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The Diachrony of Negation

Edited by

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Volume 160

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The diachrony of negation

Introduction

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1. A resilient subject

Despite intensive research, negation remains elusive in many ways. Its expression across languages, its underlying cognitive mechanisms, its development across time, and related phenomena, such as negative polarity and negative concord, leave many unresolved issues of both a definitional and a substantive nature. The importance of works on negation for recent developments of linguistic theory is reflected in an ever increasing interest in the topic. As well as monographs and collections addressing negation from a synchronic point of view, such as Horn (2010), Penka (2011), and de Swart (2010), the last few years have seen the publication of a number of volumes focussing on the diachrony of negation from different theoretical angles, viz. Jäger (2008), Larrivée & Ingham (2011), Roberts & Roussou (2003), and Willis et al. (2013). In addition, this brief list leaves out a significant number of workshops and lone-standing papers published in journals and edited volumes with broader overarching topics, such as van Gelderen (2009) on linguistic cycles as an important model of language change, an idea further explored in van Gelderen (2011).

The idea of a cycle, and in particular the so-called Jespersen Cycle, is in various ways central to much current work on the diachrony of negation, incl. the studies mentioned above and several of the chapters in the present volume. The Jespersen Cycle (or “Jespersen’s Cycle”, cf. Dahl 1979:88) is shorthand for the well-known phenomenon that, across a number of languages, the historical evolution of standard clause negation¹ seems to proceed in a cyclical

1. By “standard clause negation” we refer to the most common kind of negation marking found in a given language, a form of marking which is used productively in declarative main clauses, among other environments, and which does not involve quantifiers (cf. Payne 1985:198).

fashion, along largely similar lines. Jespersen (1917: 4) described this evolution as follows:

The original negative adverb 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 the course of time be subject to the same development as the original word.

French, which is the object of the contributions in chs. 7–9 of this volume, is often adduced as an illustration, as in Table 1 below:²

Table 1. The evolution of French clause negation (sample sentence: ‘I do not say...’)

Stage 0. [Classical Latin]	<i>non dico</i>	The negator is preverbal
Stage 1.	<i>je ne dis</i>	The preverbal negator is phonetically reduced
Stage 2.	<i>je ne dis (pas)</i>	The preverbal negator is optionally complemented by a postverbal element
Stage 3.	<i>je ne dis pas</i>	The postverbal element grammaticalizes as part of a discontinuous negator embracing the verb
Stage 4.	<i>je (ne) dis pas</i>	The original preverbal negator becomes optional
Stage 5. [Future French?]	<i>je dis pas</i>	The negator is postverbal
Stage 6. [Louisiana French Creole]	<i>mo pa di</i>	The previously postverbal negator migrates to preverbal position

Predictably, Jespersen’s original formulation has been subject to criticism. For one thing, it suggests that the cycle is driven principally by phonetic change, i.e.

2. There are a few things to note concerning Table 1: First, as column 1 specifies, Stages 0 and 6 of course do not represent French as such, nor is there any necessity for French to ever develop to the hypothesized Stage 5 (let alone Stage 6). While certain dialects (notably Québécois) have all but eliminated preverbal *ne* in conversational speech (Sankoff & Vincent 1977, Fonseca-Greber 2007), the marker continues to be normatively used in writing in those dialects, and it is used with greater frequency in the spontaneous speech of native speakers from France (Ashby 2001). Indeed, it has been suggested (Fonseca-Greber 2007) that, in Swiss French at least, preverbal *ne* may be in the process of acquiring a new pragmatic function. If that is so, and if the function in questions spreads to other dialects, Stage 5 may never become instantiated. In other words, Stages 0, 5, and 6 are included merely for the purpose of showing what a complete Jespersen Cycle might look like. Secondly, Stages 2 and 4, i.e. the stages that are characterized by variability in the realization of negation, are not recognized as separate stages by all researchers, but are included in Stages 3 and 5, respectively, thus yielding a three-stage development for French: I: *ne* > II: *ne...pas* > III: *pas*.

the “weakening” of the original, preverbal, negative marker. Against this hypothesis, Kiparsky and Condoravdi (2006: 4) observe that cross-linguistic evidence for it is not strong, and indeed, other scholars, starting with Meillet (1912: 140), have suggested that the addition of a new postverbal marker may more plausibly be triggered by pragmatic factors.

