere la situazione del momento!
 need-PRES.3SG know-INF DET situation of_DET moment
 ‘One cannot say ‘political’ like that [i.e. light-heartedly], you need to know the
 current situation!’
 (*Teche Rai* data base, 1982)

Another example can be found in (8): as in the previous extract, the negated content (namely, that the students’ house is in Santo Stefano) has not been previously stated, though the inference may have been triggered by some previous knowledge (e.g., most of the students invited to the party are from Santo Stefano or Santo Stefano is the area where most university students find their accommodation, etc.), and hence be interpreted as Discourse-old.

- (8) no, non lo so, so solo che sono
 NEG, NEG PRO.ACC.3SG know-PRES.1SG know-PRES.1SG only that be-PRES.3PL
 di San Benedetto, mica la casa era in Santo Stefano
 from San Benedetto, mica DET house be-IMPERF.3SG in Santo Stefano
 ‘[Talking about a couple of students the speaker has recently become acquainted
 with during a party] No, I don’t know, I do know that they are from San Bene-
 detto, the house was not in Santo Stefano’
 (KIParla Corpus, BOA3004)

Many scholars (e.g. Dahl 1979: 88; Bernini and Ramat 1996; Van der Auwera and Neuckermans 2006; Visconti 2010; Cerruti 2020: 133) agree that the three aforementioned negative constructions (*non ... mica*; *V + mica*; *mica + V*), alongside with certain functions (associated with the development from non-canonical to canonical negation), can be accounted for in terms of a grammaticalization cline, commonly known as Jespersen cycle, whereby “the original negative adverb [in this case, pre-verbal *non*, FG] is first weakened, then found insufficient and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional word, and this in turn may be felt as a negative proper and may then in course of time be subject to the same development as the original word” (Jespersen 1917: 4). In the last stage of this grammaticalization cline *mica* ousts *non* as a pre-verbal negative operator: as Van der Auwera and Neuckermans put it, “we start with a preverbal negator, we end with a new one” (2006: 460), without any significant effect on word order.

Bernini and Ramat (2012 [1996]) point out that negative constructions entailing a pre-verbal negative operator, such as *mica + V*, appear more frequently in the world’s languages and hence can be considered as the unmarked members of an opposition having as the marked extreme post-verbal negative particles⁴:

NEG particles in syntactic constructions show a clear TENDENCY to appear in PREVERBAL position (before the finite verb in compound forms), independently of whatever predominant basic order may be. (Bernini and Ramat 2012 [1996]: 23; small caps in the original)

As we shall see (Section 4), cross-linguistic frequency is extremely important in order to establish which structures are more likely to be favoured in language change, and hence, to become part of current usage in neo-standard Italian.

⁴ See also Jespersen (1917: 5), who noted a cross-linguistic tendency to place negative operators “first, or at any rate, as soon as possible, very often before the particular word to be negated (generally the verb)”.

2.2 *Non è che + S*

The third negative structure mentioned in Berretta's essay (*non è che* 'it is not that' + S) has been devoted scarcer attention in the literature. One notable exception is Bernini (1992), who identifies three structural features which, in his opinion, deserve special consideration:

- i) the tense of the verb form occurring in the cleft sentence: present indicative is certainly the default option, though an imperfect or a future indicative verb form may sometimes occur, as illustrated in (9) and (10) below⁵:

(9) però poi, come, voti **non era** **che** erano ...
 but then, as votes NEG be-IMPERF.IND.3SG that be-IMPERF.IND.3PL
 'But then, as for the votes, it was not that they were [...]'

(10) **Non sarà** **che** è più facile tollerare?
 NEG be-FUT.IND.3SG that be-PRES.IND.3SG more easy tolerate-INF
 'It will not be that it is easier to tolerate?'
 (Bernini 1992: 196)

- ii) the mood occurring within the *that*-clause, which may be either the indicative (11) or the subjunctive (12). The latter choice, which conveys a counterfactual nuance, is inhibited by the alleged disappearance of the subjunctive mood from spoken Italian, its place being taken by the corresponding indicative verb forms (e.g., Berruto 2017a: 41–42); nevertheless, as we will show in the next section, the occurrence of a subjunctive form is not uncommon.

(11) Anche perché **non è** **che** dovevo
 Also because NEG be-PRES.IND.3SG that have_to-IMPERF.IND.1SG
 verificare quelle firme
 verify-INF those signatures
 'Besides, it is not that I had to verify those signatures'
 (Bernini 1992: 197)

⁵ Note that in (10) the choice of the future tense assigns the cleft sentence a modal value of uncertainty and tentativeness.

