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FROM N TO D*
CHARTING THE TIME COURSE OF THE INTERNAL RISE
OF FRENCH N-WORDS

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Abstract

Based on a thorough review of their feature make up and on novel diachronic data of their modification properties, this paper maps out the internal syntactic structure of French n-words and the historical time course of their internal rise within a nominal projection. It charts out precise steps that directly relate internal structural changes to corresponding changes in concord properties. Indirect modification with *autre* as in *rien d'autre* is shown to be an innovation of modern French that serves to provide a distinctive signature of the final morphosyntactic change of n-words into negative quantificational expressions. The evidence offered supports the hypothesis (Déprez 2000; Condoravdi & Kiparsky 2006) that it is change in the internal structure of n-words that determined the current properties of negative concord, not changes in the sentential negation marker, contra Zeijlstra (2004 and following work).

1. Introduction

It has been proposed that negative concord systems be distinguished on the basis of 1) the internal syntax of their n-words and 2) the semantic interface that these syntactic structure imply (Déprez 1997, 2000; Lohndal & Haegeman (2010). In particular, for languages like Haitian Creole (HC) Déprez (1997, 2000) proposed that n-words occupy a low structural position in a nominal constituent and showed that they manifest syntactic and semantic properties relating to those of bare nominals. Negative concord, in these cases, involves an operator variable system, with negation binding a bare nominal variable. For languages such as French in contrast, n-words

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occupy a high position in their DP, behaving syntactically like determiners with the semantics of quantificational expressions. Negative concord, in these cases, involves resumptive quantification (May 1989; Déprez 2000; De Swart & Sag 2002). The proposal was motivated by the observation that although in both languages, n-words share the appearance of ‘bare’ nominals – *pèsonn* ‘nobody’ in HC and *personne* ‘nobody’ in French – the general licensing conditions on bare-N radically differ, bare-N occurring freely as arguments in HC, but not in contemporary French. If bare N have a null determiner, this difference implies that null-D are fully licensed in HC, but not in French, leaving for French the structure (1b) in which the “bare” n-word occupies a determiner position.¹

- (1) a. [DP D⁰ [NP *pèsonn*]] (Haitian Creole)
 b. [DP *personne* [NP]] (Contemporary French)

Following Déprez (2000), I regard these two systems as the two polar extremes of negative relations between which micro-variation can span. Empirical support for this approach to negative concord requires a detailed analysis of the internal structure of n-words and evidence of robust correlations between this inner syntax and distinctive properties of the concord relation. This paper has two goals: first, to provide a detailed internal analysis for standard contemporary European-French n-words, focusing on their feature composition and their modification possibilities and second, to offer an in depth exploration of the changes that have affected this internal structure in history and of the correlation that these changes present with those of the negative relations they participate in. The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 sums up and expands the distributional evidence for the complex D-structure of French n-words. Next, we turn to their feature composition and modification possibilities and we take stock of what these mean for their internal structure. In the second part of the paper, we turn to historical changes in feature composition and modification possibilities, focusing on novel evidence provided by modification with *autre*, which are particularly revealing for the evolution of French n-words through internal structural changes.

¹ The idea that French n-words are determiners is also independently proposed in Sleeman’s (1996) dissertation. The similarities and difference between this formal proposal and the classic grammatical tradition that considers n-words as indefinite pronouns (Gougenheim 1951; Grevisse 1980, Nyrop 1930 among others) are discussed in depth in this work.

2. Looking inside N-words

2.1 Distributional evidence

As is well known, the lexeme *personne* still has a double life in contemporary French as a common count noun meaning ‘person’ and as an n-word with a strong negative interpretation. A careful comparison of the two can thus provide interesting grounds to determine the minimal factors that enter in their distinction. Given that the frequency of use of each of these items is roughly the same, questions arise as to how speakers know which is which.² The answer turns out to be relatively simple. *Personne* has a (positive) nominal interpretation whenever it co-occurs with a determiner in an argument position (2a). Conversely, it is interpreted as an n-word, whenever it occurs bare, in an argument position, with no determiner, as in (2b).

- (2) a. *J’ai vu une/cette/la personne.*
 “I have seen a/one/this/the person.”
 b. *J’ai vu personne.*
 “I have seen no one.”