Secondly, typological studies have suggested that there is not just one, but several, Jespersen Cycles (van der Auwera 2009), as languages may add not just one, but two, and occasionally even three postverbal markers. In other words, rather than Stage 4 being the logical next step after Stage 3, alternative developments are possible.

Thirdly, a related, but broader, typological question concerns the degree to which European languages, where the Jespersen Cycle has so far been most amply attested, are representative of the languages of the world in respect of the evolution of negative marking. The answer to this latter question is of importance not least to the issue of reconstruction, for while the Jespersen Cycle appears in principle to be an eminently useful basis for reconstruction of earlier stages of languages with few or no textual records of any significant time-depth, it is not clear that it is currently sufficiently understood and sufficiently well-attested throughout the world to serve this purpose.

Fourthly, even those languages where the empirical reality of the basic pattern posited by Jespersen has never been in doubt show substantial variation in the speed with which they progress through the cycle, and the degree to which its different stages are clearly delimited in time. Thus, languages may remain stable at a given stage of the Cycle (often Stage 3, where negative marking is bipartite and embraces the verb) for very long periods of time. In addition, languages may not just go through stages of simple variation such as Stages 2 and 4, where bipartite negation alternates with either pre- or postverbal negation, but stages of complex variation may also be instantiated, where preverbal, embracing, and postverbal negation are found simultaneously. Because, as mentioned above, the typological representativity of the Jespersen Cycle has yet to be firmly established, such languages raise the issue of whether the evolution of negation is unidirectional or whether it might be possible for postverbal negative markers in embracing constructions to be lost.

The bulk of research on the history of negation having traditionally focused on European and Mediterranean languages (including, most recently, Willis et al. 2013 and Larrivé & Ingham 2011), a first important element of relative novelty offered by this volume is the variety of languages studied (although a number of them are also adduced – albeit in lesser depth – in van Gelderen 2011: Chapter 8). Thus, the first five chapters offer a mix of large-scale typological surveys and

in-depth investigation of the evolution of negation in individual languages that have not frequently been studied from this point of view. Among other things, these chapters query the commonly held belief that the Jespersen cycle may be less frequent outside of Europe (cf. e.g. Willis et al. 2013: 11). Chapter 3, for instance, shows that there is enough evidence in 409 Austronesian languages to conclude that the Jespersen cycle is attested there too, and sometimes even taken further to triple, or even quadruple negation constructions.

The wide typological variety of the data highlights, moreover, the importance of word-order issues (preverbal *vs* postverbal markers), as discussed in Chapters 3, 5 and 6. In works such as Venneman (1974) or Harris (1978), the word order realignment processes effected by the Jespersen Cycle *via* the shift from preverbal to postverbal negation were central. As pointed out by Willis et al. (2013: 10), such word order issues have, however, become less prominent in recent studies, which are rather focused on the alternating weakening and strengthening of negative markers and on the phonological and pragmatic factors at stake (although see van Gelderen 2011: ch. 8 for some pertinent observations). Data from Austronesian, Taiwanese Southern Min and Berber shift the focus back to word order issues and to their role in determining to what extent cases of bipartite negation in those languages are compatible with a Jespersen Cycle scenario. As discussed in Chapter 3, Jespersen's NEG-FIRST principle, which says that a negative marker tends to come early in the sentence and that it is very often preverbal (see also Horn 1989: 293; Dryer 1998), holds for Austronesian also. Since many second negators have a non-negative origin and since the first negator will tend to occupy an early position in the clause, it is expected that many second negators will follow the first negators. Thus, the combination of the Jespersen cycle with the NEG-FIRST principle makes the prediction that one negative marker precedes the verb and the other follows it, at least in languages that do not put their verb very late in the sentence. Since this expectation is largely borne out, it allows for the speculation that the preverbal marker is the oldest one in the language considered.

