

On the pragmatic content of the so-called expletive negation

SLE 2018 Workshop : The semantics and pragmatics of apprehensive markers in a cross-linguistic perspective

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On the so-called expletive negation (*ne*) with fear verbs

- Cross-linguistically, Expletive Negation (EN) appears within embedded contexts, specifically under a particular semantic class of attitude predicates, fear verbs.
 - (1) Je crains qu'il **ne** pleuve.
'I fear that it EN might rain.'
- Under most existing accounts, EN is analyzed as semantically vacuous. I will argue that EN gives rise to a conventional implicature.

Cross-linguistic triggers

- **Fear verbs**

- (2) Jane **craint** que son fils **ne** mange(SUBJ) de la viande.
'Jane fears that her son might eat meat.'

- **Impediment verbs**

- (3) Jane a **empêché** que son fils **ne** mange(SUBJ) de la viande.
'Jane prevented that her son would eat meat.'

- **Negated doubt verbs**

- (4) Leo **ne doute pas** que ce film **ne** soit(SUBJ) une réussite.
'Leo has no doubt that this movie will be a success.'

Cross-linguistic triggers

- **Without, before, until constructions**

(5) Partons **avant que** le soleil **ne** se couche(SUBJ).
'Let's go before sun goes down.'

-  **Comparatives**

(6) Ce film a **plus** de succès **que** Leo **ne** l'aurait(COND) cru.
'This movie is more successful than Leo had thought'.

→ Ce film a plus de succès que Leo **ne** l'aurait (**jamais**) cru.

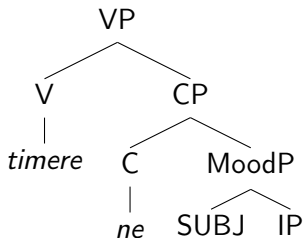
Plan

- 1 A modal analysis of expletive negation
 - Expletive negation is a modal morpheme
- 2 Diachronic analysis
 - Goals and Method
 - Study 1 : Expletive and sentential negation
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 - Towards a counter-preference analysis

New proposal : syntactic function

- In Latin, *ne* was selected as a subordination marker by a certain type of desiderative verbs. It was a complementizer, used to introduce a subjunctive clause (vs. *quod* + indicative)

(7)



New proposal : syntactic function

- In the transition from Latin to Old French, *quod* (\rightarrow *que*) was the only complementizer to survive, and increased its range.
- However, *ne* + subjunctive also survived, but *ne* becomes embedded under *que* (no longer a complementizer).

(8) Timeo **ne** pluat. (Latin)
'I fear that it might rain.'

⇓

(9) Criem **ne** turt. (Early Old French)
'Je crains qu'il ne revienne'.

⇓

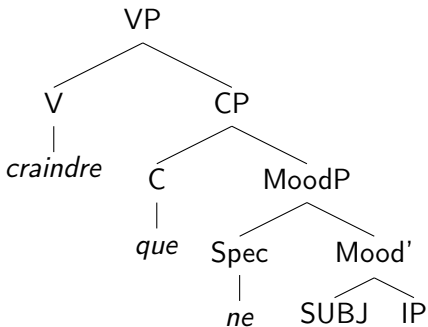
(10) Criem **que ne** me mesavaigne. (Old French)
'Je crains qu'il ne m'arrive un malheur'.

Expletive negation is a modal morpheme

New proposal : syntactic function

- My proposal is that *ne* is reanalysed as being in the specifier position of the Mood Projection, in Old French.

(11)



New proposal : pragmatic meaning

- In this syntactic position, I propose that *ne* marks the subjunctive mood head with an evaluative feature, giving rise to a conventional implicature of counter-expectation.
- I also propose that EN, alike the subjunctive mood, has a preferential semantics, and it needs a specific semantics of (dis)preference to be licensed .

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Goals and Method

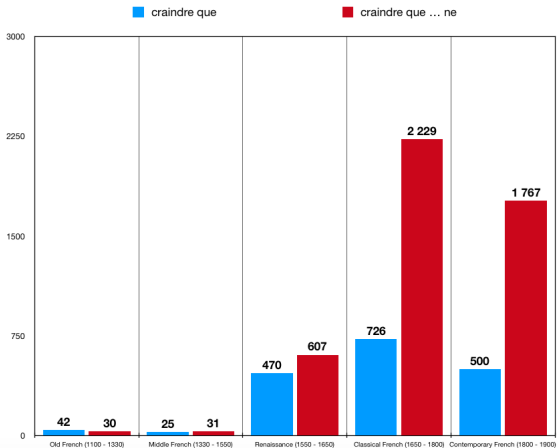
- My aim is to test against historical data the hypothesis that EN is a modal morpheme, licensed by a (dis)preference semantic component. To do so, I will :
 - Provide a numerical view of the frequency of occurrence of EN across the history of French.
 - Study the diachronic development of expletive negation against the diachronic development of sentential negation on the one hand, and of mood on the other.

