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THE OBLIGATORINESS OF *NE* FOR THE LICENSING OF N-WORDS IN STANDARD FRENCH

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ABSTRACT
This paper revisits the licensing relation of *ne* to N-words in Standard French with the proposal that the former licenses the latter contrary to the syntactic agreement analysis provided by Zeijlstra (2004) and Penka (2007). The present account relies on the variation provided by the linguistic system of Standard French to argue that there are multiple versions of *ne* with varying semantic strengths available in Standard French in spite of the existence of a decaying version of this marker. It follows that the semantically stronger *ne* bear the negative feature needed for the licensing of n-words.

Keywords: negation, negative concord, n-words, Standard French, Jespersen Cycle.

INTRODUCTION

This paper revisits the licensing relation of negative markers to n-words in Standard French. Syntactic studies on negation and N-words have established that the later are inherently non-negative in negative concord languages. This means that they need to be license by negation. Zeijlstra (2004) however posits that *ne* in SF is semantically non-negative and, as such, cannot licence the N-words with which it co-occurs (1). Moreover, *pas* in SF cannot be considered to licence N-words because it never co-occurs with an N-word under a single negation reading. N-words co-occur with *pas* only under a double negation reading (2). This implies that *pas* contributes one semantic negation while the second semantic negation is contributed by a phonetically silent negator as postulated by Zeijlstra (2004). What is puzzling is that the silent operator cannot license N-word in the absence of *ne*, thus showing that *ne* has a part to play in the licensing of N-words. Yet Zeijlstra (2004) remains silent about this. In order to rescue this syntactic analysis, Penka (2007) argues that the silent negative operator with the ability to license N-words featurally differs from *pas*. This provides a system with a silent and an overt negative operator. Yet none of them can license N-words in the absence of *ne*. If *ne* in (1) is not contributing anything to the licensing of N-words, the question this raises is why the latter never occurs in the absence of *ne* in SF. Differently stated, if *ne* in (1) and (2) is not doing anything, why must its absence lead to ungrammaticality?

(1) Personne ne parle a personne
n-person NEG talk to n-person
'Nobody talks to anybody'

(2) Jean ne gagne pas rien
Jean Neg earn Neg n-thing
'John earns much'

The position taken here is that *ne* is actually licensing N-words. Accordingly, I propose that an overlapping approach to the JC offers better insights into the dataset involving negative concord in SF. The remainder of the paper summarizes the syntactic agreement analysis in section 2. Section 3 discusses the Jespersen Cycle in its linear and in its overlapping approaches. And section 4 shows how an overlapping approach can better capture the real empirical data involving negation in SF, thus making it possible to see that multiple versions of bipartite negation strategies together co-occur alongside the monopartite strategies *ne* and *pas* which also come in diverse semantic strengths.

1. The syntactic agreement account of n-words

Many scholars (Herburger, 2001; de Swart & Sag, 2002) have addressed the question surrounding the inherent semantics of N-words which convey the semantics of negation in some languages, but not in others. In the first case involving double negation[1] languages like Dutch, n-words and negative markers cannot co-occur in a clause expressing a single negation (3). In negative concord[2] languages such as Czech (4), an n-word and a negative marker together convey a single negation.

(3) a. Niemand loopt (Dutch)
n-person walks
' Nobody walks'

b. *Niemand loopt niet
n-person walks Neg
'Nobody walks'

(4) a. Milan nevidi nikoho (Czech)
Milan Neg sees n-person
'Milan doesn't see anybody'

Like in mathematical logic, two negations cancel out in Dutch, unlike in Czech. Zeijltra (2004) however argues that there is semantically only a single negation in (4), and that the two negative items seen in the linear order are involved in a syntactic agreement relation. He thus departs from both the lexical ambiguity approach proposed by Herburger (2001) and the resumptive quantification analysis of de Swart & Sag (2002) and innovates a syntactic agreement analysis which establishes a difference between a negator which bears a semantic feature and one that is a mere syntactic element. Section 2.1 summarizes this analysis. Section 2.2 raises some problems with this analysis, and section 2.3 discusses Penka's proposal to improve the analysis.

[1] Henceforth, DN.
[2] Henceforth, NC.