- (12) **Non** è **che** io mi preoccupi,
 NEG be-PRES.IND.3SG that PRO.NOM.1SG REFL worry-PRES.SUBJ.1SG
 ci mancano dei soldi a casa
 PRO.DAT.1PL be_missing-PRES.1PL some money at home
 ‘It is not that I am worried, [but] at home some money is missing’
 (Bernini 1992: 196)

iii) the interface between *non è che* and the appearance of negative quantifiers in the *that*-clause; as Bernini remarks, the latter remain within the scope of the negative particle *non*, and hence, a sentence like (13) is interpreted as if it contained a single negative operator (‘the treatment is not doing me any good’):

- (13) e poi ho sospeso la cura,
 and then AUX.PRES.1SG interrupted DET treatment,
 ho visto che **non** è **che** mi
 AUX.PRES.1SG realized that NEG be-PRES. 3SG that PRO.DAT.1SG
 faccia **niente**
 do-SUBJ.PRES.3SG nothing
 ‘And then I interrupted the treatment, I realized that it is not that it is doing me any good’
 (Bernini 1992: 199)

To be more precise, the polarity of the (either negative or positive) quantifiers occurring within the *that*-clause tends to be neutralized. The latter are equalled to the former, as illustrated in (14), a semantically equivalent reformulation of (13):

- (14) **Non** è **che** mi faccia **qualcosa**
 NEG be-PRES.3SG that PRO.DAT.1SG do-SUBJ.PRES.3SG something
 ‘[The treatment] is not doing me any good’

Another structural peculiarity of this construction is that *non è che* may be followed either by an affirmative or by a negative clause; in fact, in Italian, a negative cleft construction is the only option available in order to deny the propositional content of a negative clause (cf. Bernini 2011). In (15), for instance, what is actually denied is the truth value of the assertion *non si è fatto proprio niente per il Mezzogiorno* ‘nothing has been done for Southern Italy’ and, at the same time, the contrastive meaning ‘something has already been done ...’ is implicitly conveyed:

- (15) In questi ultimi venti anni **non è** **che non** si
 in these last twenty years NEG be-PRES.3SG that NEG IMPERS
 sia fatto proprio **niente** per il Mezzogiorno.
 AUX.SUBJ.PRES.3SG done quite nothing for Southern_Italy
 ‘In the last twenty years, it is not that nothing has been done for Southern Italy.’
 (*Teche Rai* data base, 1977)

This leads us to a final distinction formulated by Bernini (1992: 200–203), namely, that between “metalinguistic” and “descriptive” negative cleft constructions. While the former can be paraphrased as “non si può dire *x* di *p*” [one cannot assert *x* about *p*] and suggest a contrastive interpretation, as extract (15) above, the latter deny a certain propositional content, without implicitly conveying any contrastive meaning, as in (16):

- (16) Ho detto che non sono pienamente soddisfatta
 AUX.PRES.1SG say-PAST_PART that NEG be-PRES.1SG fully satisfied
 della struttura, **non è** **che** io sono
 by_DET facility, NEG be-PRES.3SG that PRO.NOM.1SG be-PRES.1SG
 completamente delusa dal percorso di studi
 completely disappointed by_DET degree_program
 ‘I said that I am not fully satisfied by the facility, it is not that I am completely
 disappointed by the degree program [= ‘I am not completely disappointed by the
 degree program’]’
 (KIParla Corpus, BOA1018)

Yet, as Bernini (1992: 202) acknowledges, the boundaries between the two categories are blurred: “buona parte delle occorrenze non si lascia attribuire univocamente all’uno o all’altro dei due tipi estremi, ma si colloca in una sorta di *continuum* tra i due” [most occurrences cannot be univocally interpreted as belonging to one of the two groupings but occupy an intermediate position on a cline between them]. Accordingly, we will leave aside the latter distinction and focus on the three structural features discussed at the beginning of this section.

A few years later, D’Achille et al. (2005: 266) examined the data of the LIP corpus⁶ and found roughly 250 cleft sentences, one third of which were negative cleft constructions. The basic conclusions of their analysis were that *i) non è che + S* is a mitigating device which may be resorted to in order to explain with greater accuracy

⁶ See De Mauro et al. (1993).

the content of a previous utterance⁷, and *ii*) in spontaneous informal speech, negative cleft constructions are being grammaticalized as negative operators almost equivalent to pre-verbal *non*.

A similar conclusion was reached by Ramat (2006: 356), who maintained that *non è che + S* “may undergo semantic bleaching, as it has been the case with many negative strategies in the long run of language history. It may lose, or be on the way of losing, its specific function and simply become equivalent to [unmarked] sentence negation”. This outcome is favoured by the syntactic position of *non è che*, which precedes the finite verb of the *that*-sentence, and hence is comparable to a pre-verbal negative operator, the preferred option in cross-linguistic terms (cf. Section 2.1). Hence, a sentence like (13) can easily be rephrased as:

- (18) [...] ho visto che **non** mi fa **niente**
 AUX.PRES.1SG realized that NEG PRO.DAT.1SG do-PRES.3SG nothing
 ‘[...] I realized that it is not doing me any good’

A final point made by D’Achille et al. (2005) was that the analysis of the LIP corpus revealed another use of the negative cleft structure: the occurrence of *non è che* at the end of the utterance, often with a suspensive intonation, as if the speaker was inviting the addressee to draw his or her own conclusions on the subject under discussion. The same peculiarity had already been noted by Berretta (2002 [1994]: 379), who observed:

In un’altra conversazione del medesimo *corpus*, non conteggiata per il presente lavoro, ho notato l’uso di *non è che* sospeso in fine di enunciato, come formula di chiusura generica, che affida la conclusione alla cooperazione dell’interlocutore (o ad una riformulazione del parlante).

[In another interaction of the same corpus, not considered in the present work, I noticed the use of *non è che* at the end of the utterance, as a generic closing formula, which assigns the conclusion to the interlocutor’s cooperation (or to a reformulation uttered by the speaker herself)].