Diachronic Analysis : Corpus

Periods

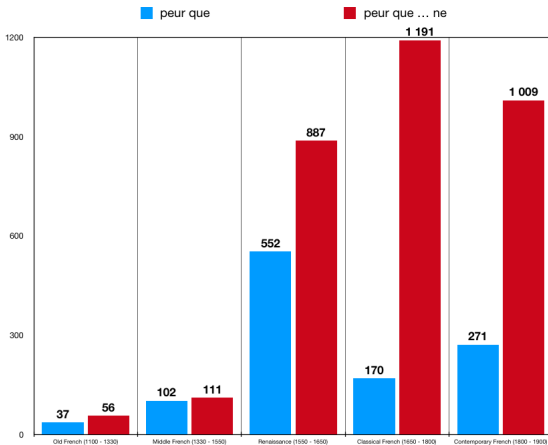
- Old French : 1100 - 1330
- Middle French : 1330 - 1550
- Renaissance French : 1550 - 1650
- Classical French : 1650 - 1800
- Contemporary French : 1800 - 1900

Distributional data : global evolution (*craindre*)



Comparison of the frequency of occurrence of *que* vs. *que ... ne*

Distributional data : global evolution (*avoir peur*)



Comparison of the frequency of occurrence of *que* vs. *que ... ne*

Distributional data : global evolution

Stages

- Competition of *que* and *que ... ne* : 1150-1650
- Winning of *que ... ne* over *que* : 1650-1900

⇒ The frequency of use of EN rapidly increases by the early 17th century.

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Expletive and Sentential Negation

- The aim of this study is to provide counter-evidence to the hypothesis that EN is a subtype of sentential negation (see Rowlett, 1998; Abels, 2005; Espinal, 2012; Zovko Dinkovic, 2017).

Jespersen's cycle

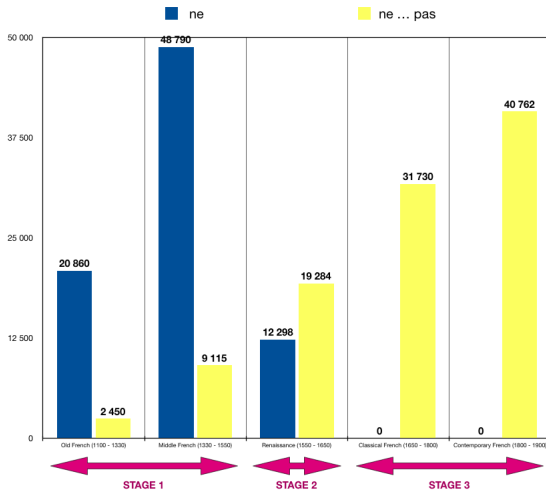
- **Jespersen's cycle** : the diachronic evolution of sentential negation in French and beyond, which proceeds from a solitary marker of negation, to its progressive reinforcing with the addition of a postverbal negative element.
 - ① Stage 1 : *ne*
 - ② Stage 2: *ne (... pas)*
 - ③ Stage 3 : *ne ... pas*
 - ④ Stage 4 : ~~*(ne ...)*~~ *pas*

Homophony hypothesis

- **Homophony of sentential and expletive negation :**
Two competing homophonous lexical items (Stage 1 of Jespersen's cycle).
→ possible **ambiguïty** of *ne* when embedded under fear verbs.
- **Distinctiveness of sentential and expletive negation :**
Differentiation of the two competing items once negative *ne* is obligatorily associated with *pas* (Stage 3 of Jespersen's cycle).

Study 1 : Expletive and sentential negation

Distributional data : Jespersen's Cycle



Comparison of the frequency of occurrence of *ne* vs. *ne ... pas*

Results : Jespersen's Cycle

⇒ The rapid increase in the frequency of EN by 1650 is correlated to Stage 3 of the Jespersen's cycle (obligatory negative doubling).