1.1. N-words and negative markers in NC and non-NC languages

A distinction has long been established between NC and non-NC languages. Accordingly, Zeijlstra (2004) points to two resulting distinctions. The first is related to the semantics of the n-word. The latter conveys the semantics of negation in the absence of a negative marker in (3), unlike in (4). Then he turns specifically to NC languages and draws attention to the distinction between strict NC and non-strict NC. This second distinction involves the status of the negative marker which is semantically empty in Strict NC languages. In such languages, the negative marker has the unique role of pointing to the semantics of negation in the clause. Zeijlstra (2004) calls such a semantically empty marker of negation a syntactic negator and attributes to it an uninterpretable [u-NEG] feature. By contrast, non-strict NC languages have a negative marker which bears the semantics of negation and as such bear the [i-NEG] feature. Given the lack of negative semantics on the negative marker in strict NC languages, the semantics of negation is contributed in the clauses where it occurs by an operator with an interpretable [i-NEG] feature. The latter will then check the [u-NEG] feature on the syntactic negator and, by so doing functions as the semantic negator which provides the clause with the semantics of negation in strict NC languages. N-words being non-negative in NC languages, this semantic operator also has the function of checking the [u-NEG] feature on them. In (5) *ne* is considered to be the syntactic negation void of the semantics of negation and thus bearing an uninterpretable feature of negation, while *pas* is a phonetically overt negative operator.

(5) a. Je n'ai pas faim (SF)
I NEG have NEG hunger
'I am not hungry'

b. [NegPpas$_{i[i\text{-NEG}]}$[Neg^{0}ne$_{[u\text{-NEG}]}$[VP t_i [VP je ai faim]]]

c. Personne ne parle à personne
n-person NEG talk to n-person
'Nobody talks to anybody'

In this system, *n*(*e*) in (5a) is the syntactic negator, while *pas* is the semantic negator. *Pas* raises from a VP adjunct position to the specifier of NegP where it licenses *ne*. The linear order is obtained when *n*(*e*) cliticises to and is moved higher up in the structure with the verb.

Non-strict NC languages (6), by contrast, have a negative marker which is semantically negative, and could be said to combine the functions of both syntactic and semantic negators.

(6) a. Gianni non telefona a nessuno (Italian)
Gianni NEG call to n-person
Gianni doesn't call anybody

b. Gianni non$_{[i\text{-NEG}]}$ telefona a nessuno$_{[u\text{-NEG}]}$

c. Nessuno telefona a Gianni
n-person call to Gianni
'No one calls Gianni'

d. Op ¬ $_{[i\text{-NEG}]}$nessuno$_{[u\text{-NEG}]}$ telefona a Gianni

Another difference between strict and non-strict NC languages has to do with the co-occurrence relation between the negative marker and the subject n-word. In strict NC languages, the subject n-word does co-occur with the negative marker as in SF (5c). By contrast, the subject n-word and the negative marker do not co-occur (6c) in non-strict NC. To sum up, we observe, on the one hand, that both the negative marker and the n-word are non-negative and carry the [u-NEG] feature in strict NC languages like SF and Czech. On the other hand, only the n-word is non-negative in non-strict NC languages like Italian, while the negative marker is negative and carries an [i-NEG] feature. This implies that the negative marker in non-strict NC is the negative operator (7a) and as such checks the [u-NEG] feature on the n-word, while there is need for a separate negative operator to perform the same task in strict NC languages (7b).

(7) a. [NegP[Neg^0 ¬$_{[i\text{-NEG}]}$ n-word$_{[u\text{-NEG}]}$]]

b. [Op ¬$_{[i\text{-NEG}]}$ n-word$_{[u\text{-NEG}]}$ [NegP[Neg^0$_{[u\text{-NEG}]}$ n-word$_{[u\text{-Neg}]}$]]]

1.2. Problems with Zeijlstra's analysis of n-words

The discussion above raises some questions. Regarding non-strict NC languages like Italian, one observes a variation in the phonetic realization of the negative marker. The latter is phonetically present when the n-word is in object position (6a), but absent if the n-word is in subject position (6c). This raises the need to postulate, in addition to the overt negative operator (6a), a covert negative operator for the licensing of the subject n-word which is inherently negative in NC languages. Without this silent negative operator, it wouldn't be possible to explain the negation interpretation of (6c). We therefore have a covert operator licensing subject n-words, and the overt negator licensing object n-words in non-strict NC languages. Penka (2007) explains these facts relying on the assumption that "licensing under Agree can only take place under c-command". Accordingly, the pre-verbal n-word cannot be licensed by the linearly lower negative marker. This thus raises the necessity of a covert negative operator to license subject n-words in non-strict NC languages.

