

Remarks on a Language with No Overt Negation

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The idea



Negation **requires** an n-word in its scope.

Basics: n-words in European French (EF)

- *personne* 'anyone',
- *rien* 'anything',
- *jamais* 'ever',
- *nul* 'any',
- *aucun* 'any',
- *plus* 'anymore',
- *ni...ni* 'either...or',
- *guère* 'much',
- more?

Basics: negative sentence

- A simple negative sentence in French:

(1) Il (**ne**) connaît **pas** Marie.
he NE knows PAS Marie
'He doesn't know Marie.'

- Two parts: *ne* (optional) and *pas* (or *point*).

The problem (1)

- What is special about n-words? They don't need *pas* (and *ne* is optional).

(NE)... n-word

- (2) Il (ne) connaît **personne**.
he NE knows anyone
'He knows no one.'

n-word... (NE)...

- (3) **Personne** (n') est venu.
anyone NE is come.
'No one came.'

Question 1: In a sentence with an n-word, where does negation come from? From the n-word? From something else?

The problem (2)

- (4) **Personne** (ne) dit **rien**.
anybody NE says anything
'Everybody says something.' $\neg\exists\neg\exists$ (Double Negation)
Or: *'Nobody says anything.'* $\neg\exists\exists$ (Single Negation)

► Sentences with two n-words are **ambiguous** between DN readings and **SN** readings.

Question 2: How to derive the ambiguity?

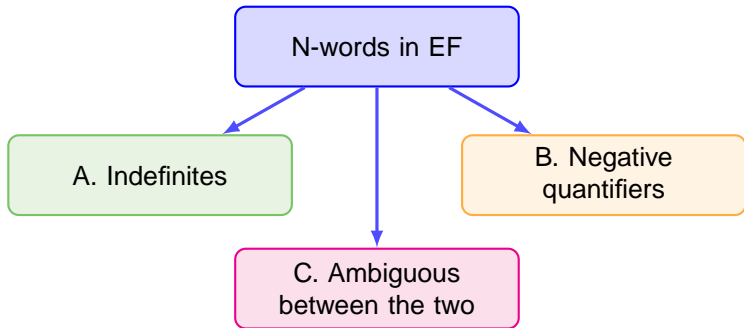
Three solutions

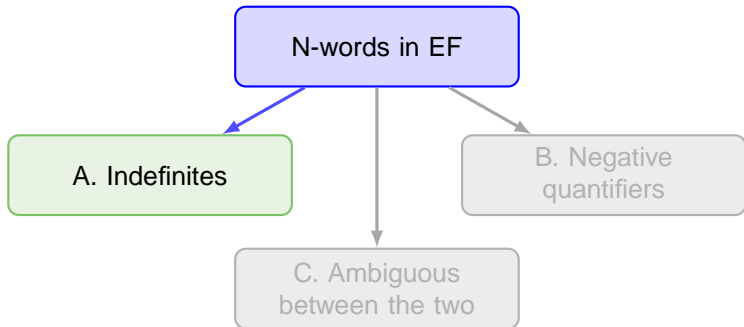
- (5) Il (ne) connaît **personne**. (= (2))
'He knows no one.'
- (6) **Personne** (ne) dit **rien**. (= (4))
'Everybody says something.' DN
Or: *'Nobody says anything.'* SN

A. N-words are indefinites and negation is covert.

B. N-words are inherently negative and there is (optional) negative concord.

C. N-words are ambiguous (either indefinites or negative quantifiers).





The plan

Show that negation needs an n-word.

Roadmap

- 1 N-words are **NPI indefinites** (not negative quantifiers);
- 2 There is **no overt negation** in EF.