7 A mitigating function is pointed out by Bernini (1992) as well, who remarks that there are at least some contexts in which a negative cleft structure is semantically equivalent to a concessive clause, as in (17):

- (17) Questa roba di G. **non** è **che** c’entri
 this stuff of G. NEG be-PRES.3SG that be_relevant-PRES.3SG
 un granché, ma è interessante
 a lot, but be-PRES.3SG interesting
 ‘As for G.’s stuff, it is not that it is very relevant, but it’s interesting’
 [= ‘As for G.’s stuff, though it is not very relevant, it’s interesting’] (Bernini 1992: 204)

This use of *non è che* as a “closing formula” is consistently attested within the KIParla corpus as well – cf. (19) and (20) – and, as we shall see, it can be said to function as a discourse marker in its own right.

(19) No, vabbè, siamo andati a cena ed è
 NEG well, AUX.PRES.1PL go-PAST_PART to dinner and AUX.PRES.3SG
 andato tutto benissimo, **non è che ...**
 go-PAST_PART everything very_well NEG be-PRES.3SG that
 ‘No, well, we had dinner [together] and everything went very well, it is not that...’
 (KIParla Corpus, BOA3002)

(20) Questo magari/ cioè è giusto che tu/
 this maybe that_is be-PRES.3SG right that PRO.NOM.2SG
 è legittimo quello che pensi, **non è che**
 be-PRES.3SG legitimate what think-PRES.2SG NEG be-PRES.3SG that
 ‘This maybe/ I mean, it is right that you/ what you think is legitimate, it is not
 that...’
 (KIParla Corpus, BOA3018)

More recently, the structural features and discursive functions of the negative cleft construction have been discussed by Spina (2019), who compares the linguistic materials of the LIP corpus (dating to the 1990s) with those of a similar corpus collected two decades later, the *Perugia corpus* (cf. Spina 2014). Her analysis reveals that *non è che* has progressively extended its frequency of occurrence in informal face-to-face interactions and in telephone conversations, while the data concerning television talk shows display no significant difference (see Table 1), probably because they include a higher proportion of careful/planned speech.

Table 1: Comparison between LIP corpus and Perugia Corpus (Spina 2019: 100).

	LIP corpus (1990–92)	Perugia corpus (2010–13)
Informal face-to-face interactions	3.1 %	5.6 %
Informal telephone interactions	2 %	4.1 %
TV talk shows	2.2 %	2 %

Besides, Spina (2019) draws attention to a feature of the negative cleft construction that had not been mentioned in previous research, i.e., the fact that it may function as a double focus-marking device whereby the speaker can direct the attention of his/her hearers to both the negative structure and to a pronominal subject, by

extracting the latter from the cleft sentence and placing it before the negative particle *non*, as *io* ‘I’ in (21a) or *lui* ‘he’ in (22a):

- (21) a- *io non è che volevo aggiungere*
 PRO.NOM.1SG NEG be-PRES.IND.3SG that want-IMPERF.1SG add-INF
chissà quanti crediti
 who_knows how_many credits
 ‘As for me, it is not that I wanted to add heaven knows how many credits!’
 (KIParla Corpus, BOA1018)

- b- *non (è che) volevo aggiungere*
 NEG be-PRES.IND.3SG that want-IMPERF.1SG add-INF
chissà quanti crediti, io
 who_knows how_many credits, PRO.NOM.1SG

- (22) a- *lui non è che sa il numero*
 PRO.NOM.3SG NEG be-PRES.IND.3SG that know-PRES.3SG DET number
preciso di persone che vanno a mangiare
 precise of people that go-PRES.3PL to eat-INF
 ‘As for him (the owner of a mountain hut), he cannot know for sure the
 number of people coming for lunch’ (KIParla Corpus, BOD2008)

- b- *non (è che) sa il numero preciso*
 NEG be-PRES.IND.3SG that know-PRES.3SG DET number precise
di persone che vanno a mangiare, lui
 of people that go-PRES.3PL to eat-INF PRO.NOM.3SG

In both spoken and written Italian, subject pronouns may be put into focus by placing them in sentence-final position, like in extracts (21b) and (22b), where both pre-verbal *non* and *non è che* are equally acceptable. The choice of a negative cleft structure, however, admits two options – the focussed pronoun may be placed either at the beginning or in sentence-final position – unlike standard negation with pre-verbal *non*, which allows only the latter. This is because by placing the subject pronoun immediately before *non* we would obtain a pragmatically unmarked SVO sentence, where the pronominal subject (if openly expressed) is interpreted as the topic of the utterance:

- (21) c- **io** **non** volevo aggiungere chissà
 PRO.NOM.1SG NEG want-IMPERF.1SG add-INF who_knows
 quanti crediti
 how_many credits
 ‘I did not want to add heaven knows how many credits!’
- (22) c- **lui** **non** sa il numero preciso di persone
 PRO.NOM.3SG NEG know-PRES.3SG DET number precise of people
 che vanno a mangiare
 that go-PRES.3PL to eat-INF
 ‘He cannot know for sure the number of people coming for lunch’.

Someone might object that the pronominal subjects of (21a) and (22a) are the topic, rather than a secondary focus, of the corresponding utterances⁸. In fact, while a sentence may contain two (or more) topical elements with different degrees of topicality or givenness (Berretta 2002[1995]: 153), double-focus constructions are comparatively rarer, both in Italian and cross-linguistically. We will leave this question open, though the analysis of the larger conversational context in which extracts (21a) and (22a) are embedded appears to corroborate Spina’s (2019) interpretation by suggesting that the pronominal subjects *io* and *lui* function as “second occurrence focus” of the corresponding utterances, displaying “a combination of ‘focus-ness’ on the one hand and ‘givenness’ on the other” (Baumann 2016: 503).

