

Maryana Havran¹, Roksolana Vysotska²

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXPRESSION OF NEGATION IN FRENCH

ABSTRACT:

This research paper studies the evolution of the syntactic realization of negation in French. In the **introduction** part, it is defined the objective of the research as tracing the development of using words *aucun*, *personne* and *rien* in French negative structures presenting their different practical applications. One of the tasks is to find out if these constructions could be used with the negative marker *pas*, without inducing a double negation interpretation. The novelty of the research paper is the evolution of the expression of French negation proved by the given examples taken mostly from literary, legal or epistolary texts. **The stages of evolution in French negation** part shows a detailed analysis of negative markers *ne* and *pas* through different stages of their developments presented by various scientists. The evolution of negation in French is generally analyzed by using three main stages, but the investigation proves that there are other approaches for characterizing it, the so-called four stages evolution or even five stages; nevertheless, the final stage is identified by negation expressed by using only marker *pas*. The next part of this paper **The expression of negation in Old and modern French** studies the evolution of the undefined *aucun*, *personne* and *rien*, which are presented in the negative constructions in modern French. It is proved that the negation was strengthened by adding an undefined non-negative post verbal element or representing a small amount, such as *pas*, *point*, *mie*, *brin*, *goutte*, *aucun*, *personne*, *rien*, etc. It is concluded that in the course of historical development, these words being initially of positive value have taken on a negative coloration and value in modern French.

INTRODUCTION.

In the process of learning foreign languages, grammarians distinguish such a linguistic component, without assimilation and perfect understanding of which, it is impossible to master and fully comprehend the whole structure of the language. Such component is known to be negation which expression and emphatic constructions have been changing since the development of almost every European language.

¹ Ph.D. (Pedagogy), Associate professor, Associate professor of the Department of Foreign Languages
Lviv Polytechnic National University, UKRAINE

² Lecturer of the Department of Foreign Languages
Lviv Polytechnic National University, UKRAINE

At the historical progress many European languages elaborated negation that accompanied the verb, but in French this tendency has been developed to one of the highest levels. At the end of the XVII century, *pas* and *point* appeared. The latest, favourably used in the XVII century, lost its value in favour of *pas*. Isolated *ne* is no longer used in more than a few phrases, particularly specific to cultivated society: *je ne sais que dire, je ne sais où....* [1].

For a long time, the concept of negation continues to be the object of investigation of such sciences as logic, linguistics, and even philosophy, because “there is no system of logic, mathematics, science, philosophy or theology in which negation does not play a fundamental role” [10]. In linguistics, negation is presented as one of the main categories. Today, despite a great amount of scientific works, the category of negation remains the object of the investigations of eminent and leading linguists and grammarians, among them J. Pinchon, D. Willis, Ch. Lukas, R.L. Wagner, A. Breutbarth, A. Dauzat, N. Fournier, P. Larrivée [6; 7; 12].

This article studies the evolution of the syntactic realization of negation in French. Our research objective is to trace the development of using words *aucun*, *personne* and *rien* in French negative structures presenting their different practical applications. One of our tasks is to find out if these constructions could be used with the negative marker *pas*, without inducing a double negation interpretation, as it is in the case of non-standard Quebec French. Moreover, a detailed analysis of the historical influence on contemporary state of using negative constructions in French is also of a scientific merit.

The novelty of the research paper is the evolution of the expression of French negation proved by the given examples taken mostly from literary, legal or epistolary texts. We are also interested in presenting the French negation that the grammarians and lexicographers used at that time. For this reason, we focus on the grammars and dictionaries published between the XVI and XIX centuries.

THE STAGES OF EVOLUTION IN FRENCH NEGATION.

The system of negation in French includes two dimensions: a semantic dimension and a syntactic dimension. On the one hand, it is possible to express an idea of negation using semantic negation particles, such prefixes as (in, dé -...) or lexical items (*faux*, *erroné*, *nier....*), while maintaining a positive sentence form [4]: *Ce décor est d'une inimaginable beauté. Il faudra démonter ce*

meuble afin de bien le réparer. Il est faux de dire que ce film est mal réalisé. Cette affirmation est erronée. Le suspect a nié tout ce dont l'accusait.