In the case of strict NC languages, both the negative marker and the n-word are assumed to be licensed by the same negative operator. In Czech for instance, the negative operator is abstract, and thus there is no inconsistency. In SF however, the

syntactic negative marker *ne* and the negative operator *pas* do co-occur, as seen in (5a). But (5c) shows that the n-word and the negative operator *pas* do not co-occur, and if they do as in (8), then we get a double negation reading.

(8) a. Jean ne gagne pas rien
Jean Neg earn Neg n-thing
'John does not earn nothing /John earns much'

b. Jean ne_i gagne [NegPpas$_{[i\text{-NEG}]}$ [Neg^{0}t$_{i[u\text{-NEG}]}$ rien$_{[u\text{-NEG}]}$ / $_{[i\text{-NEG}]}$ DN

x

Zeijlstra follows Haraiwa (2001) according to whom multiple agree is possible, thus positing that a single negative operator Op¯ can agree with and check the [u-NEG] feature on multiple non-negative elements. In the case of Czech, the same negative operator agrees with both the n-word and the negative marker (9).

(9) Op¯$_{[i\text{-NEG}]}$ Milan nevidi$_{[u\text{-NEG}]}$ nikoho$_{[u\text{-NEG}]}$

However, when we consider examples (5c) and (8), we observe that *pas* as a negative operator in the case of SF cannot be said to license the n-word, given that we always obtain a double negation reading when *pas* co-occur with n-words and, which is more, *pas* and n-words are mutually exclusive under a single negation reading. The inconsistency thus uncovered by the SF data shows that there is more complexity at hand than envisioned by Zeijlstra (2004). In view of the above facts, Penka (2007) proposes some revisions to improve on the syntactic agreement analysis of n-words.

1.3. Penka's (2007) proposal regarding the SF data

In order to improve upon an agreement-based account of n-words, Penka (2007) successfully argues that n-words and negative markers are not licensed by the same negative operator in SF. Hence, she proposes an analysis that provides an answer to the question related to the licensing ability of *pas* with regards to n-words, reaching the conclusion that n-words, unlike the negative marker *ne* are licensed by a different negative operator. Her analysis is based on the following observations about SF:

- The two negative markers of SF, *ne* and *pas* generally co-occur in the absence of n-words.
- The two negative markers exhibit stark contrast in their ability to participate in NC with n-words: While *ne* obligatorily co-occurs with n-words and this irrespective of their position, *pas* cannot co-occur with n-words under a NC reading, and this co-occurrence always yields a double negation reading.

From these facts which remain unexplained under Zeijlstra's analysis, Penka (2007) observes that *pas* does not license n-words. She therefore proposes an abstract negator for the licensing of n-words in SF. This abstract negator contributes the

second negation in structures where *pas* and n-words co-occur. The second [i-NEG] is assigned the index Ø. [i-NEGØ] is intended for negative operators without a phonological content, while [i-NEG] is meant for negative operators with a phonological content, in this case *pas*. N-words in SF are thus considered to have the feature [u-NEGØ], which cannot be checked by the [i-NEG] feature on *pas*.

The analysis proposed by Penka thus accounts for the data of SF as shown by her sample derivation for sentences with n-words below.

(10) Personne n'aime personne
n-person NEG love n-person
'Nobody loves anyone'

(11) [TP Op¯$_{[i\text{-}NEG\emptyset]}$ [TP Personne$_{[u\text{-}NEG\emptyset]}$ n'aime personne$_{[u\text{-}NEG\emptyset]}$]] NC

(12) [TP Op¯$_{[i\text{-}NEG\ \emptyset]}$ [TP personne $_{[u\text{-}NEG\emptyset]}$ n'aime [VP Op $_{[i\text{-}NEG\emptyset]}$ [VP personne$_{[u\text{-}NEG\emptyset]}$]]] DN

(13) Jean n'a pas vu personne
Jean NEG has NEG seen n-person
'John has not seen anyone/ John has seen someone'