Moving on to other forms of negation, a central issue, which is closely related to the Jespersen Cycle, is the question of the relations that may or may not obtain between the evolution of standard clause negation and quantifier negation. Thus, Zeijlstra (2004) and de Swart (2010) both propose that negative concord, i.e. "the co-occurrence of more than one negative element in the same clause with the interpretation of a single instance of negation" (Zanuttini 1997: 9), could be a necessary condition for bipartite clausal negation. As before, enlarging the empirical data base is a prerequisite for assessing the accuracy of that prediction. Accordingly, Chapter 2 of our collection surveys 103 non-European languages and concludes that negative concord cannot, in fact, be considered to be a necessary condition for

bipartite clausal negation, nor for preverbal negation. Moreover, against frequent claims in the literature, the survey reveals that the strategy of expressing clausal negation only through inherently negative pronouns or adverbs is not only found in Europe, but also in the Americas, and that it is also found in verb-initial languages.

Quantifier negation raises the further issue of the possible existence of a Quantifier Cycle (Ladusaw 1993) bearing some resemblance, and possibly related, to the Jespersen Cycle. Such a cycle, if real, and its parallelisms with the Jespersen Cycle, could be illustrated as in Table 2 below, again using French as the test language.

Table 2. A possible Quantifier Cycle

Stage 1.	<i>Je ne dis (rien)</i> 'I do not say (a thing)'	A polarity-neutral NP optionally accompanies the preverbal negative marker to make the scope of the negation explicit
Stage 2.	<i>Je ne dis rien</i> 'I don't say anything'	Preverbal negation + Negative Polarity Item
Stage 3.	<i>Je (ne) dis rien</i> 'I don't say anything/I say nothing'	N-word optionally accompanied by a preverbal negative agreement marker
(Stage 4. [Future French?])	<i>Je dis rien</i> 'I say nothing'	Negative quantifier)

There are two central questions here: The first is whether system-level (or "macro-parametric") change is involved, such that the development of all quantifiers used in negative or negative-polarity environments in a given language is triggered in the same way and follows a largely identical diachronic trajectory, or whether the evolution of such quantifiers may be determined more by individual, more or less idiosyncratic, (or "micro-parametric", cf. Déprez 2011) factors pertaining, for instance, to their source meaning or the particular part of speech from which they originate, than by the existence of a Quantifier Cycle as such.

The second question is whether the diachronic development from polarity neutral item > NPI > n-word³/negative indefinite, which in and of itself is uncontroversially attested in many cases, is (at least partly) unidirectional or whether indefinites are rather subject to what Jäger (2010) calls a "random walk", such that items may move freely back and forth between polarity types and/or between

3. N-words (Laka Mugarza 1990: 107) are quantifiers which share properties of both negative indefinites and negative polarity items (NPIs). Thus, n-words can express negation on their own, without an accompanying marker of clausal negation, but co-occurrence of two or more such markers will by default be interpreted as expressing a single negation (e.g. French *Je [ne] vois plus personne* 'I don't see anybody anymore/I see no-one anymore').

NPI-status and n-word/negative-indefinite status. A crucial issue in that context is how to reliably distinguish between the four types of indefinite in any given language at any given stage.

In the second part of the volume, which centers on French, a language whose early stages are comparatively richly documented, and which therefore provides an important test case for hypotheses about the diachrony of negative marking, Chapters 7 and 8 are concerned to elucidate the history of specific quantifiers in that language. In both cases, the data adduced weakens the idea of a general Quantifier Cycle in French, emphasizing the importance of heterogeneous developments that cannot easily be reduced to the operation of a few simple principles, hence of individual pathways over a systemic approach.

A final chapter on French highlights the importance of taking sociolinguistic factors into consideration, such as the influence of normative pressures, to account for language variation and change mechanisms. As noted by Hansen (2011: 282), it is important, in developing models of the evolution of negative markers, that we be careful not to idealize the database:

There is ample evidence, across this and other areas of the grammar, that language users can live happily with structural and distributional variation and, indeed, ambiguities for very considerable lengths of time. In a language like French, we should probably expect such variation and ambiguities to be all the more evident due to the tension between, on the one hand, a culturally strong tradition of codification and prescriptivism with respect to the more formal, in particular written, registers, and, on the other hand, the inevitable evolution of informal, in particular spoken, registers.