Preamble: negation is not where *ne* is (1)

Novel observation

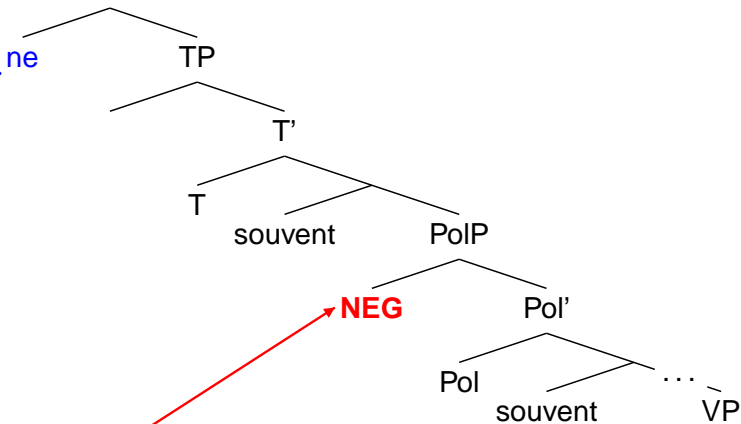
(7) Il ne m' a **souvent pas** répondu.
he NE to-me has often PAS answered
'He often did not answer me.'

OFTEN»NEG

(8) Il ne m'a **pas souvent** répondu.
'He did not often answer me.'

NEG»OFTEN

- The scope of *souvent* w.r.t. negation unambiguously depends on its position relative to *pas*; it **doesn't depend** on the relation with *ne*.



Sentential negation (only one PolP per clause), signaled by *ne*.

Preamble: negation is not where *ne* is (2)

- *Ne* **signals** the presence of negation (we are going to claim that negation is **never** realized **overtly** in French):
- When *ne* appears in a given clause, there is a negation hosted by the Polarity Phrase immediately below *ne*.
- Consider a biclausal structure:

(9) Il peut [**ne** pas parler.
he can NE PAS speak
'He can abstain from speaking.'

CAN»NEG

(10) Il **ne** peut pas [parler.
'He cannot speak.'

NEG»CAN

In sum

- Negation is not where *ne* is;
- It is where *pas* is or **close to where *pas* is;**
- When *ne* is present in a clause, there is a negation in the PoIP immediately below *ne*.

Part 1: N-words are NPI indefinites

Indefinite readings (1)

- N-words can clearly behave like **indefinites**: a single negation (SN) reading is possible in (11)-(12) (the negation is in the superordinate clause):

(11) Il est impossible que **personne** ait fui.
it is impossible that anyone has fled
'It is impossible that anyone ran away.'

(^{ok} SN)

(12) Je ne crois pas qu' il ait **jamais** fui.
I NE think PAS that he has ever fled
'I don't think that he ever ran away.'

(^{ok} SN)

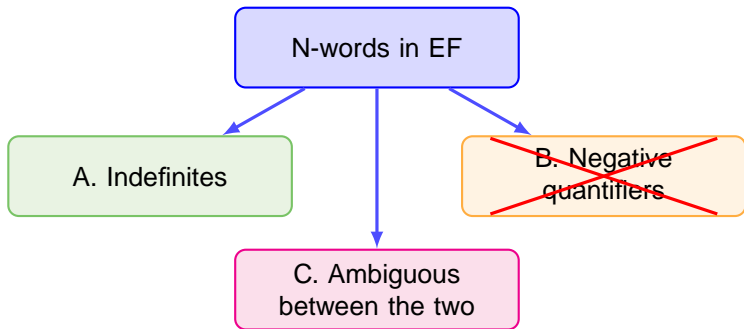
Indefinite readings (2)

- N-words are also sometimes available with an indefinite meaning in **downward-entailing, non negative**, contexts:

(13) A-t- il **rien** dit d'intéressant ?
has he anything said of interesting
'Did he say anything interesting?' ✓indefinite reading

- N-words can be NPIs:

(14) Il a **rien** dit d'intéressant.
'He said nothing interesting.'
Not: *'He said something interesting.'* *indefinite reading



Taking stock

- We know that n-words *can* be NPI **indefinites** and that *ne* is **not negative**;
- We are now going to show that n-words **must** be NPI indefinites.

Under *sans* ‘without’

- **Only an SN reading** is available under *sans* ‘without’:

(15) Il est venu sans **rien**.

he is come without anything

‘He came without anything.’

(^{ok}SN)

But not: *‘He came with something.’*

(*DN)

This is a problem for any theory in which n-words can be **negative quantifiers**.