(14) [TPJean n$_i$'a [NEGPpas$_{[i\text{-}NEG]}$t$_{i[u\text{-}NEG]}$[VPOp¯$_{[i\text{-}NEG\emptyset]}$[VPvu personne$_{[u\text{-}NEG\emptyset]}$]]]

In (11), the abstract Operator is inserted in the specifier of TP, from where it enters into a multiple agree relation with all n-words in the sentence. To obtain the double negation reading in (13), a second abstract operator is inserted lower in the structure; that is, in the specifier of VP, from where it can check the [u-NEGØ] feature on the object n-word. When the overt operator *pas* and n-words co-occur as in (13), *pas* cannot check the uninterpretable feature on the n-word, because it does not have the index Ø. Therefore, an abstract operator is still needed (14), thus bringing in the second negation.

The following inventory of features is given by Penka (2007: 77).

(15) a. Interpretable features
(i) [i-NEG] on overt operators
(ii) [i-NEG Ø] on abstract negative operators

b. Uninterpretable features
(i) [u-NEG] has to be checked by [i-NEG] or [i-NEG Ø]
(ii) [u-NEG Ø] can only be checked by [i-NEG Ø]

In short, Penka's analysis adds a second pair of features [i/u-NEG Ø] to the pair of features previously proposed by Zeijlstra. This addition thus improves on the system by handling those cases which could not be accounted for by Zeijlstra's original proposal. By so doing, Penka establishes a difference between licensing by covert and overt negative operators, where the covert operator stands for the semantically negative element that is not realized phonologically. Notwithstanding

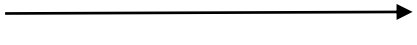
her input, Penka (2007) remains silent about the relation of *ne* to n-words. The gap left by this silence is addressed in section 4. Immediately below, I discuss two views of the Jespersen Cycle. The first, namely the linear approach, is the one that lies in the background of the analysis proposed by Zeijlstra (2004) and Penka (2007), and which sees linguistic variation only in terms of mutually exclusive options and, as such, predicts the impossibility for *ne* and another strategy of negation to both operate as semantic negators within a single language state. The second, which pays more attention to the actual empirical variation involved in language change, provides the possibility for *ne*, *ne pas*, and *pas* to altogether co-exist in SF and to each convey the semantics of negation, but in different contexts.

2. Linear versus overlapping approaches to the Jespersen Cycle

The main objective of this research work is to reconsider the licensing relation of *ne* to n-words in Standard French, a NC language. NC languages have been analyzed as having n-words which are void of the semantics of negation. Accordingly, Rowlet (1998) establishes a co-relation between the position of a language in the JC and its being a NC language or not. In accordance with Jespersen (1924: 333), he proposes that NC holds for languages which lack a [+NEG] in specNegP. I am therefore compelled in this section to make sure my reader is familiar with this cycle before laying down my analysis of SF as a NC and regarding the relation of *ne* to n-words.

This well-known phenomenon involving a shift in the negation system of a language can be perceived either linearly with negative strategies stepping into a language one after the other and also exiting in the same way, with no possible overlap and hence, no possibility for two markers ever striving to rule over the same linguistic space. This perception of fact is represented in (16). A second perception of the same historical phenomenon would have negative strategies step into a linguistic system one after the other, but have to share that system together for some time thus leading to a situation of overlap and a potential conflict regarding space management before one of the strategies imposes itself while others are forced to exit the language. This second perception is represented I (17)

(16)



1 2 3

The three stages of the JC in the standard linear story

(17)

		1		
	1	2	2	
1	2	3	3	3

The stages of the JC in the overlapping view

In 3.1, I briefly discuss the first perception and the resulting implications regarding the relation of negative markers to n-word in SF, while section 3.2 draws the reader's attention to a rather unpopular view to the parametric world, namely, the overlapping approach.

2.1. The standard and linear approach to the JC

In the historical development of negation known as the JC, there are three stages as in (16) where 1 represent the lone standing marker *ne*, with 2 representing the bipartite strategy *ne pas* and 3 the monopartite strategy *pas*. As seen on the line in (16), each of these occurs as the only marker in the linguistic system during a particular time frame. Then another marker steps into the linguistic system while the former peacefully exit the system without any competition arising with the new comer. This perception of the historical change can be illustrated as in English (18) and French (19) below.

