

# *Introduction to the special issue: ‘Negation and Clitics in French: Interaction and Variation’*

ELISABETH STARK, CHARLOTTE MEISNER AND  
HARALD VÖLKER

*University of Zurich*

## ABSTRACT

This introduction presents very briefly some of the main issues currently discussed around negation particles and clitics in contemporary French and taken up by the six contributions it assembles, namely language change (grammaticalisation of clitics into agreement markers, completion of the Jespersen Cycle) vs. stable variation, and external (sociolinguistic) or internal (phonotactic, prosodic, or syntactic) factors triggering variation in both cases; the hypothesis of a potential diglossia in French opposing two grammars with considerable syntactic differences. Five out of six contributions focus on modern standard and non-standard varieties of French, with a formal theoretical background, while one shows a more philological-descriptive approach and is dedicated to Old French manuscripts.

This special issue of the *Journal of French Language Studies* assembles a selection of papers presented at the conference ‘Negation and Clitics in Romance’, which took place in February 2012 at the University of Zurich. All contributions are devoted to sentential negation and/or clitics in French with a special focus on the various ways of interaction between these two linguistic categories. They are all concerned with central aspects of variation in the expression of negation (cf. the contributions by Hugues Peters, Paul Rowlett, Lene Schøsler and Harald Völker, Charlotte Meisner and Natascha Pomino) and subject clitics in French (Jennifer Culbertson and Géraldine Legendre, Michael Zimmermann and Georg Kaiser) with the contributions of Meisner and Pomino and of Rowlett explicitly investigating their morphophonological and syntactic interaction. The papers assembled all focus on contemporary French, with the exception of Lene Schøsler’s and Harald Völker’s contribution on Old French.

Both French sentential negation, with or without the preverbal clitic *ne*, and the realisation of clitic subjects, are well-known variables in French (for  $\pm ne$  variation see e.g. Armstrong, 2002; Armstrong and Smith, 2002; Ashby, 1976, 1981, 2001; Coveney, 2002; for a general description of French and Romance clitics see Heap, 2000 or Miller and Monachesi, 2003). The French clitic paradigm is often described as moving down a grammaticalisation path from formally independent pronouns towards agreement affixes (cf. Lehmann, 1985; Fuß, 2005). Some scholars have even gone as far as to describe modern French subject clitics as prefixed agreement

morphemes expressing person and number of the inflected verb (see e.g. Auger, 1994; Culbertson, 2010; Culbertson and Legendre, 2008; Kaiser, 2008; Miller and Sag, 1997; Roberge, 1990 and Zribi-Hertz, 1994), which results in a pro-drop analysis for Modern Colloquial French. Now, if French subject clitics are really becoming agreement markers, they should occur without exceptions and always in the same place, as affixes do. However, the situation of some French subject clitics, such as impersonal *il*, seems to be much more complicated: in some contexts, it can be easily omitted (e.g. *Ø faut faire ça*), while in other cases this seems hardly possible (e.g. *\*Ø pleut toute la semaine*). This issue will be taken up by the contributions of Jennifer Culbertson and Géraldine Legendre, Michael Zimmermann and Georg Kaiser.

Recently, the interaction of French negation and the just mentioned reanalysis of subject clitics have been widely discussed in the context of a potential diglossia in contemporary French (cf. Massot, 2010; Zribi-Hertz, 2011 and the special issue of *JFLS* in 2013, vol. 23.1, edited by Benjamin Massot and Paul Rowlett, 'L'hypothèse d'une diglossie en France'), where a systematic co-occurrence of *ne*-omission and obligatory clitic subjects (being reanalysed as subject agreement markers), on the one hand (cf. e.g. Culbertson, 2010: 98), and of *ne*-realisation and fully argumental clitic subjects, on the other, is argued for (see also Palasis, 2013, with evidence from acquisitional data). However, the precise nature of this interaction, which has been observed for quite some time (see e.g. Duffer & Stark, 2007; Meisner, 2010), has not yet been fully understood, neither for French, nor for other Romance varieties (cf. e.g. Zanuttini, 1997).

In contrast to the diglossic approach, 'classic' variational, variationist<sup>1</sup> and sociolinguistic approaches to the two phenomena at hand consider them in principle as independent, though occasionally co-occurring variables triggered by extra- or intralinguistic factors (e.g. pragmatic or linguistic context, cf. Armstrong, 2001, 2002; Armstrong and Smith, 2002; Coveney, 2002 on negation and Coveney, 2010; van Compernelle, Williams & McCourt, 2011, Williams & van Compernelle, 2009 on clitic variation). The only paper of the present special issue that takes a direct stance and claims a third, intralinguistic explanation for the close interaction between *ne* and clitic subjects (i.e. neither diglossic nor extralinguistically triggered) and consequently rejects the diglossia hypothesis is the contribution by Charlotte Meisner and Natascha Pomino, while all other contributions try to model syntactically the striking variation phenomena in French negated imperatives (Peters, Rowlett) or with impersonal (expletive) clitic subjects (Culbertson and Legendre, Zimmermann and Kaiser).