To sum up, the studies carried out in the last decades suggest that the higher frequency of occurrence of negative cleft structures may be due to their higher syntactic flexibility in comparison to standard negation with pre-verbal *non*, as well as to their “pragmatic versatility” (Spina 2019: 111), which enables the speaker to perform a number of discursive functions, including:

- i) denying the propositional content of a negative clause (cf. extract 15);
- ii) when employed as a “closing formula”, inviting the addressee to draw his or her own conclusions on the subject under discussion (cf. extracts 19 and 20);
- iii) acting as double focus-marking device whereby the speaker can put into focus both the negative structure and a pronominal subject (cf. extracts 21 and 22);

As anticipated, the next section will be devoted to the comparison of the negative constructions occurring within the KIParla corpus with the corresponding occurrences in a thirty-hour sample from the *Teche Rai* data base. Further empirical evi-

⁸ My thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper for drawing my attention to this point.

dence will be discussed in order to come to a better understanding of the tendency under way and assess Monica Berretta's hypothesis concerning sentence negation in neo-standard Italian.

3 Negative structures in Neo-standard Italian: a case study

3.1 The data

RAI, the Italian national television company, began its broadcasting in 1954, with a single channel; a second national channel went on air in 1976, while a third channel was launched three years later. A selection of the programs (including documentaries, talk shows, news programs, etc.) broadcast from the 1950s onwards is available at the *Teche Rai* archive, a digital audio and video data base which can be accessed free of charge⁹.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the national television service fulfilled important social functions, including the promotion of literacy and the spread of Italian to larger sections of the population, who used to speak an Italo-Romance dialect as the most common (or even the only) language of everyday communication. But, most importantly, television was promptly endorsed as one of the language norm authorities that contributed to the emergence and diffusion of the new standard which is the focus of this issue. As De Mauro maintains in one of his well-known essays on the subject (2014: 96),

La televisione si fece scuola di italiano. Pochi anni dopo l'esordio della tv, in aree ancora prevalentemente dialettone, [...] fu possibile stabilire che l'ascolto abituale della televisione valeva, ai fini della padronanza dell'italiano, cinque anni di scuola: gli analfabeti e senza scuola imparavano a capire l'italiano come se avessero la licenza elementare; chi aveva la licenza si trovava proiettato tra gli italo-foni all'inizio delle secondarie; con l'ascolto televisivo una licenza media portava all'italiano degli aspiranti universitari.

[Television became an Italian language school. A few years after the introduction of television, in those areas of the country where most people still used to speak an Italo-Romance dialect, it was established that, as far as competency in Italian was concerned, watching tv on a daily basis was comparable to five years of school attendance: illiterate people developed a proficiency equivalent to their counterparts with elementary school graduation; the latter dis-

⁹ See www.techerai.it (last accessed on 13 June 2022).

played language skills similar to contemporaries entering secondary school; persons holding a middle school diploma attained the same proficiency of graduates aspiring to university studies.]¹⁰

Another reason for choosing to analyse linguistic materials from the *Teche Rai* data base is that the recordings involve speakers from different regions of the country, whose Italian displays various local and regional features, and whose sociolinguistic profile and educational background are accordingly extremely heterogeneous. For the purpose of this study, thirty hours of recordings dating back to the 1960s, the 1970s and 1980s were selected and all the occurrences of sentence negation analysed. An outline of the recordings can be found in the Appendix; all the data were anonymised by removing personal names, place names and other identifying information.

As for the KIParla corpus (Mauri et al. 2019), its size is 70 hours, corresponding to roughly 700 thousand words. The data were collected in two Italian towns, Torino and Bologna, and include several types of interactions recorded in the academic domain, e.g., professor-student interactions in office hours and in oral examinations, academic lessons, semi-structured interviews collected by students within peer-groups, spontaneous conversations recorded by in-group members, involving both students and teaching staff. A noteworthy social feature shared by all the participants is, accordingly, the high level of education. A fully-fledged description of the KIParla corpus is offered in the Preface to this issue, hence we will skip further details and turn to the analysis of the data.

3.2 Results

The sample of recordings from the *Teche Rai* database contains roughly two thousand occurrences of sentence negation; however, only a marginal percentage of them displays a negation other than unmarked preverbal *non*. As illustrated in table 2, the total number of non-standard sentence negation occurrences amounts to 40; 29 occurrences out of 40 (amounting to 72.5%) entail the use of a negative cleft sentence, whereas the remaining 11 occurrences entail the use of *mica*, either in a discontinuous *non V mica* structure (9 occurrences; 22.5%) or in pre-verbal position (2 occurrences; 5%). There are no examples of *mica* in post-verbal position: its use as the only negative operator is probably perceived as too regional, too ‘dialectal’ even by Northern Italian speakers, and is accordingly avoided.

¹⁰ Lack of space prevents us from addressing this aspect in greater detail; for a thorough discussion of the role played by the national television company in spreading the national language over the country, the reader is referred to De Mauro (2003 [1963]: 118–126) and (2014: 92–98).