(18)	a.	ic	**ne**	secge			stage 1	
	b.	I	**ne**	seye	**not**			stage 2
	c.	I	say	**not**				stage 3a
	c'.	I	do	**not**	say			stage 3b
(19)	a.	Je	**ne**	sais			stage 1	
		I	Neg	know				
		'I don't know.'						
	b.	Je	**ne**	sais	**pas**			stage 2
		I	Neg	know	Neg			
		'I don't know.'						
	c.	Je	sais	**pas**				stage 3
		I	know	Neg				
		'I don't know.'						

In (19b), we have the second stage of the JC which corresponds to *ne pas* in SF. From the strong parametric perspective which upholds mutually exclusive options, a single language state can afford only a single marker/strategy for negation at the same time, be it (bipartite or monopartite). What is meant here is that if one sticks to the position of a single marker at a time for every language state, then, examples such as (20) with the stand alone *n'(e)*as a marker of negation should not occur in SF because this would imply that the latter is in competition with *ne pas*, while competition is not possible into a system that functions like a switch providing one facet at a time. From this perspective, when the switch is on zero (0) only *ne* is at work in the linguistic system. And when the switch is on one (1), only *ne pas* is at work in the system. Hence, by the time one has examples involving *ne pas* as in (21), *ne* is no longer available to the linguistic system, given that no instance of mutual co-existence leading to an eventual competition between markers is possible. It follows that examples such as found in (20) belong the stage preceding SF. And if they occur

in SF, then the *n'* in (20) must necessarily have become semantically void with regard to negation.

(20 personne n'aime personne
(21) Jean n'aime pas Marie
(22) Jean n'a pas vu personne

Moreover, (22) involving both *ne pas* and an n-word should not be interpreted as a case of double negation because the *ne* portion and the *pas* portion of the bipartite strategy should combine together to convey a single negation, given that bipartite negation should be the only visible and conceivable facet of negation in this language state. In the syntactic agreement account discussed in section 2, *n*(*e*) in (21) is considered as the syntactic negator, while *pas* is the semantic negator. *Pas* raises from a VP adjunct position to the specifier of NegP where it licenses *ne*. The linear order is obtained when *n*(*e*) cliticises to and is moved higher up in the structure with the verb. View from this angle, there is no point in the language when the *ne* portion and the *pas* portion of the bipartite strategy concomitantly convey the semantics of negation without any discrimination regarding their semantic strength. This also implies that the *ne* found in *ne pas* does not differ in any way from the *ne* found in stage 1 at the very end of its lifespan. Yet Eckardt:2006/9) provides extensive evidence supporting the position that *pas* starts as a negative argument used in negative constructions before later being associated to the expression of negation. And when it does, it does not immediately step into the shoes of an item which can convey negation on its own to the point of being able to extend its negative semantics to another item. Rather, it first partakes to the expression of negation because it receives the semantics of negation from *ne* via bipartition in *ne pas*. What is meant here is that if one sticks to the position of a single marker at the time for every langue state, then, one expects examples such as (23a) for stage 1, (23b) for stage 2, and (23c) for stage 3.

(23) a. Je n'ose dire
b. Je ne comprends pas cette situation
c. Je parle pas anglais

That SF can display examples such as (20), (21), and (22) altogether can be considered as evidence in favour of a more flexible conception of language variation. Namely, one that is more in harmony with the empirical data encountered across language families and involving overlap.

2.2. The overlapping approach to the JC

It is known from languages that have (almost) completed the JC that this process has a cline/rise and a decline which are separated by an intermediate period involving the mutual co-existence of the markers involved. Authors such as Croft (1991), Hopper and Traugott (2003), Campbell (2004), and Lehmann's (2004) among others

interpret this by claiming that variation is the manifestation of change. Accordingly, Ashby (1981) considers the concomitant uses of *ne*, *ne…pas* and *pas* as a syntactic change in progress. In columns 1 to 3 of (17), negative markers are entering the linguistic system one by one. In columns 4 to 5, we can see *ne* (1) and *ne pas* (2) to-illustrate with French- respectively exiting the linguistic system. Yet, from columns 2 to 3, it is clear that all markers involved in the JC share the same linguistic space, though *pas* still needs *ne* for the semantics of negation because it is only a nominal argument being introduced into the negation system via bipartition. Kroch's (1989, 1994) states in this regard that a reorganization of the grammar takes place only when one form entirely displaces (all) the other(s) at the endpoint of a change. The phase of mutual co-existence displayed in columns 2 to 4 of (17) therefore corresponds to the period where the language is striving to find a new system between the initial single strategy and the final one. Ngangoum (2015: 137 - 19) proposes an overview of this overlap in Germanic, Romance, and Celtic languages. The following quote is her summary of the English case.