This complementary distribution between the co-presence of overt determiners and the n-word interpretation of *personne* is quite general, apart from a few interesting cases discussed below, and reveals a competition for the same syntactic position that clearly supports placing the n-word *personne* in a determiner position. This structural hypothesis, in turn, provides a straightforward explanation as to how a seemingly bare nominal *personne* succeeds in meeting the stringent French requirement for obligatory determination: *personne* requires no determiner whenever it is, itself, a determiner. Worth stressing, moreover, is the fact that complementary distribution with D is far more reliable a cue to the interpretation of *personne* than its co-occurrence in a negative context with either a weak negative marker like *ne* or a strong one like *pas*. The presence/absence of *ne*, as is known, changes nothing to the n-word interpretation of a bare *personne*, nor can it or *pas* coerce the nominal interpretation of a determined *personne* to negation. Indeed, the semantic distinction between the negated nominal in (3a) and the n-word in (3b), although subtle, is nonetheless patent. Consider a scenario in which, aliens that look like humans would have invaded our world and would be looking for remaining humans they call ‘persons’ for final annihilation. Then, if an alien hunter was looking for humans in a crowded alien party and came up

² Our assertion here is based on a rough estimate of occurrences of *personne* in the Elicop corpus. In each of the files of this corpus that we considered and tallied, the count of negative *personne* came to about the same number as the count of the positive uses.

empty handed, he could truthfully utter (3a), but surely not (3b).

- (3) a. *Je n'ai pas vu de personne(s)*
 "I did not see any person."
 b. *Je n'ai vu personne*
 "I saw nobody."

Only in (3a), but not in (3b), does the lexical meaning remain prevalent, as expected if *personne* is indeed a nominal predicate in the former, but not in the latter. (3a) is yet of further interest for the peculiar nominal structure in [de NP] it features. Kayne (1977) argued that this construction sports a remnant null determiner, an analysis supported by the fact that it manifests a characteristic subject/object asymmetry (4), like other null D structures.

- (4) a. **Je ne crois pas que [de personnes] seront invitées.*
 "I don't think that persons will be invited."
 b. *Je ne crois pas qu'il sera invité [de/personne(s)] à son anniversaire.*
 "I don't think that there will be invited persons to his birthday."

[de NP] constructions also require an overt c-commanding operator, here negation, which is expected if their remnant null D is a variable that must appropriately be bound for interpretation. If this much is correct, it provides strong contrastive evidence that militates against contemporary bare n-words containing a null D, given that their distribution manifests no comparable subject/object asymmetry and no comparable overt operator-binding requirement. There is also empirical evidence that they must be in D. These are provided, on the one hand, by the interesting exceptions to the complementary distribution with D, and, on the other hand, by the modification facts discussed in §2.2.³ Turning first to the exceptions, note that (5) features a "bare" *personne* that is necessarily interpreted as a positive nominal.

- (5) *Vous (?? ne) recevrez deux livres par personne.*
 "You (not) will receive two books per person."

Despite bareness, *personne* in (5) cannot be coerced into a negative, even with *ne*. Yet, as (6) shows, PP constructions do not always have this effect:

- (6) *Ce livre (n') a été envoyé par personne.*
 "This book was (not) sent by no one."

³ See also Sleeman (1996) for further independent evidence.

So why and how do (5) and (6) differ? Replacing *personne* by other nominals, we quickly note that while (6/7a) displays the properties of a regular PP, taking all sorts of nominals as complements, this is not true of (5/7b). In (7b), the range of allowable complements is very narrow, in effect, strictly limited to nominals with no determiners:

- (7) a. *Ce livre a été envoyé par les/ (tous) mes/mon/un ami(s).*
 “This book was sent by the (all) my/a friend(s).”
 b. *Vous recevrez deux livres par *le/*mon/*un enfant.*
 “You will receive two books per the/my/a child.”

As (7b) reveals, the presence of overt determiners is simply excluded in this construction. Yet, as (8) shows, adjectival modification is allowed, ruling out an analysis of (5) as compounding, or N to P incorporation.

- (8) *Vous distribuerez un cadeau par gros client fortuné.*
 “You will distribute one present per big wealthy customer.”

Constructions like (5) appear to select bare singular NP, banning any nominal with a complex determiner structure.⁴ This recalls Pereltsvaig (2008)’s observation about some Russian prepositions that strictly select for a “small nominal” with no DP projection. Returning to n-words, we can now take stock of what this data entails about their structure and interpretation. If the n-word interpretation of *personne* were compatible with a bare NP structure, its exclusion from (5) would be mysterious. If it requires a complex D-structure, as defended here, the facts are entirely as predicted; a complex D-structure fails to meet the selection restrictions of this peculiar PP construction. The facts in (5) exclude analyzing bare *personne* as an N-level pro-noun (Nishigauchi 1990), making the clear point that not all apparent “bareness” can be treated equal, and providing limpid empirical evidence that the bare nominal n-words of contemporary French must be D-like structures.⁵

⁴ That the complement of such prepositions must be singular is demonstrated by (i) below where we see that a phonetically distinct form of plural is unacceptable:

- (i) *Vous mettez un ballot d’avoine par cheval/ *chevaux*
 “You will put one straw pile per horse/*horses.”