Table 2: Occurrences of *mica* and *non è che + S* in the Teche Rai sample

	Occurrences of non-standard sentence NEG	<i>Non è che + S</i>	<i>Non V mica</i> (standard)	<i>Mica V</i> (standard)	<i>V mica</i> (sub-standard)
1960s	8	4 (50 %)	3 (37.5 %)	1 (12.5 %)	---
1970s	15	11 (73.3 %)	4 (26.7 %)	---	---
1980s	17	14 (82.3 %)	2 (11.8 %)	1 (5.9 %)	---
Total	40	29 (72.5 %)	9 (22.5 %)	2 (5 %)	---

In most of the recordings dating to the 1960s, a careful speech style prevails over spontaneous speech and, impressionistically, speech rate appears to be lower if compared to the recordings of the following decades. This however does not justify the apparent lack of variation in sentence negation.

All in all, the occurrences of negative cleft constructions entail less than 1 occurrence per hour of recording; yet this result is consistent with previous investigations (e.g., Spina 2019) attesting a gradual but steady rise in the percent of *non è che + S* occurrences.

The limited number of occurrences within the *Teche Rai* sample is largely compensated by the analysis of the KIParla corpus, whose data enable us to draw a clearer picture of the structural and functional features of negative cleft constructions. As illustrated in table 3, we were able to analyse more than 400 occurrences of *non è che*, and 48 instances of sentence negation involving the use of *mica*, either in a discontinuous *non V mica* structure (28 occurrences, amounting to 6.1 % of the total), in pre-verbal position (11 occurrences, 2.5 % of the total), or in post-verbal position (9 occurrences, 1.9 % of the total). It was not possible to determine the corresponding percentages in relation to the total number of occurrences of sentence negation within the corpus¹¹; nevertheless, the raw data show that, within the KIParla corpus, *non è che* is by far the most frequent non-standard sentence negation strategy – almost fourteen times more frequent than discontinuous *non V mica* negation – exceeded only by unmarked standard negation with preverbal *non* (either alone or in combination with another negative quantifier in post-verbal position).

¹¹ For the moment, the linguistic materials of the KIParla corpus are not annotated, hence the research tool cannot automatically distinguish the occurrences of *non* as sentence negation from those of *non* as constituent or phrase negation.

Table 3: Occurrences of *mica* and *non è che + S* in the KIParla corpus

Occurrences of non-standard sentence NEG	<i>Non è che + S</i>	<i>Non V mica</i> (standard)	<i>Mica V</i> (standard)	<i>V mica</i> (sub-standard)
458	410 (89.5 %)	28 (6.1 %)	11 (2.5 %)	9 (1.9 %)

If we turn to the structural features of negative cleft constructions mentioned by Bernini (1992), the first observation is that in both the *Teche Rai* sample and the KIParla corpus the verb form attested in the cleft sentence is invariably in the present indicative. No occurrences of imperfect (*non era che...*) or future tense (*non sarà che ...*) are attested.

The analysis of the *that*-clauses, on the other hand, reveals that, despite the alleged disappearance of the subjunctive mood from spoken Italian, indicative is far from being the default choice: within the *Teche Rai* sample we notice an almost even split between indicative and subjunctive; as for the KIParla corpus, the indicative mood prevails (279 occurrences, roughly 78 % of the total), but a subjunctive verb form is attested in 77 (21.5 %) occurrences (cf. Table 4).

Table 4: Types of negative cleft sentences and mood occurring within the *that*-clause (KIParla corpus).

<i>Non è che + S</i>			<i>Non è che ...</i> (closing formula)
357 (87.1 %)			
<i>Indicative</i> 279 (78.1 %)	<i>Subjunctive</i> 77 (21.5 %)	<i>Conditional</i> 1 (0.4 %)	53 (12.9 %)

Quite predictably, the presence of the subjunctive conveys a more tentative and counterfactual value to the content of the *that*-clause, as in (23), where the speaker is considering the possible explanations for the sudden death of a colleague of his:

- (23) **non è che** io avvalli la tesi
 NEG be-PRES.3SG that PRO.NOM.1SG endorse-PRES.SUBJ.1SG DET thesis
 del suicidio, sono estremamente incerto, lo
 of_DET suicide be-PRES.1SG extremely doubtful PRO.ACC.3SG
 confesso
 confess-PRES.IND.1SG
 'It is not that I endorse the thesis of a suicide, I am extremely doubtful, I must confess'
 (*Teche Rai* data base, 1982)

- (24) è stato presentato come un codice
 be-PRES.3SG be-PAST_PART present-PAST_PART as a code
 rivoluzionario anche se poi, se andiamo a vedere, **non**
 revolutionary even if then if go-PRES.1PL to see-INF NEG
è **che** fosse tanto rivoluzionario
 be-PRES.3SG that be-IMPER.SUBJ.3SG much revolutionary
 ‘It was presented as a revolutionary code, though, at a closer look, it was not so
 ground-breaking’
 (KIParla Corpus, TOC1006)

Both present and imperfect subjunctive (as in extract 24) are attested within the subordinate clause, whose predicate conveys the temporality of the entire sentence: present-time vs. past-time reference, as the last two examples illustrate (cf. Bernini 1992: 197–98).