> In Early Old English, the English language made use only of the marker *ne* (initially *no*) which immediately preceded the verb. As early as Classical Old English, however, the use of bipartite negation is attested, with the older negator *ne* being concomitantly used with other forms such as *na/no* and *nawiht/nowiht* for the expression of a single sentential negation… Note however that the introduction of bipartite negation does not lead to the immediate eradication of the previous use with *ne* alone for the expression of negation. Rather, both monopartite and bipartite uses are co-variants for many centuries. In Early Middle English, the two co-variants already attested in Old English continue to be used for the expression of negation, In Later Middle English, we see an additional way of expressing negation, namely *not.* the previous uses are exponentially reduced in Later Middle English in comparison to the increasing use of the standalone *not*... Yet they are still present in the grammatical system at the introduction of *not*, and survive for a certain period of time alongside *not* before finally going out of use.

The question raised by the attestation of mutually co-existing markers within the same language state is whether these items are doing exactly the same job and, if so, how they are redistributed so as to be able to share the same linguistics space. Regarding the first preoccupation, various synchronic languages display a situation of multiple markers serving the same function. In fact, Ngangoum's (2015) motivation for investigating the previous stages of negation in Indo-European languages was the need to account for the complex negation system of Fɛʔfɛʔ which in her synchronic state displays up to six markers of negation in monopartite and/or bipartite versions.

Coming to the second issue, corpus studies in other domains have shown that items from different chronological times are redistributed in different syntactic environment when they happen to occur within the same language state. In this regard, Bybee and al. (1994) observe that new markers in the domain of tense, aspect and mood are always grammaticalized in independent main clauses. In a later study on complex sentences, Bybee (2002) strongly claims that 'main clauses are

innovative', while 'subordinate clauses are conservative'. Coming back to negation in its historical development, Muller's (1991) corpus study on negation in French shows that synchronic variation is found as early as Old French where *non/ne* alone is used concomitantly with the optional bipartite strategies *ne mie*, *ne pas* and *ne gote*. In this early period, the environment where *mie*, *gote* and *pas* can be used is strictly determined by the meaning of the verb to which they each associate. In Middle French, while *ne* alone is still present in the language, *point* is added to the list of reinforcers, and bipartite negation becomes the standard. With the loss of *mie* and *gote* in later stages of Middle French, Classical French displays only *ne*, *ne pas* and *ne point*. Beyond Classical French, Standard French maintains *ne…pas* as the standard way of expressing negation, with *ne* in conservative environments and *ne…point* in more restricted contexts. Unlike non-Standard French which evolved much faster, Muller's conclusion is that Standard French is still to move to the final stage 3 of the JC. The completion of the cycle should imply that the new negator *pas* - just like *not* in English- is to be the only negator- like in non-Standard French, until a new cycle is launched. This is in accordance with Kroch's (1989, 1994) statement that a reorganization of the grammar takes place only when one form entirely displaces (all) the other(s) at the endpoint of a change.

Moreover, corpus studies of French show that the older negator *ne* is still retained in some syntactic environments. In this respect, Ashby (1981) reports that *ne* is retained in dependent environments, particularly relative, subjunctive and dependent infinitival clauses. Additionally, *ne* also occur with the temporal auxiliaries *être* and *avoir*, as well as with the modals *savoir*, *devoir* and *pouvoir*. Considering the retention of *ne* in the French negation system as a pattern that has survived from older usages, Muller (1991: 226) adds relatives dependent on a noun phrase containing a semi-negation, or on a partitive construction introduced by *pas* (24), conjunctive subordination (25), in if constructions (26), in some temporal constructions (27) and in interrogatives with partial questions (28)

(24). Pas une famille, ici, qui n'ait un parent tue ou mutile.
Not a family here that Neg have a parent killed or mutilated
Pas une cite au Nicaragua qui n'ait accueilli la victoire des
Not a city in Nicaragua that Neg welcome the victory of
Sandinistes avec plus d'enthousiasme q'Esteli"
Sardinists with more of enthousiasm than Esteli
"Not a family here that does not have a parent killed or mutilated. Not a city in Nicaragua that has not welcomed the victory of the sardinists with more enthousiasm than Esteli."