On the other hand, the elements that were part of the syntactic system of negation make it possible to form a negative sentence. They are the following elements as: *ne... pas/point, jamais, plus, guère, aucunement, nulle part*; the indefinite pronouns *aucun, nul, personne, rien*; the undefined determinants *aucun, nul* [3].

To study and analyse the evolution of negation in French in more details, we have to go back to Indo-European language, which expressed a negative statement with a single negation *ne*. This Indo-European negation has almost disappeared in classical Latin in favour of an amalgam, *non* [13], from *ne-oenum*, which means “not a thing”. In this expression, *oenum* is a neutral numeral that acts as a positive strengthen of the negation. Subsequently, *non* has lost its final consonant before consonant, becoming *no* or *ne* [1]. It was used in the XX century in the form of *ne*, as presented below:

“Il ne s’affligeait pas tant de leur salut” from *“Et ne doleiet tant de lur salut”* (fragments of Valenciennes on Jonas, 950, in TLFi).

In certain varieties of French, like Quebec French, there are constructions with both negative indefinites (*aucun, personne* and *rien*) and the negative marker *pas*, without inducing a double negation. Examples of these constructions in Quebec French are: *J’en ai pas vu aucun. Je connais pas personne. Je vois pas rien* [1]. At the same time, N. Fournier suggests that this type of construction is quite common among classical authors [7]. Several examples from texts of the XVII and the beginning of the XVIII centuries are given here: *Il n’y resta pas aucun vestige que cette ville eût jamais été. Je ne veux point ôter à personne l’espérance de les vaincre.*

It is worth mentioning that in the course of historical development, the negative constructions containing the words *aucun, personne* and *rien* have changed significantly. They were firstly conveyed with an affirmative value and then shifted to a negative one.

In the section on the history of negation in French, it is presented the theory of the cycle of negation. Jespersen supposes that the negation evolves in a cycle that can be found in many languages. The evolution of negation in French is generally analyzed by using three main stages [11]. First, the negation is expressed using the preverbal marker *ne*. To illustrate this step, Larrivée and Rowlett use the example from Old French: *Jeo ne dis*. Then, in the days of classical French, according to Larrivée and Rowlett, negation is expressed using the preverbal marker *ne* and a postverbal element (*je ne dis pas*). Finally,

in modern oral French, we observe the loss of the preverbal marker *ne*, and the negation is expressed using the postverbal element (*je dis pas*). In fact, we have observed this loss of the *ne* since the XVII century. Indeed, although it was rather rare at this time, the loss of *ne* was developing more widely in the following centuries [9].

According to van der Auwera, this evolution can also be represented by using four or five stages [11]. The four-stage evolution can be presented in two ways, according to the authors. For some authors cited by van der Auwera, it is detailed as follows: at the first stage, the negation is expressed by the accented ancestor of *ne*, that means *non*. At the second stage, the negation is expressed with the help of *ne* alone. At the third stage, the negation is expressed by using the two negative markers *ne* and *pas*. Finally, at the last stage, we observe the loss of *ne* when negation is expressed by using *pas* only.

For other authors cited by van der Auwera, the evolution of negation looks more like this: at the first stage, negation is expressed through *ne* alone [11]. At the second stage, the negation is expressed using *ne* and *pas*, which was not yet negative. At the third stage, the negation is expressed using *ne* and *pas*, now negative. Finally, at the last stage, we observe the loss of *ne*, and the negation is expressed with the help of *pas* only.

In accordance with the five-stage evolution by van der Auwera, it is presented sensitively in the same way as the three-stage evolution, but includes distinct stages where the transitional passages between *ne* and *ne...pas* are explicitly presented, where *pas* is optional to express the negation, and between *nepas* and *pas*, where *ne* is optional to express the negation. This evolution is thus presented as follows: at the first stage, the negation is expressed by means of *ne* alone. The second stage is negation expressed by using *ne* and, optionally, *pas*. At the third stage, negation is expressed with the help of two negative markers *ne* and *pas*. At the fourth stage, the negation is expressed by using *pas* and, optionally, *ne*. The final stage is negation expressed by using only *pas* [12].