⁵ A reviewer objected that the exclusion of the n-word in (5) could have a semantic basis barring negative terms for some (pre-theoretic intuitive) semantic reason. Note, however, that it is not just negative quantifiers that are excluded in (5) but all positive ones as well. Thus as (i) shows, *chacun* ‘each’ is equally excluded, even though the sentence is pretty much synonymous to (ii) and thus not semantically odd in any obvious ways. Moreover (iii) may be semantically odd, though it is far from impossible, and yet there is no doubt that *personne* there is the n-word and not the nominal. Such examples show quite clearly that a purely semantic explanation would simply not suffice.

- (i) **Vous leur donnerez un livre par chacun.*

Let us now briefly see how these observations about *personne* extend to other nominal French n-words and, in particular, to *rien*. Although *rien* no longer has a comparable common nominal counterpart in contemporary French, it is nevertheless not hard to find evidence that the above structural conclusions extend to it. First, the complementary distribution with determiners is still observable to some extent for *rien* in examples like (9), and, as expected, the presence of a determiner is required to allow it:

- (9) *Il est très sensible. Le plus petit rien/un rien le fait sursauter.*⁶
 “He is very sensitive. The merest thing makes him jump.”

Moreover, although (10) unlike (5) is strictly speaking not fully acceptable, it nonetheless significantly improves with a pre-nominal modifier.

- (10) *Vous utiliserez un sac par *rien/ ?petit rien*
 “You will use one bag per nothing/little thing.”

(10) illustrates the fact that the nominal equivalent of *rien* can still be coerced if the nominal structure is made obvious by a pre-nominal adjective that forces *rien* to be construed in a low nominal position. Remarkably, *rien* loses its negative import there. Hence, the reasoning applied to (5) above, extends to (10), suggesting that *rien* just like *personne* sports a complex determiner structure that constrains its interpretation. The tests used above clearly do not apply to the French nominal n-word *aucun*. For a thorough discussion of the structure of *aucun* see Déprez & Martineau (2004).

-
- (ii) you them will-give a book per each
Vous leur donnerez un livre (à) chacun.
 “You will give a book (to) each of them.”
- (iii) *Vous (ne) donnerez un livre à personne.*
 “You will (not) give a book to nobody.”

⁶ As noted by a reviewer, *rien* with a positive meaning is strange with a singular definite determiner, if no scalar adjective precedes it. Compare: ??*le rien* ‘the thing’ vs. *le petit rien* ‘the small thing’. I am not convinced, however that this strangeness is significant. What seems to be happening here, is that with a definite determiner, *le rien* is easily and preferably interpreted as a synonym to *le néant* ‘the nothingness’. This seems to only happen with a definite determiner, presumably because only this determiner allows for the kind generic interpretation required for this type of reading. With a demonstrative, which cannot have a generic interpretation, *ce rien* ‘this thing’ is perfectly acceptable with a positive meaning.

2.1 *The features and modification of n-words*

The evidence provided in section 2.1 for a complex D structure for French n-words relied on distributional factors. In this section, we offer a feature comparison between n-words and their nominal counterparts and compare the modification possibilities that each allow. Turning to features, (11a) shows that the nominal *personne* is feminine and varies in number, as reflected by determiner or adjectival agreement and by co-referring pronouns. In (11b) in contrast, the n-word triggers no adjectival agreement and has a corresponding singular and masculine bound pronoun.

- (11) a. *Les personnes intelligentes pensent qu'elles n'ont pas toujours raison.*
 “Intelligent persons think they.FEM are not always right.”
- b. *Personne d'intelligent (ne) pense qu'il a toujours raison.*
 “No one intelligent thinks he is always right.”

In these respects, n-words behave like the existential quantifier *quelqu'un* also unmarked for gender and number. Note, however, that despite number invariability, n-words seem semantically plurals as shown in (12) where *personne* is occurring with plural subject requiring verbs.⁷

- (12) *Personne ne se rassemble plus ici.*
 “No one gathers here anymore.”

How do these facts support the view that n-words occupy a high D-like position in their functional structure? First, the lack of gender and number features makes n-words characteristically un-nominal. Moreover, syntactic invariability and semantic plurality are characteristic of a certain type of D-elements in French such as mass terms, the impersonal pronoun

⁷ Likewise, as a reviewer points out, reference to the n-word *personne* in non-commanding relations involves preferably plural pronouns.