In Old French, the variable to be investigated is not the omission of *ne*, but the optional *pas* and its variants, which appears to be obligatory only later (cf. Ménard, 1994, §283). The evolution from Old French sentential negation *ne* +  $\emptyset$  to Modern *ne* + NEG-PARTICLE is one of the important features of French morphosyntactic

<sup>1</sup> For the distinction between variational and variationist linguistics see e.g. Gadet (2003: 98), and Völker (2009: 34).

variation in diachrony. It reveals a major and still ongoing morphosyntactic change that has been described by Jespersen (1917): initially, *ne* was the unique preverbal particle of negation. Later on, a number of postverbal particles of reinforcement like *pas*, *mie*, *point* and others were grammaticalised and used together with *ne*, which nowadays may be dropped under certain conditions (see above). Up to now, the initial part of evolution has not yet been understood in all its aspects; thus, the diachronic variational linguistic study by Lene Schøsler and Harald Völker is trying to identify relevant factors for the absence or the presence of these elements of reinforcement in Old French.

Syntactically, Modern French bipartite negation has been described in multiple ways: following the ‘classical’ analysis, based on Pollock (1989) (cf. Haegeman, 1996; Rowlett, 1998), it is conceived in terms of a negative functional projection NegP, whose specifier is occupied by the negative element *pas*, while *ne* is located in its head position. In the last decades, questions have been raised concerning the status of negation as a functional phrase. More recent approaches, such as the ones adopted by Biberauer and Roberts (2011), Déprez (2003), Roberts (2007) and Zeijlstra (2004), describe the co-occurrence of French negation particles *ne* and *pas* in terms of negative concord, in analogy to the multiple occurrence of n-words and negative markers in other Romance languages (e.g. the Italian negative marker *non* ‘no’ and n-words such as *nessuno* ‘nobody’ or *niente* ‘nothing’). These and related issues become clearer by analysing non-standard data such as negated imperatives with enclitics: *dis-le pas*, investigated by Hugues Peters.

In the following, we give a brief overview over our six contributions:

The contribution of **Charlotte Meisner** and **Natascha Pomino** (Universität Zürich), *Synchronic variation in the expression of French negation: A Distributed Morphology approach*, provides a new approach to variation in the expression of French sentential negation. Based on empirical evidence, the authors reconsider the influence of the grammatical subject on the absence and presence of the clitic negation particle *ne*. While *ne* absence and presence has been seen as a sociolinguistic variable, a stylistic marker or indicating the alternation between two different grammars of French, the authors claim that it is mainly dependent on the phonological form of the grammatical subject. In spoken French, lexical subjects and ‘heavy’ pronouns seem to favour *ne* presence, while ‘light’ clitics inhibit it. This empirical result is implemented within the framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz, 1994).

Based on a recent syntactic approach (Shlonsky, 2004; Rizzi 1997), **Paul Rowlett’s** (University of Salford) contribution *French imperatives, negative ne, and non-subject clitics* discusses the clitic placement in positive and negative imperatives in French. While in positive imperatives all clitics appear obligatorily after the verb, negative imperatives include proclitics (at least in the standard language). These differences are accounted for by the assumption of a feature checking mechanism either of several features on one head, or of feature spreading across several head positions: in positive imperatives all features are checked on one head before clitics merge, hence these will be enclitic. In contrast, negation intervenes between the

relevant features, provokes checking in multiple heads and blocks the enclisis, so that the clitics occur in preverbal position.

**Hugues Peters** (University of New South Wales, Australia) in his paper *The morpho-syntactic status of ne and its effect on the syntax of imperative sentences* argues against the status of *ne* as a negative particle. *Ne* does not determine the scope of negation with respect to other operators and does not have properties of a head (being optional). Rather, *ne* should be considered as an affix merged to a Tense projection (TNSP) endowed with sub-label features of polarity. It is argued that this proposal provides a unified solution for the distributional properties of *ne* in finite and non-finite contexts alike, with a special emphasis on Standard French negative imperatives, which are characterised by the proclisis of argument clitics, crucially linked to properties of Tense, as opposed to their enclisis in positive imperatives, and in non standard spoken registers where *ne* is absent (*prends-le pas* ‘don’t take it’).