(25). Je ne peux faine qu'il ne me fatigue, même quand il est le plus simple.
I Neg can do that 3sg Neg 1sg tire even when 3sg be pres the more simple
"I cannot prevent him from …me, even when he is the simplest"

(26). Si vous n'étiez ecclésiastique, je vous aurais, comme les autres,
If 2plNeg be past ecclesiatist 1sg 2pl have past like the other
traine en justice.
Taken to justice
"Had you not been an ecclesiastical, I would have taken you to justice, just like the others."

(27) a. De ma vie je n'ai vu des fantomes.
Of my life 1sg Neg have seen ghosts
"I havent seen ghosts of my life."

b. Il y a bien longtemps qu'on avait vu une equipe.. aussi triste.
It expl have good long that expl have seen a team so sad
"One has not seen a team so sad since a very long time."

(28) Qui n a jamais cause un accident?
Who Neg have never caused an accident
"Who has never caused an accident?"

It follows that negative markers from chronologically diverse periods indeed mutually share the linguistic space of SF. And for this to be possible, they occur in different syntactic environment, with the older marker *ne* in conservative environments. SF whose prevalent negative strategy is bipartite negation corresponds to columns 2 to 4 in (17). And the older marker *ne* (1) is clearly still present in columns 2 and 3. One should therefore understand that the presence of the old marker *ne* does not prevent the standard strategy *ne pas* from expressing negation, given that they occur in different syntactic environments. Moreover, the newly introduced marker *pas* is also present in some innovative environments and this simply reduces the syntactic space of the standard strategy *ne pas* without altering its semantic ability to convey negation in SF. It is also worth noting here that though *pas* represented by (3) in (17) occurs alone in column 5, SF has not yet evolved to a stage where *pas* alone is the marker of negation throughout the linguistic system. So, unlike column 1 which represents a real empirical stage of the negation system as envisioned for speakers of SF, column 5 of (17) is merely meant to let the reader know that SF might evolve to a point when *pas*, the last comer into the negation system eventually becomes the single marker in the linguistic system.

		1		
	1	2	2	
1	2	3	**3**	**3**

I introduce a new version of (17) here with colours to indicate the ability of *ne* and *pas* to convey the semantics of negation in different columns. *Ne* (1) appears in green when it is the only marker in the linguistic system. This is a long forgotten phase as we know. *Pas* (3) appears in green when it becomes the only marker of negation in all syntactic environments if ever. This phase belongs to the future as far as SF is

concerned. *Ne* in bleu represents authority and as such is the bearer of the negative semantics and, eventually enters in bipartite negation with a *pas* that is deprived of negative semantics (3) in black. By contrast, *pas* (3) in bleu conveys the semantics of negation and gets into bipartition with *ne* (1) in black which has lost the semantics of negation.

The implication of this ability of the linguistic system to accommodate multiple markers each expressing negation in specific syntactic environments invalidates the need for postulating silent negative operators with the intention of supplying the older marker *ne* with the semantics of negation. *Ne* occurs only in restricted syntactic environments and, which is more, jealously keeps these environments as long as it can. When *ne* is decayed to the point of no longer conveying negation, another newer marker invades that space as *ne* steps out or potentially shift into a polarity marker. With this in mind, how does one motivate the need for a silent operator in the presence of a phonetically realised negative marker? The environment where the postulation of silent negative operators may be motivated is solely where n-words occur in the absence of negative markers.

3. Ne licenses n-words in Standard French

From the discussion above, multiple negative strategies co-occur in SF, namely *ne*, *ne pas*, *ne point*, and to some extend *pas* at a reduced level. Moreover, they are redistributed in various syntactic environments. This implies that in conservative environments where *ne* alone functions as a marker of negation, it bears the semantics of negation and, as such, does not need to receive it from a silent negative operator. Now, regarding *ne pas*, one can considers that it has three different phases, the first where *ne* (bleu) alone bears the semantics of negation while *pas* (black) is non negative; the second where it would be difficult to assign the semantics of negation to one or the other markers because both items in bipartition function thoroughly as a single whole, and the third where one could say that *ne* (black)is weakened with regard to the semantics of negation while *pas* (bleu)is strong in this regard and, as such, is the bearer of the negative semantics. In this last phase of bipartition, *pas* is already functioning as an autonomous marker of negation with full semantic strength. It follows that SF has a standalone *ne*, three versions of bipartite *ne pas*, and a standalone *pas* altogether for the expression of negation. This implies that in conservative syntactic environments where *ne* alone occurs, these environments being opaque to *pas*, *ne* is the only bearer of the negative semantics, while *pas* is the bearer of the negative semantics in more innovative environments. This perception of facts explains the complex negation data of SF.