In sum, our volume shows the importance both of large-scale typological studies and of fine-grained studies of individual negative markers, their different diachronic sources and trajectories, as well as differences in the pace of change.

1.1 A note on terminology

The wide spectrum of theoretical angles on negation has resulted in considerable terminological variation (e.g. Willis et al. 2013: 30ff.). Most terms are employed in our volume according to their established use in the literature. Thus, the terms “standard” vs “non-standard” negation, or “sentential” vs “non-sentential” negation (defined in Chapter 4), follow Payne’s definition of (1985: 198, also Miestamo 2005: 1) “standard clause negation” (cf. Footnote 1 above); the terms “bipartite”, “embracing”, or “discontinuous” negation refer to Stage 3 of the Jespersen Cycle (Table 1 above); and “n-words” (Footnote 3 above) refer to items that are used for purposes of quantification in both negative and weak negative-polarity (or “affective”) contexts (Chapters 7 and 8).

One peculiarity worth mentioning, however, is the use of the term “double (clausal) negation” in Chapters 2 and 3 to refer to what others term bipartite, or embracing, negation (e.g. French *Je ne le vois pas* “I don’t see it”). It is worth noting that the term “double negation”, besides referring to the use of two negation morphemes to express one semantic negation, as in the chapters mentioned and, for instance, WALS (Dryer & Haspelmath 2013), is frequently used elsewhere to designate the relation of mutual cancelation between two negation morphemes resulting in a positive sentence (e.g. Zeijlstra 2004: 58–59; 261–263). Double negation in this latter sense is opposed to “negative concord”, i.e. the phenomenon where two (or multiple) negatives appear without canceling each other out. Negative concord is known, alternatively, as “multiple negation”, “negative doubling” or “negative spread”.

2. Summaries of the individual chapters

The first two chapters of the volume take a broad typological perspective on the expression and evolution of negation, focusing on a range of non-European languages.

In Chapter 2, “On the relation between double clausal negation and negative concord”, Lauren Van Alsenoy and Johan van der Auwera study the relation between double clausal negation (as exemplified by French *ne ... pas* ‘not’) and negative concord (as exemplified by French *ne ... personne* ‘nobody/not...anybody’). Using a database of 179 languages from Asia, Africa and the Americas, the authors test the proposals by Zeijlstra (2004) and de Swart (2010) that negative concord may be a necessary condition for double clausal negation, and they conclude that although French shows that the two phenomena can be related, they coincide only rarely. The subsequent discussion focuses on Ewe and Karok, languages in which the two phenomena interact, but in a non-French way, and on seven languages with negative concord, but no double negation, thus sketching a battery of parameters of variation.

Chapter 3, by Frens Vossen and Johan van der Auwera, discusses “The Jespersen cycles seen from Austronesian”. The authors set out to collect and evaluate evidence for what is known as the ‘Jespersen cycle’ in the Austronesian language family, their database containing information on the verbal main clause negation of 409 Austronesian languages. It is shown, mostly on the basis of the synchronic comparison of related languages, that the Jespersen cycle manifests itself in that family too, most clearly so in the languages of Vanuatu, but that some languages take the cycle further by using triple, or even quadruple, negation.

The following chapters take a closer look at aspects of the evolution of negation in three less-studied, also non-European, languages.

In Chapter 4, "The development of Standard Negation in Quechua", Edith Pineda-Bernuy shows that, across the several languages and varieties of this language family, three different patterns of standard negation can be discerned: single, preverbal negation with *mana*, bipartite, embracing negation with *mana(-m) ... -chu* and single, postverbal negation with *-chu*. These three patterns exist alongside a large and varied number of non-standard patterns, all of which are carefully described. The author subsequently discusses three possible paths of development, arguing that the most plausible one takes the form of a three-stage evolution: *mana* > *mana... -chu* > *-chu*. While this appears compatible with the definition of the Jespersen Cycle, Pineda-Bernuy emphasizes that phonetic erosion of *mana* is not a factor.