On the contrary, an indicative verb form prevails in low formality contexts, when the style is closer to spontaneous speech, as in (25), or even because the speaker may be more familiar with the indicative (*stava*, in extract 26) than with the corresponding imperfect subjunctive form (*stesse*):

- (25) io c’ho da fare, **non è** **che** sto
 PRO.NOM.1SG have-PRES.1SG to do-INF NEG be-PRES.3SG that stay-PRES.1SG
 qua a vostra disposizione
 here at your disposal
 ‘I am busy, it is not that I stay here at your disposal [= I cannot stay here at your disposal]’.
 (KIParla Corpus, PTD012)

- (26) quella sera ero fuori provincia per lavoro,
 that evening be-IMPERF.IND.1SG out province for work
non è **che** la ditta stava sempre in
 NEG be-PRES.3SG that DET firm stay-IMPERF.IND.3SG always in
 città, io giravo
 town PRO.NOM.1SG go_around-IMPERF.IND.1SG
 ‘That evening I was working out of the province, it is not that our firm used to be
 always in town, I used to go around’.
 (*Teche Rai* data base, 1988)

Occasionally, *non è che* may introduce a direct question, as in (27), where the interviewer (S2) defiantly asks a politician (S1) whether he is tempted to disavow a controversial law that had recently been approved thanks to his very effort and collaboration:

- (27) S1: la legge non è mia, né divento
 DET law NEG be-PRES.3SG mine nor become-PRES.1SG
 il padre putativo
 DET father putative
 S2: non è che la disconosce?
 NEG be-PRES.3SG that PRO.ACC.3SG disavow-PRES.3SG(POLITE)

S1: I am neither the promoter of the law [lit. the law is not mine], nor its putative father

S2: it is not that you are disavowing it?
 (*Teche Rai* data base, 1979)

Within the KIParla corpus, direct questions preceded by *non è che* entail either a polite offer, as in (28)¹², or a potentially face-threatening request, as in (29), where the choice of a negative cleft structure functions as a mitigating device which minimizes the impact of the question itself:

- (28) ma non è che vuoi prendere un caffè?
 but NEG be-PRES.3SG that want.PRES.2SG take.INF a coffee
 'But it is not that you want to take a coffee? [= Would you like a coffee?]
 (KIParla Corpus, TOD2008)

- (29) ma non è che la stai usando
 but NEG be-PRES.3SG that PRO.ACC.3SG AUX.PROG.2SG use-GERUND
 al contrario?
 to contrary
 'But it is not that you are using it the other way round?
 [= You are using it the other way round, aren't you?]
 (KIParla Corpus, PTD016)

¹² Note that, in this context, *non è che* is in direct competition with *non V mica*, as illustrated in Section 2.1.

In 19 occurrences *non è che* introduces a negative clause: as we mentioned in Section 2.2, in Italian, a negative cleft structure is the only means available in order to deny the propositional content of a negative utterance. Extracts (30) and (31) are two examples from the KIParla corpus: incidentally, the latter is the only instance of a *that*-clause containing a conditional verb form (cf. Table 3.4).

- (30) non lo so, non è che non ci
 NEG PRO.ACC.3SG know-PRES.1SG NEG be-PRES.3SG that NEG there
 siano idee, è come se fosse
 be-PRES.SUBJ.3PL ideas be-PRES.3SG as if be-IMPERF.SUBJ.3SG
 ancora un po' addormentata, la città
 still a little asleep DET town
 'I don't know, it is not that there are no ideas, it is as if the town were still asleep'
 (KIParla Corpus, PTD010)

- (31) S1: ehm, ti trasferiresti all' estero per lavoro?
 PRO.ACC.2SG move-PRES.COND.2SG to_DET abroad to work
 S2: non posso, non è che non
 NEG be_able-PRES.1SG NEG be-PRES.3SG that NEG
 vorrei, mi piacerebbe vedere l'
 want-PRES.COND.1SG PRO.DAT.1SG like-PRES.COND.3SG visit-INF DET
 estero, ma ho problemi famigliari
 abroad but have-PRES.1SG problems family

S1: Would you move abroad for working reasons?

S2: I cannot, it is not that I do not want to, I would like to stay abroad, but I have got some family problems

(KIParla Corpus, PTA005)

In this particular context (i.e., when *non è che* is used to deny the propositional content of the following clause), the indicative mood still prevails over the others: the subordinate clause typically appears in the form of a quotation containing the same mood employed in the original utterance (see Bernini 1992: 202).

A final observation emerging from the analysis of the KIParla corpus is that in 53 occurrences (amounting to 12.9% of the total) *non è che* is employed as a “closing formula” (see table 3.3). When used to fulfil this function, *non è che* occurs in sentence final position (as in 32), but it may occasionally be followed by either an indicative or a subjunctive verb form as in extract (33) and (34), respectively. This suggest that *non è che* has the potential for becoming grammaticalized as a

discourse marker, whereby the speaker invites the addressee to draw his or her own conclusions on the topic under discussion.