At the same time, it should be noted that Ashby also includes certain elements of dating his description of the evolution of French negation and presents it through five stages [3]. During the first stage, in classical Latin, negation is expressed by *non*. At the second stage, in Ancient French, negation is expressed by using *ne* and, optionally, *pas* or other positive words expressing small quantities that help to reinforce the negation. At the third stage, in classical French, negation is expressed by means of two negative markers *ne* and *pas*. The fourth stage is defined by negation expressed by *pas* and,



optionally, *ne*. Finally, at the last stage, Ashby presents as “future French”, negation expressed by using *pas* only, as it was also mentioned by van der Auwera.

THE EXPRESSION OF NEGATION IN OLD AND MODERN FRENCH.

In Old Classical French (1150-1300), there is a coexistence of *non*, full form, and *ne*, toneless form [15]. The *non* form is used in sentences where there is an ellipse of the verb, as can be seen in the following examples: “*Ne set nus hanz hom Qui foi li porte ne qui non*” (*La chaste/aine de Vergi*, milieu du XIII siècle. “*Nul puissant ne sait qui lui est fidèle et qui ne l'est pas*” [15]. The *non* form is also used before the verbs *estre*, *avoir*, *valoir*, *pouvoir*, and before the verbs in non personal modes.

However, from the XI century (1050), the simple *ne* [...] was felt to be too weak to express negation. Indeed, it is a clitic, which elides before verbs that start with a vowel. Moreover, it has no prosodic or syntactic autonomy [12].

So, to give more strength to the negation, some elements have been added to *ne*. These elements are either nouns having no specific negative value and expressing a minimal quantity or even “picturesque words [names], suggesting the idea of a very low value” [15] or undefined. We denote by the term “undefined” the quantifiers which designate a zero quantity [2] like *aucun*, *nul*, *personne*, *rien*. From Ancient French, the negation *ne* was strengthened by the addition of indefinites, also called semi-negations [14].

According to the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, the negation particle *pas* appeared in French in the XI century and came from the substantive *pas* [7]. Initially, *pas* is used to reinforce negation in the context of walking, as in *Je ne marche pas* (“je ne fais même pas un pas”). Subsequently, this use of *pas* extended to verbs expressing the movement in general. From the XVI century, *pas* replaced its “competitors” and became the most common particle of negation [7].

In accordance with Brunot, who admits that the rule of negation proposed by Maupas wanting the particle *ne* to be omitted before a term already expressing the negation, is imposed fairly quickly in the 17th century with clearly negative words as *jamais* [12]. We therefore find many examples where these negative words are used in constructions with *ne ... pas*. « Ces mots [...] ne font pas double emploi avec *pas*, parce que ou bien ils sont seulement en train de devenir négatifs, ou bien ils ne le sont plus qu'à moitié. De toute façon,

la valeur négative n'y est pas assez nette pour empêcher d'employer la négation complète.» [12].

Thus, for better understanding of the expression of negation, we analysed in more detail the evolution of the undefined *aucun*, *personne* and *rien*, as they are presented in the negative constructions in modern French.

Evolution of *aucun*

The word *aucun* appears in the French language at the end of the 10th century in the form *alcun* [5]. This word comes from the late Latin *alicunus*, itself from *aliquis* “someone” and *unus* “one”. In Ancient French, *aucun* retains its positive value and means “some, someone”. According to Rey and Tomi, *aucun* is used in negative sentences and then takes a negative meaning from the XI century. However, according to Hasenohr, *aucun* is never negative in Ancient French. Buridant affirms that “in almost all literary works [in Ancient French], *aucun* does not appear in negative sentences; it only appears with *ne* in clearly positive meanings [5].

Evolution of *personne*

First of all, it is important to mention that most of our findings on the evolution of *personne* are related to the noun and not to the pronoun. Since this study does not focus on the noun *personne*, we only retained information about the pronoun *personne*. The indefinite pronoun *personne*, “is derived by specialization from the substantive *personne*” [8]. Originally, *personne* has a positive value and means “any human being”. This word retains this value in hypothetical sentences until the XVI century and even in negative sentences until the XV century. At the end of the XIII century, *personne*, used with *ne* in negative sentences, acquires the negative value of “no one, nobody” [8].