Chapter 5, "Taiwanese Southern Min V2 negation: a historical perspective", by Hui-Ling Yang, provides a historical account of some issues which have not previously been fully addressed in connection with the Taiwanese Southern Min V *bo* XP construction. One issue is an ambiguity over two interpretations, while another involves the presence or absence of post-verbal negation. Assuming that the diachrony of *bo* is parallel to that of Mandarin *mei*, and using inner aspect as her theoretical framework, Yang analyzes Southern Min negative *bo* as originating in the V and as having been reanalyzed as an aspect marker in V *bo* XP. Other than the diachrony of Chinese negation, previous treatments of one particular type of V2 negation are also reviewed. Contra Huang (2009), who analyzes the semantics of *bo* in V *bo* DP as lexically determined by the abstractness of the nominal phrase following *bo*, Chapter 5 argues that *bo* in this construction can occupy two positions: while the aspectual head *bo* yields an episodic interpretation in the nominal argument, *bo* in a higher head gives rise to genericity.

Rounding off this section of the book, Vermondo Brugnatelli gives an overview of "Berber negation in diachrony" in Chapter 6. The morphosyntax of negation in Berber is rich and complex, and appears to be the outcome of multiple processes that have taken place over different time-periods from prehistory to the present day. The most noteworthy issue is the tendency towards a redundant marking of negation, not only by means of discontinuous morphemes (circumfixes) but also through the use of special "negative verb stems" – a feature that is attested in nearly all of the Berber-speaking area, regardless of the type of negative affixes in use. The author attempts to single out the main processes that have led to the present stage, taking into account the etymologies of prefixal and suffixal negative morphemes, the origin of negative stems and the role of the Jespersen's cycle in the evolution of Berber negation.

The three final chapters provide new perspectives on the evolution of negative expressions in French, one of the most widely studied of languages in this respect, further demonstrating the richness and complexity of the diachronic development of negation.

In Chapter 7, Maj-Britt Mosegaard Hansen explores “The grammaticalization of negative indefinites: the case of the temporal/aspectual *n*-words *plus* and *mais* in Medieval French”. The author argues that while the contemporary French *n*-words have undergone a process of paradigmaticization, in the sense that the language has evolved from making available a relatively open set of quantifying expressions, many of which could be used independently of polarity, to offering speakers a small closed set of items which are syntactically confined to contexts of negative polarity, individual members of this functional paradigm appear to have followed different paths of evolution. Thus, while the evolution of standard clause negation in French is well-established as an instantiation of the Jespersen’s Cycle, there is no parallel unidirectional macro-development of quantifying negators, i.e. no Quantifier Cycle, in that language. The paper is concluded by a discussion of the status of functional paradigms and the role of paradigmatic pressure as a factor in language change.

Further contributing to the elucidation of how indefinites evolve, Richard Ingham and Amel Kallel adduce “Evidence from a correspondence corpus for diachronic change in French indefinites 1450–1715” in Chapter 8. Data from personal letters is interpreted using Haspelmath’s (1997) semantic map of indefinites, and it is shown that the re-categorisation of *quelque* (‘some’) as an ordinary positive indefinite is associated with a major change in the use of the hitherto all-purpose indefinite *aucun* (‘some’ > ‘any’/‘no(ne)’), leading the latter to become an *n*-word in Modern French. Like Hansen’s paper, Ingham & Kallel’s analysis contributes to an account of the evolution of syntactic negation that emphasizes micro-parametric factors involving the properties of individual lexical items, rather than a macro-parametric change affecting the structural representation of negation.

Pierre Larrivé’s investigation of “The continuity of the vernacular. The evolution of negative doubling in French” in Chapter 9 completes the volume. Larrivé’s aim is to assess Labov’s claim that the vernacular is the most stable variety of a language, using geographically distant varieties of French as a test case. He tracks the co-occurrence of a clausal negator with an *n*-word (e.g. ‘I didn’t do nothing’ with a single-negation interpretation, i.e. ‘I didn’t do anything’) over a period of six centuries. The quantitative study of negative doubling in Quebec and France historical and contemporary vernacular sources demonstrates overall stability for France from the 14th century to the present. That negative doubling is ten times more frequent in contemporary vernacular Quebec French than in contemporary vernacular France French may be due to difficulty in accessing the vernacular

in France French and to the presumed lesser impact of normative pressures in Quebec. The author concludes that his data provide support for the notion that stability characterizes vernacular varieties.

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