**Jennifer Culbertson** (George Mason University, USA) and **Géraldine Legendre** (Johns Hopkins University, USA), *Prefixal agreement and impersonal il in Spoken French: Experimental evidence*, argue that *il* in impersonals (and other constructions with less than fully referential subjects) is an agreement marker, like all other subject clitics in colloquial French, which can be dropped under some circumstances. They report the results of a controlled acceptability judgement task designed to probe features which affect the availability of *il*-drop. Their findings suggest that verb frequency, subcategorisation by the verb for a quasi-argument vs. true expletive, and modal vs. non-modal status influence *il*-drop. Finally they set out some implications of the observed variation for an analysis of subject clitics as agreement affixes in Spoken French.

**Michael Zimmermann’s** and **Georg Kaiser’s** (Universität Konstanz) paper *On expletive subject pronoun drop in Colloquial French* also looks into the intriguing characteristic of Colloquial French to have expletive subject pronouns non-expressed in impersonal constructions. The authors establish that different conceptions of this characteristic as (further) evidence for the approach to the clitic subject pronouns in terms of inflectional affixes prove to be inadequate. Rather, the non-expression of expletive subject pronouns is shown to be syntactically restricted. In light of the additional insight that this phenomenon represents the continuation of a grammatical trait of older stages of French, an account is put forward which argues that the non-expression of the expletive subject pronouns in Colloquial French follows from the same reasons as the non-expression of subject pronouns in Medieval French, namely the left-peripheral movement of the finite verb.

**Lene Schøsler’s** (Københavns Universitet) and **Harald Völker’s** (Universität Zürich) paper on *Intralinguistic and extralinguistic variation factors in Old French negation with ne-Ø, ne-mie, ne-pas and ne-point across different text types* is motivated by the wish to find relevant factors that favour the existing variants of sentential negation in Old French – with Old French being a period of transition from *ne-Ø* to *ne+pas*. In order to identify factors of influence on the variable NEG with or without *pas*, *mie* and *point*, the authors analyse two subcorpora of two different text types (narrative and charters). The choice of the tested factors implies (extralinguistic) factors like

diatopic and diastratic ones as well as intralinguistic factors like transitivity of the verb, word order and clause type. One of the results is the probable relevance of clause type and the influence of socially definable (diastratic) groups. In addition to these findings, the two different text types shed some light on relevant text type differences in diachronic empirical research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all our anonymous reviewers for their substantial remarks which all contributed crucially to the improvement of this special issue, the editorial board of *JFLS* for having accepted this special issue, Julia Herschensohn for her patience with us, Mirjam Beck for style checking, and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) grant 10CO12\_140592, and the association of the friends of Zurich University (Zürcher Universitätsverein) for considerable financial support of the above mentioned workshop. Gabrielle Hess, Mirjam Beck and Aurélia Robert-Tissot provided indispensable logistic support around the workshop itself.

*Address for correspondence:*  
Romanisches Seminar  
Zürichbergstrasse 8  
CH-8032  
Zürich  
Switzerland  
e-mail: estark@rom.uzh.ch

REFERENCES

- Armstrong, N. (2001). *Social and Stylistic Variation in Spoken French. A Comparative Approach*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Armstrong, N. (2002). Variable deletion of French *ne*. A cross-stylistic perspective. *Language Sciences*, 24: 153–173.
- Armstrong, N. and Smith, A. (2002). The influence of linguistic and social factors on the recent decline of French *ne*. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 12: 23–41.
- Ashby, W. J. (1976). The loss of the negative morpheme *ne* in Parisian French. *Lingua*, 39: 119–137.
- Ashby, W. J. (1981). The loss of the negative particle *ne* in French: a syntactic change in progress. *Language*, 57: 674–687.
- Ashby, W. J. (2001). Un nouveau regard sur la chute du *ne* en français parlé tourangeau. S'agit-il d'un changement en cours? *Journal of French Language Studies*, 11: 1–22.
- Auger, J. (1994). Pronominal clitics in Québec colloquial French: a morphological analysis. PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania; accessible online under: [http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1174&context=ircs\\_reports](http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1174&context=ircs_reports)