Intervention effects (1)

- First, observe that the adverb *toujours* 'always' scopes below negation:

(16) Il n' a **pas toujours** compris le cours.
he NE has PAS always understood the lecture.
'He didn't always understand the lecture.' NEG≫TOUJOURS

- Note also that *toujours* creates an **intervention effect** on NPIs (Linebarger 1981):

(17) *Il ne comprend **pas toujours** quoi que ce soit.
he NE understands PAS always anything
*'*He doesn't always understand anything.'*

Intervention effects (2)

Novel observation

- This low adverb creates an **intervention effect** on **object** n-words, e.g. *rien*:

*LF: NE...NEG...TOUJOURS...n-word

(18) *Il ne comprend **toujours**_{always} **rien**.

he NE understands TOUJOURS ANYTHING

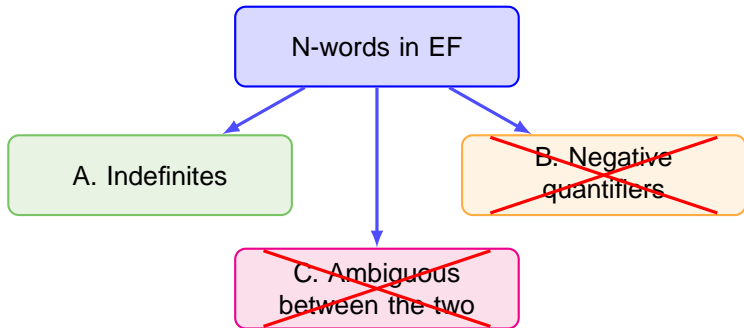
Not: *'He doesn't always understand something.'*

Not: *'He always understands nothing.'*

*NEG>>TOUJOURS

*TOUJOURS>>NEG

The unavailability of the second reading is a problem for any theory in which n-words can be **negative quantifiers**.



Interim conclusions

- We know that *ne* is not negative, and that n-words are NPI indefinites.

(19) Il ne connaît **personne**. (= (2))

- Therefore there must be a **silent negation** in EF, NEG, in sentences such as (19); we also know where NEG is (very close to where *pas* appears, between T and V).

(20) Il ne connaît NEG **personne**.

Explaining double negation readings

- The availability of **constituent** NEGs in a sentence (alongside sentential negation) accounts for the Single/Double Negation ambiguity:

(21) **Personne** (ne) dit **rien**. (= (4))

LF₁: (ne) **NEG** **personne** **rien** dit (SN: $\neg\exists\exists$)

LF₂: **NEG** **personne** (ne) **NEG** **rien** dit (DN: $\neg\exists\neg\exists$)

▶ No negative concord.

- 1 N-words are NPI indefinites
- 2 No overt negation in EF

Part 2: No overt negation in EF

A question

- Now that we have established that French has a silent negation, how come a given assertive sentence is not ambiguous between a positive and a negative reading?

(22) Il pleut.

'It is raining.'

Not: *'It is not raining.'*

- Why isn't (23) a possible LF of (22)?

(23) [NEG pleut]

- ▶ For the same reason that (24) is **ungrammatical**:

(24) *Il **ne** pleut.

▶ **NEG requires an n-word in its scope.**

The idea: a negative rule



Negative rule:

No clause can contain NEG, the silent sentential negation, if it contains no n-word in the scope of NEG.

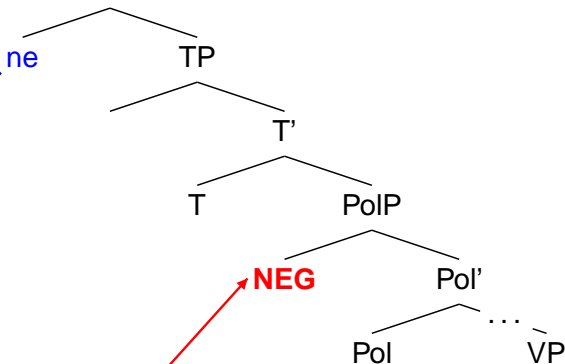
- The negative rule is directly **observable**.

(25) Il est impossible que **personne** soit venu.
 it is impossible that anyone is come
'It is impossible that anyone came.'
 LF: [_{CP} impossible [_{CP} personne venir

(ok SN)

- Adding *ne* (which signals the presence of NEG) forces the **reconstruction** of the subject n-word in (26):

(26) Il est impossible que **personne ne** soit venu.
 it is impossible that anyone NE is come
 ► *'It is impossible that no one came.'*
 LF: [_{CP} impossible [_{CP} ~~personne~~ NEG personne venir
 ───────────────────────────────────┐
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 ► Not: *'It is impossible that anyone didn't come.'*
 *LF: [_{CP} impossible [_{CP} personne NEG venir



Sentential negation (only one PolP per clause), signaled by *ne*.