The question this raises is where do double negation (29c), *ne* plus *pas* serving as a single negation (29b), and *ne* alone with n-words (29a) as all encountered in the

empirical data of SF each belong? I provide here the relevant data previously discussed in section 2.

(29) a. Personne ne parle à personne
n-person NEG talk to n-person
'Nobody talks to anybody'

.b. Je n'ai pas faim
I NEG have NEG hunger
'I am not hungry'

c. Jean ne gagne pas rien
Jean Neg earn Neg n-thing
'John earns much'

Differently stated, given that all three stages of the JC are mutually co-existent in SF, is it at all possible to clearly state in which stage each of (29a), (29b) and (29c) which broadly represent the empirical negation dataset present in SF each belong? I think that (29a) is representative of *ne* (1) in green color which is still operative in SF alongside bipartite negation and which in this stage is represented with the blue color. In this stage, *ne* alone is indisputably conveying the semantics of negation. This stage having co-existed with bipartite negation exits the linguistic system only when *pas* cannot express negation as an autonomous marker. The standard bipartite negation strategy represented here by (29b) corresponds to the second stage of the JC strongly present in SF. Finally, (29c) becomes possible when *pas* is a full bearer of the negative semantics. This occurs during the third phase of bipartite negation while the brain is still conscious of *ne* as the licenser of n-words. Additionally, the brain has already integrated the ability of *pas* to convey the semantics of negation in bipartition with *ne*. Moreover, there is absolutely no law preventing a strong *ne* (bleu) from getting into bipartition with a strong *pas* (bleu). Hence we have a special meeting point between a bleu *ne* and a bleu *pas* in bipartite negation, thus resulting into double negation. It follows, given that *pas* does not co-occur with n-words elsewhere in SF, that the only possible licenser for *rien* is *ne*.

One might consider this perception of facts to be rather simplistic. Yet I think that it sticks closer to the empirical data than postulating a silent operator as the licenser or n-words and yet not be able to explain why such an operator- whether it bears an index as postulated by Penka (2007) or not- can never license n-words in the absence of *ne*. Though Ngangoum (2017) takes the syntactic agreement account of n-words one step further by arguing that *ne* must be licensing the silent negative operator and by so doing enables it to license n-words, this simply renders the system unnecessarily complex while at the same time depriving it of the naturalness that is so dear to the language faculty. True, this provides a reason why none of the postulated negative operators, be it *pas* or the silent operator, can succeed to license n-words in the absence of *ne*. Yet, by rather acknowledging the mutual co-existence

of negative markers in the linguistic system of SF, one doesn't have to go searching for a licenser for n-words while their inability to occur in the absence of *ne* speaks by itself and tells us that they are legitimated only by *ne* and, as such, the latter cannot, but be their licenser.

CONCLUSION

Faced to the problem raised by syntactic accounts according to which n-words cannot be licensed by *ne*, I have reconsidered the licensing of n-words in Standard French. Having observed that n-words never occur in any environment unless *ne* is present, and hence that the silent negative operator postulated as the licensor of n-words in previous accounts can never license n-words in the absence of *ne*, I have been compelled to question the obligatoriness of *ne* for the grammaticality of any clause containing an n-word. This has led to the question regarding the function of *ne* in such clauses. By adopting an overlapping approach to the JC, I have demonstrated that the negation system of SF provides multiple versions of *ne*. This thus enforces the need to relativize the claim made by previous analyses and according to which *ne* is semantically non-negative. The variation provided by the linguistic system of SF and accommodated by an overlapping approach thus provides the space for the licensing of n-word by *ne*. The major question raised by the present account is how an overlapping approach fares with the parametric view. This question is addressed in future research.

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