- Biberauer, T. and Roberts, I. (2011). Negative words and related expressions. A new perspective on some familiar puzzles. In: P. Larrivée and R. P. Ingham (eds), *The Evolution of Negation. Beyond the Jespersen Cycle*. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, pp. 23–60.
- Coveney, A. (2002). *Variability in Spoken French. A Sociolinguistic Study of Interrogation and Negation*, 2nd ed. Bristol UK, Portland USA: Elm Bank.
- Coveney, A. (2010). *Vouolement and tutoiement: sociolinguistic reflections*. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 20.2: 127–150.
- Culbertson, J. (2010). Convergent evidence for categorical change in French: from subject clitic to agreement marker. *Language*, 86: 85–132.
- Culbertson, J. and Legendre, G. (2008). Qu'en est-il des clitiques sujet en français oral contemporain? In: J. Durand, B. Habert and B. Laks (eds), *Actes du 1er Congrès Mondial de Linguistique française*. Paris: EDP Sciences, pp. 2651–2662.
- Déprez, V. (2003). Concordance négative, syntaxe des mots-N et variation dialectale. *Cahiers de Linguistique Française*, 25: 97–118.
- Dufter, A. and Stark, E. (2007): La linguistique variationnelle et les changements linguistiques 'mal compris'. Le cas de la 'disparition' du ne de négation. In: C. Marchello-Nizia and B. Combettes (eds), *Etudes sur le changement linguistique en français*. Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, pp. 115–128.
- Fuß, E. (2005). *The Rise of Agreement. A Formal Approach to the Syntax and Grammaticalization of Verbal Inflection*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Gadet, F. (2003). La signification sociale de la variation. *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, 54: 98–114.
- Haegeman, L. (1996). *The Syntax of Negation*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Halle, M. and Marantz, A. (1994). Some key features of Distributed Morphology. *MIT Working Papers in Linguistics: Papers on Phonology and Morphology*, 21: 275–288.
- Heap, D. (2000). *La variation grammaticale en géolinguistique. Les pronoms sujet en roman central*. Munich: LINCOM Europa.
- Jespersen, O. (1917). *Negation in English and Other Languages*. Copenhagen: Høst.
- Lehmann, C. (1985). Grammaticalization: Synchronic variation and diachronic change. *Lingua e Stile*, 20: 303–318.
- Kaiser, G. A. (2008). Zur Grammatikalisierung der französischen Personalpronomina. In: E. Stark, R. Schmidt-Riese and E. Stoll (eds), *Romanische Syntax im Wandel*. Tübingen: Narr, pp. 305–326.
- Massot, B. (2010). Le patron diglossique de la variation grammaticale en français. *Langue Française*, 168: 87–106.
- Massot, B. and Rowlett, P. (eds) (2013). L'hypothèse d'une diglossie en France. Special issue, *Journal of French Language Studies*, 23.1.
- Meisner, C. (2010). A corpus analysis of intra- and extralinguistic factors triggering *ne*-deletion in phonic French. In: F. Neveu et al. (eds), *Congrès Mondial de Linguistique Française – CMLF 2010*. Paris: Institut de Linguistique Française, pp. 1943–1962.
- Ménard, P. (1994). *Syntaxe de l'ancien français*, 4th ed. Bordeaux: Bière.
- Miller, P. H. and Monachesi, P. (2003). Les pronoms clitiques dans les langues romanes. In: D. Godard (ed.), *Les langues romanes: problèmes de la phrase simple*. Paris: CNRS, pp. 67–123.
- Miller, P. H. and Sag, I. A. (1997). French clitic movement without clitics or movement. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 15: 573–639.

- Palasis, K. (2013). The case for diglossia: Describing the emergence of two grammars in the early acquisition of metropolitan French. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 23: 17–35.
- Pollock, J.-Y. (1989). Verb movement, universal grammar, and the structure of IP. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 20: 365–424.
- Rizzi, L. (1997). The fine structure of the left periphery. In: L Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of Grammar*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, pp. 281–337.
- Roberge, Y. (1990). *The Syntactic Recoverability of Null Arguments*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Roberts, I. (2007). *Diachronic Syntax*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rowlett, P. (1998). *Sentential Negation in French*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shlonsky, U. (2004). Enclisis and proclisis. In: L. Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of CP and IP. The Cartography of Syntactic Structures*, vol. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 329–353.
- van Compernelle, R. A., Williams, L. and McCourt, C. (2011). A corpus-driven study of second-person pronoun variation in L2 French synchronous computer-mediated communication. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 8(1): 67–91.
- Völker, H. (2009). La linguistique variationnelle et la perspective intralinguistique. *Revue de Linguistique Romane*, 73: 27–76.
- Williams, L. and van Compernelle, R. A. (2009). On versus tu and vous: Pronouns with indefinite reference in synchronous electronic French discourse. *Language Sciences*, 31: 409–427.
- Zanuttini, R. (1997). *Negation and Clausal Structure: A Comparative Study of Romance Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zeijlstra, H. (2004). Sentential negation and negative concord. PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam.
- Zribi-Hertz, A. (1994). The syntax of nominative clitics in standard and advanced French. In: G. Cinque et al. (eds), *Paths towards Universal Grammar. Studies in Honor of Richard S. Kayne*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, pp. 453–472.
- Zribi-Hertz, A. (2011). Pour un modèle diglossique de description du français: quelques implications théoriques, didactiques et méthodologiques. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 21: 1–26.