- If there already is an n-word in the scope of NEG, e.g. *jamais*, reconstruction of the subject *personne* is **optional**: the constraint on NEG is already satisfied by *jamais*:

(27) Il est impossible que **personne ne** soit **jamais** venu.
 it is impossible that anyone NE is ever come

- ▶ *'It is impossible that no one ever came.'*

LF: [_{CP} impossible [_{CP} ~~personne~~ NEG personne jamais venir



- ▶ *'It is impossible that anyone never came.'*

LF: [_{CP} impossible [_{CP} personne NEG jamais venir

Fragments

- The following pattern falls out of the negative rule straightforwardly:

(28) —A: Qui est venu ? ('who came?')

—B: **Personne.**

(LF: [NEG personne])

—B': ***Qui que ce soit.**

(*LF: [NEG qui que ce soit])

—B'': Marie. (\neq 'not Marie')

(*LF: [NEG Marie])

Two negations?

- It might seem that French has two negations, NEG and *pas*:

(29) Il ne connaît **pas** Marie.
he NE knows PAS Marie
'He doesn't know Marie.'

- Compare:

(30) Il ne connaît [NEG] **personne**.
he NE knows NEG anyone
'He doesn't know anyone.'

Only one negation

- We are going to show that we don't need to postulate two negations (Occam's razor):
- We can explain all the facts with just NEG;
- The **negative rule** still holds: *pas* is an n-word.

(31) Il ne connaît [NEG] **pas** Marie.
'He doesn't know Marie.'

- *Pas* satisfies the negative rule in fragments as well:

(32) —A: Qui est venu ? ('who came?')
—B: Marie. (\neq 'not Marie') (*LF: [NEG Marie])
—B': **Pas** Marie. ('not Marie') (LF: [NEG pas Marie])

Evidence that *pas* is an n-word (1)

- 1 *Pas* co-occurs with *ne*;
- 2 *Pas* is historically not negative (it means *step*): originally, *'il n'a pas bougé'* meant literally 'he didn't move even by one step' (btw, *personne* means 'person');
- 3 *Pas* can clearly lack negative force under *sans* 'without' or *non* 'not':

Novel observations

- (33) a. Il est allé au lit sans même (**pas**) avoir mangé.
he is gone to-the bed without even not have eaten
'He went to bed without having eaten.'
- b. Il aime non (**pas**) Paris mais Bruxelles.
he likes NON PAS Paris but Brussels
'He likes Brussels, not Paris.'

Evidence that *pas* is an n-word (2)

Novel observation

- 4 The contribution of *pas* is the same as that of indisputable n-words:

- (34) 'Synonyms' of *pas*:
point, *aucunement*, *nullement*, *en aucun cas*.
- (35) a. Il ne connaît **pas** Marie.
b. Il ne connaît **nullement/aucunement/en aucun cas** Marie.

[(35a)] = [(35b)]

Evidence that *pas* is an n-word (3)

Novel observation

- 5 *Pas* forces a Double Negation reading with run-of-the-mill n-words: in this, it **behaves like the n-words in (37)**:

- (36) Il n' a **pas** vu **personne**.
he NE has PAS seen anyone
'He saw someone.'
 $\neg\neg\exists$ (DN)
 $*\neg\exists$ (*SN)
- (37) 'Synonyms' of *pas*:
point, aucunement, nullement, en aucun cas.
- (38) Il n'a **nullement/aucunement/en aucun cas** vu **personne**.
'He saw someone.'
 $\neg\neg\exists$ (DN)
 $*\neg\exists$ (*SN)

- We do not have an explanation for the **blocking** effect of *pas/point/nullement/aucunement/en aucun cas* on single negation readings;
- But we observe that it seems to be **semantically** driven, because it occurs with a natural class defined by its meaning.

- Since *pas* is not negative...

European French has only one negation ... which is silent: **NEG.**

- ... And negation requires an n-word in its scope.