Evolution of *rien*

The indefinite *rien* appears in the French language at the end of the X century in the form *ren*. It took the form of *rien* approximately in the XI century. This word is derived from the Latin *rem*, which means “the thing, the possession, the property”. In Ancient French, it originally takes on the vague signification and general meaning of “thing”. *Rien*, which was used as an indefinite pronoun, means “something, anything”, and it is used “whenever the context is not fully affirmative” [15].

The pronoun *rien* has had a positive value (in parallel with the negative value) in the sense of “thing” for a long time. It acquired a negative value along with the negation particle *ne*. Le Bidois and Le Bidois denote the fact that “this positive value inherent in the word *rien* is so strong that in order to make it forget, a writer had recourse to the negation *ne ... pas*. In addition, they add



that the particle *pas*, aiming to redouble the negation in such constructions, was used especially with the pronoun *rien*, which had retained a part of its positive value. Nyrop agrees with this and suggests that the particle *pas* “was used with *rien* which had kept something of its original value” [5]. In this regard, he also mentions the examples of *Plaideurs* by Racine, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* by Molière, and works of La Fontaine and La Bruyère where there are similar structures. Wagner and Pinchon are for this opinion but add that the indefinite pronoun *personne* could also enter into this kind of construction (with a double negation adverb, like *ne ... pas*) in classical French [15].

Today, spoken French has its own features in the field of phonetics, vocabulary and grammar. Particular attention is drawn to the negative sentences, where we can observe significant changes in modern colloquial language. These changes affect the means of expressing absolute, nominal and restrictive negation. French refers to polynegative languages that use negative particles in common sentences [4].

N. Shigarevskaya describes in details the contradictory sentences and functions of the negative particle *ne* which has weakened its role and meaning under conditions of constant evolution [4]. This particle became an unstressed word, while the stressed position *pas* at the end of the accent group or utterance got its own negative meaning, and bilateral syntactic connections *pas* with the predicate and the adverb changed the meaning in the second component of the negation.

Thus, the interaction of grammatical and phonetic processes of evolution has led to the emergence in colloquial language of a tendency to rearrange the common sentence: double adverbial negation is replaced by one, which is expressed mainly by the negative particle “*pas*” [3], as it is evidenced by the following examples [5]:

1. *Elle est pas jeune, pas belle, mais pas banale.*
2. *Oh! ça fait rien, je n'aime pas les fêtes.*
3. *Tu peux pas le dire à ta famille.*

It should be noted that the omission of “*ne*” in most cases is a sign of colloquial speech. In the literary-colloquial variety, there are both forms of expression of verb negation: “*ne... pas*”, “*pas*” [6]. But the first form is more often used in modern French than the last one.

It is important to specify the fact that modern authors and researches agree that the standard of French has been changing since the era of classical French. Indeed, even if some seventeenth-century grammarians condemn the use of *rien*, *personne*, *aucun* in constructions with *ne ... pas*, the fairly large

number of examples taken from texts of this period illustrates their existence. On this subject, Fournier maintains that “the vitality of the usage of *personne*, *rien*, *aucun* in a foreclosure atmosphere and in particular in correlation with *ne ... pas*, [...] leads to the conclusion that there is a mismatch between the usage and partial grammatical diagnosis” [7].

CONCLUSION.

Our analysis shows that the verbal negation with two terms as we know it in modern French is a product of a long historical evolution. Indeed, the negation was firstly expressed by using the preverbal marker *ne*. Then the negation was strengthened by the addition of an undefined non-negative post verbal element or representing a small amount, such as *pas*, *point*, *mie*, *brin*, *goutte*, *aucun*, *personne*, *rien*, etc. Over time, these words being initially of positive value have taken on a negative coloration and value. These elements have become truly negative, as we can see it today in modern French.

Our research findings draw attention to the fact that negation in French is expressed not only semantically, but also by syntactic elements, that's why the negation words *aucun*, *rien* and *personne* are used in the sentences when they are required by their syntactic model (nature, meaning). Negative sentences in their grammatical senses can contain only two models: *ne* and *pas*, or such negative phrases as *aucun*, *rien* and *personne*.

As the development of negation in French is rather vast subject but the given research paper is restricted in the framework of only certain words which under historical conditions appeared in negative constructions of modern French, we realize that it is necessary to conduct the further scientific investigations concerning French negation.

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