Plan

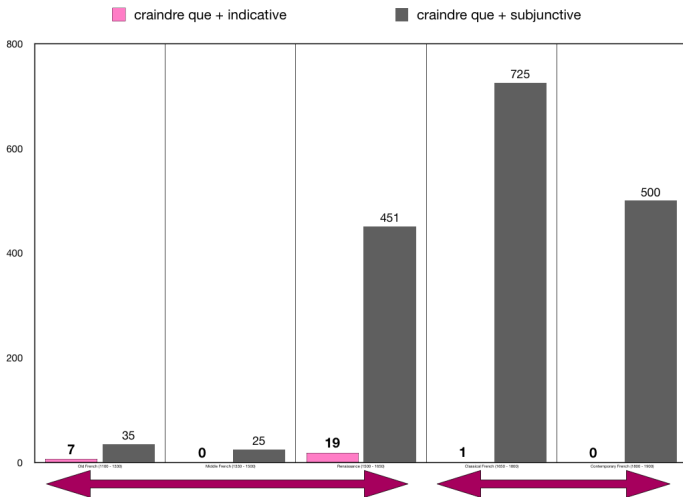
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Preliminaries : Building the semantics of 'craindre'

In the tradition of semantic approaches to mood choice (Giannakidou, 1999; Villalta, 2008; Anand & Hacquard, 2013) predicates that select for the indicative or for the subjunctive are divided into two categories accordingly.

- Representational (or *epistemic*) predicates : indicative takers.
- Bouletic (or *desiderative*) predicates : subjunctive takers.

Study 2 : Expletive negation and mood

Distributional data : Mood selection with *craindre*

Comparison of the distributions of indicative / subjunctive mood choice

⇒ The rapid increase in the frequency of EN by 1650 is correlated to the loss of the indicative with *craindre* (= categorization of *craindre* as a desiderative predicate).

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Emergence of a pragmatic factivity effect

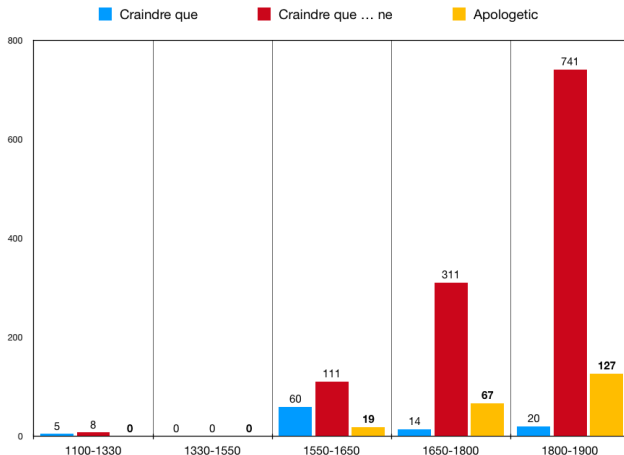
- **Pragmatically factive reading of *craindre* :**
 - presupposes the truth of the complement clause.
 - hearer-oriented : describes the apologetic emotional state of the speaker towards the fact that the truth of p is undesirable for the hearer (see Jing-Schmidt & Kapatsins, 2008).
- (12) Je crains que vous n'ayez des idées bien fausses sur la vie que je mène. (1827)
- (13) Je crains que vous ne vous trompiez, madame. (1751)

Criteria for identification

Factive "Apologetic" *craindre*

- Found with 1st person present tense agreement only.
- Factivity depends on the presence of *ne* (affected by its absence).
- Found with *que ... ne* + subjunctive (past or present tense).

Study 3 : The pragmatic factive reading of 'craindre'

Diachronic Data : Emergence of factivity with *craindre*

Emergence of the apologetic *craindre* with 1st person singular, present tense agreement.

Study 3 : The pragmatic factive reading of 'craindre'

Results : The pragmatic factive reading of 'craindre'

⇒ The fact that *craindre* acquires a pragmatic factive reading is correlated to the increased frequency of EN by 1650.

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Results

I have shown two correlations:

- **Correlation between expletive and sentential negation :**
The fact that EN is reinforced in Stage 3 of Jespersen's cycle is interpreted as corroborating the hypothesis that EN not a standard negation, but a modal morpheme (end of homonymy → differentiation).
- **Correlation between desiderativity and EN :**
The fact that EN is reinforced when indicative is lost with fear verbs is interpreted as corroborating the hypothesis that EN is triggered by desiderativity and reinforces mood choice.

- My claim is that *ne* introduces a counter-expectation implicature, ie. what the speaker expects given normalcy conditions.

[[*craindre que ne p.SUBJ*]] = 1 iff:

At issue: p is a better possibility than $\neg p$
according to what the attitude holder disprefers.

CI: $\neg p$ is a better possibility than p
according to normalcy conditions.

Implicature: the attitude holder doesn't know
whether p or $\neg p$ is true.

⇒ **Precautionary function of *ne* : the utterance has a pragmatic flavor of warning.**

- This analysis accounts for the apologetic reading of *craindre*.

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At issue: p is a better possibility than $\neg p$
according to what the attitude holder disprefers.

CI: $\neg p$ is a better possibility than p
according to normalcy conditions.

⇒ **Reprehensive function of *ne* :** Because of its interaction with the factivity of *craindre*, *ne* + subjunctive expresses a counterfactual preference for $\neg p$, which gives rise to a pragmatic flavor of reproach.

Thank you!

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