Conclusions

- N-words are NPI indefinites.
- No clause can contain NEG, the silent sentential negation, if it contains no n-word in the scope of NEG (negative rule).
- So n-words **require** a licensing environment and **are required** to satisfy the negative rule.
- *pas* is an n-word: EF has no overt negation.

Implications for European French

- There is no negative concord;
- There are no negative quantifiers.

Thank you!

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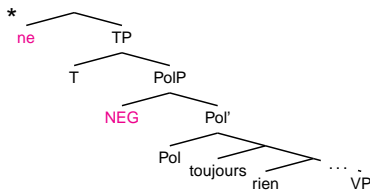
Appendix

Multiple negations

Showing that multiple negations are possible

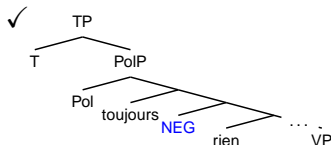
- A lower **NEG can be inserted**; this NEG is not associated with *ne* (only sentential negation is). To see this, compare (39) and (40):

(39) *Il **ne** comprend **toujours**_{always} **rien**. (=18)
*NEG>>TOUJOURS; *TOUJOURS>>NEG



(40) Il comprend **toujours**_{always} **rien**.
*NEG>>TOUJOURS; ✓TOUJOURS>>NEG

Novel observation



Further constraints

Constraints added to the negative rule (1)

- It appears that the negative rule cannot be multiply satisfied by a single n-word:

*NEG...NEG...n-word

(41) Il (ne) connaît **personne**. (=2)

Doesn't mean: *'He knows someone.'*

*LF: [NEG NEG personne]

- This suggests that a given n-word can only **license** the NEG that is **closest**.

Constraints added to the negative rule (2)

- There seems to be a locality requirement on the licensing of NEG by n-words:

(42) *Je ne pense [qu' il a rien vu.
I NE think that he has anything seen

- In (42), the n-word is embedded in the subordinate clause, which results in ungrammaticality.

It looks like binding

- We have shown that NEG wants an n-word in its scope (not too far away);
- There cannot be a sequence of two NEG's without an n-word intervening;
- N-words are indefinites, that is, variables;
- The fact that NEG requires a **variable** suggests that it is a **binder**;
- We hypothesize that n-words are the only possible bindees of this binder;
- Due to the ban on **vacuous** quantification, an n-word is necessary;
- Variables are bound by the closest binder, so there cannot be two NEG's without an n-word intervening (otherwise the higher one quantifies vacuously).

NPIs

Monotonicity reversal

Novel observation

- Recall that under *sans* ‘without’, an n-word is interpreted as an indefinite (cf. (15)):

- (43) Il est venu sans **rien**.
he is come without anything
‘He came without anything.’ (ok SN)
But not: *‘He came with something.’* (*DN)

- A monotonicity **reversal** produces the effect expected with NPIs:

- (44) *Il est venu **non sans rien**.
he is come no without anything
lit. *‘He came not without anything.’*

Indefinites

Another argument

- We can show that an n-word, e.g. *personne*, can be interpreted (existentially) in a position different from the position of interpretation of negation:
- Therefore it *can* be an indefinite;
- Consider a biclausal structure:

(45) Il peut [**ne** critiquer NEG **personne**.
he can NE criticize anyone
'He can abstain from criticizing anyone.'

CAN»NEG

(46) Il **ne** peut NEG [critiquer **personne**.
'He cannot criticize anyone.'

NEG»CAN

An alternative analysis

Two negations after all?

- One might want to maintain that EF has 2 negations, *pas* and NEG;
- We have shown that there are good reasons for not doing so, but one may take the **blocking** effect of *pas* as evidence (Zeijlstra 2008):

(47) Il n' a **pas** vu **personne**.
'He saw someone.'

(=(36))
 $\neg\neg\exists$ (DN)
 $*\neg\exists$ (*SN)

- To do so, one must say that in a configuration where *pas* co-occurs with an n-word, NEG must also be inserted;
- This is a non-starter (cf. (12)):

(48) Je ne crois pas qu' il ait **jamais** fui.
I NE think PAS that he has ever fled
'I don't think that he ever ran away.'

(*ok* SN)