- (32) se ho il tempo e la testa, tra l' altro,
 if have-PRES.1SG DET time and DET head among DET other
 perché anche quando ho il tempo **non è che** ...
 because even when have-PRES.1SG DET time NEG be-PRES.3SG that
 'If I have time and concentration, among other things, for even if I have the time,
 it is not that...'
 (KIParla Corpus, BOA3010)

- (33) io sono poco influente, **non è che posso** ...
 NOM.1SG be-PRES.1SG little influential NEG be-PRES.3SG that be_able-PRES.1SG
 '[A politician is asked whether he has ever happened to give backings to friends:]
 I have little influence, it is not that I can ... [= I have little influence, I cannot ...]'
 (*Teche Rai* data base, 1962)

- (34) però comunque è difficile, **non è**
 but anyway be-PRES.3SG difficult NEG be-PRES.3SG
che sia ...
 that be-PRES.SUBJ.3SG
 'But, anyway, it is difficult, it is not that...'
 (KIParla Corpus, PTD016)

4 Discussion and conclusions

The qualitative analysis carried out so far calls for a number of final considerations. First, both *non è che* and the various negative structures entailing the use of *mica* still occupy a marginal position among the strategies for sentence negation in neo-standard Italian. Hence, all these structures are marked in terms of frequency, since they are considerably less frequent than “standard” negation with pre-verbal *non*. *Non è che* + S and *non V mica* are also marked in terms of formal complexity since they both entail the use of more morphemes than their unmarked counterpart (pre-verbal *non*). Finally, as Bernini (1992: 208–9) pointed out, *non è che* + S, *non V mica* and *V mica* are marked in cross-linguistic comparison, for they are less widely distributed in the world languages than sentence negation entailing the use of a single, pre-verbal negative operator (cf. Section 2.1).

Table 5: Comparison among various negative constructions

	Frequency-based markedness	Cross-linguistic markedness	Morphological markedness
<i>non è che</i> + S	+	+	+
<i>non V mica</i>	+	+	+
<i>V mica</i>	+	+	–
<i>mica V</i>	+	–	–
“standard” pre-verbal <i>non</i>	–	–	–

As Monica Berretta (2002 [1994]) correctly assumed, in the last decades, negative cleft constructions have gradually but steadily increased their frequency of occurrence and appear to be favoured over *mica* negative structures. Our case study confirms that this outcome is shaped by the interplay of pragmatic factors with syntactic and functional ones.

As we mentioned, negative cleft constructions enable the speaker to fulfil a number of pragmatic functions:

- i) denying the propositional content of a negative clause (see extracts 15 and 30);
- ii) introducing a direct question, which may be either a polite offer (extract 28) or a potentially face-threatening request (as in extracts 27 and 29);
- iii) when employed as closing formulas, inviting the addressee to draw his or her own conclusions on the subject under discussion (see extracts 32 to 34)¹³;

In terms of information structure, as Spina (2019) convincingly argued, negative cleft constructions may function as double focus marking devices whereby the speaker can put into focus both the negative structure and a pronominal subject by extracting the latter from the cleft sentence and placing it before the negative particle *non* (cf. Section 2.2). Comment (i.e., information about the topic under discussion) is normally conveyed by the *that*-clause and, in the presence of a topical noun phrases, the latter may be placed at the beginning of the sentence, before the cleft negative structure, as *la manodopera* ‘manpower’ in extract (35)¹⁴:

¹³ Though this point needs further investigation, the occurrences attested within the KIParla corpus suggest that, when performing this function, *non è che* is becoming grammaticalized as a discourse marker in its own right;

¹⁴ Incidentally, extract (35) is also a clear-cut instance of *metalinguistic* negative cleft sentence (see Section 2.2) according to the terminology of Bernini (1992).

- (35) la manodopera **non** è **che** ci siano
 DET manpower NEG be-PRES.3SG that there be-PRES.SUBJ.3PL
 delle difficoltà, non si trova
 some difficulties NEG IMPERS find-PRES.3SG
 'As for manpower, it is not that it is hard to find, it is nowhere to be found'.
 (*Teche Rai* data base, 1976)

The increasing figures of occurrence of *non è che* are also motivated by its syntactic position: the structure is placed immediately before the finite verb of the *that*-clause, a position that makes it almost equivalent to pre-verbal *non*, the preferred option in cross-linguistic terms. This has led some scholars (e.g. D'Achille et al. 2005: 266; Ramat 2006: 356) to conclude that *non è che* is a likely candidate for grammaticalization into a pre-verbal negative operator. If *non è che* underwent grammaticalization and semantic bleaching, it could reduce both its morphological and cross-linguistic markedness, thus enhancing its competition with *mica* + *V* as an alternative means of sentence negation.

As for *mica* negative structures – leaving aside post-verbal *mica*, which tends to be associated with uneducated speakers of Northern Italo-Romance dialects and is accordingly stigmatised (e.g., Ruffino 2006; Guerini 2011) – they have hitherto specialised to express distinctive pragmatic and discursive functions only partially overlapping with those associated to the use of *non è che*: discontinuous *non V mica* negation is employed either as a politeness device in direct questions (extract 3) or in order to deny a conversational implicature not explicitly uttered in the previous interactional turns (extracts 1 and 2), and may occur in appositive relative clauses (extract 5a). Pre-verbal *mica* has specialised in denying Hearer-new content, i.e., propositional content that is not known to the hearer (cf. Cerruti 2020; extracts 7 and 8). Both structures have already entered the new standard variety of contemporary Italian and, together with *non è che*, enhance its variability and make it suited to its multiple functions as an everyday means of face-to-face communication.

Appendix

Outline of the *Teche RAI* corpus.

1960s

Name of the program and broadcast date	Length
<i>Natale nel mondo</i> [Christmas around the world] (December 1960)	45 min.
<i>Ritratti contemporanei: Adriano Olivetti</i> [Contemporary portraits: A. Olivetti] (January 1961)	27 min.
<i>RT – Rotocalco televisivo</i> [Weekly TV news program] (April 1962)	72 min.
<i>Viaggio nell'Italia che cambia</i> [Journey to a changing Italy] (4 March 1963)	52 min.
<i>Viaggio nell'Italia che cambia</i> [Journey to a changing Italy] (18 March 1963)	58 min.
<i>Viaggio nell'Italia che cambia</i> [Journey to a changing Italy] (April 1963)	68 min.
<i>Viaggio intorno al cervello</i> [Journey to the brain] (episode 2, 1965)	58 min.
<i>I figli crescono</i> [Kids grow up] (March 1966)	33 min.
<i>Ritratti di città: Prato</i> [Portrait of a town: Prato] (February 1967)	50 min.
<i>Ritratti di città: Matera</i> [Portrait of a town: Matera] (5 March 1968)	50 min.
<i>Ritratti di città: Bergamo</i> [Portrait of a town: Bergamo] (12 March 1968)	50 min.
<i>Sapere. L'Italia dei dialetti</i> [Italy, a country of dialects] (17 November 1969)	28 min.
<i>Sapere. L'Italia dei dialetti</i> [Italy, a country of dialects] (24 November 1969)	29 min.

1970s

Name of the program and broadcast date	Length
<i>Sapere. L'Italia dei dialetti</i> [Italy, a country of dialects] (January 1970)	28 min.
<i>Mentre l'Italia cambia</i> [Italy is changing] (May 1970)	50 min.
<i>Cronache italiane</i> [Italian chronicles] (October 1970)	33 min.
<i>Cinema 70</i> (March 1971)	22 min.
<i>Habitat: Gli inquilini dell'Expo</i> [Habitat: Expo's tenants] (December 1971)	20 min.
<i>Sapere. L'Italia dei dialetti</i> [Italy, a country of dialects] (November 1972)	25 min.

1970s (continued)

Name of the program and broadcast date	Length
<i>Come nasce un'opera d'arte: "il Sole sul cavalletto" di Giorgio De Chirico</i> [How a work of art is created: Giorgio De Chirico's <i>Il sole sul cavalletto</i>] (1973)	43 min.
<i>Facciamo insieme</i> [Let's make it together] (January 1975)	24 min.
<i>Paesaggio rurale: la Maremma</i> [Rural landscape: the Maremma] (December 1975)	27 min.
<i>Città e campagna: l'immigrazione a Torino</i> [Town and country: immigration to Turin] (February 1976)	50 min.
<i>La questione femminile: intervista a Elena Gianini Belotti</i> [The feminist question: interview to E. Gianini Belotti] (1976)	26 min.
<i>TG2 Dossier: a sette anni dall'approvazione dello Statuto dei lavoratori</i> [TG2 Dossier: seven years after the approval of the Workers' Act] (1977)	42 min.
<i>Proibito</i> [Forbidden] (18 July 1977)	50 min.
<i>Proibito</i> [Forbidden] (25 July 1977)	60 min.
<i>Bontà loro: intervista al regista Marco Ferreri</i> [Interview to director M. Ferreri] (1978)	22 min.
<i>Teatromusica</i> [Musical Theater] (February 1978)	35 min.
<i>Acquario</i> [Acquarium] (January 1979)	56 min.

1980s

Name of the program and broadcast date	Length
<i>Ricerche etnologiche nel canavese: il vino</i> [Etnological Research in Canavese region: the wine] (May 1980)	30 min.
<i>Testimoni del nostro tempo. Ricordo di Vittorio Bachelet</i> [Witnesses to our times: Remembering V. Bachelet] (1981)	50 min.
<i>Arcobaleno</i> [Rainbow] (February 1981)	15 min.
<i>Incontri della notte – Alberto Moravia</i> [Night encounters: A. Moravia] (1982)	20 min.
<i>La telefonata</i> [The phone call] (July 1982)	20 min.
<i>Sorgente di vita: Ritorno ad Auschwitz</i> [Life spring: back to Auschwitz] (April 1983)	35 min.
<i>Vediamoci sul Due: intervista a Ettore Scola</i> [See you on Channel 2: interview to E. Scola] (May 1984)	11 min.

1980s (continued)

Name of the program and broadcast date	Length
<i>Mixerstar</i> (February 1985)	10 min.
<i>Linea diretta</i> [Direct line] (March 1985)	20 min.
<i>Torino Magica</i> [Magic Turin] (1986)	30 min.
<i>Delta – In fuga verso il futuro</i> [Delta – Runaway to future] (July 1985)	42 min.
<i>TG2 Dossier: Effetto Chernobyl</i> [TG2 Dossier: Chernobyl effect] (July 1986)	28 min.
<i>Fatti nostri</i> [Our business] (1987)	30 min.
<i>Chock del Futuro: Democrazia elettronica</i> [Future shocks: electronic democracy] (1988)	25 min.
<i>Parola mia</i> [My word] (1988)	14 min.
<i>Telefono Giallo – Il delitto delle bambine di Marsala</i> [Yellow telephone: the Marsala crime] (1988)	160 min.
<i>Fluff, processo alla TV</i> [Fluff, TV under prosecution] (January 1989)	45 min.
<i>I racconti del 113</i> [The 911 tales] (October 1989)	20 min.

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