- (i) *Personne ne pense ça et ils ont bien raison/*et il a raison.*
 “No one thinks that and they are right/*he is right.”

Notably, this is also true of quantifiers like *tout le monde* and of some collective nouns:

- (ii) *Ce groupe d'adultes, tout le monde, pense ça et ils ont bien raison/?? et il a bien raison.*
 “This group of adults, everyone, believes that and they are right/??and he is right.”

This illustrates the known but curious fact that number and gender of co-referring unbound (e-type) pronouns can be governed by semantic rather than syntactic features. Clearly, however, what the relations between morphological and semantic features are is far too complex an issue to be addressed here. Thus, in the text, loss of number and gender features is understood to refer strictly to formal syntactic features.

on ‘one’ and the existential quantifier *quelqu’un* ‘someone’ or the bare quantificational pronouns question words *qui* ‘who’ and *quoi* ‘what’. These similarities make the case that n-words share features with invariable pronouns and quantifiers, but not with nouns, hence supporting the view that they are merged in a D position. Further support arises from their modification properties. Observe first in (13) that pre-nominal adjectives are excluded with n-words, while they are possible and stackable with their nominal counterpart.

- (13) *J’ai vu *autre charmante petite personne /une autre charmante petite personne.*
 “I have seen *other charming small nobody/another small charming small person.”

In the spirit of Cinque’s cartographic approach, the lack of pre-nominal modification is a further indication that these n-words occupy a position higher than NP in the DP structure. But it is not just pre-nominal modification that is excluded. More generally n-words like *personne* and *rien* do not allow direct adjectival modification; they require a specific modification construction with *de* as in (14). As (14) shows, this is again a property n-words share with existential quantifiers like *quelqu’un* or bare question words like *qui* or *quoi*.⁸

- (14) *personne/rien/ quelqu’un/qui/quoi *(d) ’intéressant*
 no one/nothing/someone/who/what *(of) interesting

Kayne (1994) observes that indirect *de* modification is more constrained than regular modification, in that it disallows stacking as in (15):

- (15) **J’ai rencontré personne/quelqu’un/qui de charmant de petit.*
 I have met no one/someone/who/ of charming of small

He argues that this anti-stacking constraint goes against a traditional adjunction structure for these modification constructions and proposes, following Huot (1981), a structure akin to relative clause modification, with *de* as a complementizer-like element, as in (16):⁹

- (16) $D^0 [{}_{DP/PP} \textit{quelqu’un/personne} [\textit{de} [{}_{IP} \textit{intelligent I}^0 t]]]$
 someone/no one of intelligent

⁸ Indirect modification of this type is not possible with universal quantifiers, a fact that strongly suggests that n-words are like existential/indefinite quantifiers or numerals in their syntactic nature, i.e. quantificational indefinites (Déprez 2000) and not universal quantifiers, contra Giannakidou (2000).

⁹ For distinct proposals on the structure of this indirect modification see Azoulay-Vicente (1985) and Hulk & Verheugd (1994) among others.

In (16), the n-word or quantifier raises from a position internal to the clause to Spec *de*, in a fashion paralleling that of predicate inversion in DP (Den Dikken 1998). Kayne following (Huot 1981) notes one intriguing exception to the stacking constraint that occurs with the modifier *autre* ‘other’:

- (17) *personne/rien/quelqu’un/qui/quoi d’autre d’intéressant*
 “no one/nothing/someone/who/what else (of) interesting”

D’autre modification is also possible with *quelqu’un* or a question word, but crucially not with the nominal *personne* for which modification by *autre* must be strictly pre-nominal and direct:¹⁰

- (18) a. *une autre personne*
 “another person”
 b. **une personne d’autre*
 a person of other

The modifier *autre* is peculiar in other respects that are of particular interest here. First, like a few other pre-nominal adjectives in French (*divers*, *différents* ‘several’), *autre* is sometimes able to play the role of a determiner and/or a pronoun.

- (19) a. *Autres temps, autres moeurs, autre histoire !*
 “Other times, other stories !”
 b. *A d’autres !*
 “To others !”

Clearly as well, it must always be the highest pre-nominal modifier in any noun phrase, as it can never be preceded by any other pre-nominal adjective:

- (20) a. **une petite autre voiture/*
 a small other car
 b. *une autre petite voiture*
 an other small car

In these characteristics, *autre* differs from regular adjectives, appearing instead to share properties with numerals.¹¹ In fact, like numerals, *autre* is able to directly modify strong pronouns as in *nous autres* (us other) comparable to *nous deux* (us two). Furthermore, while indirect *de-*

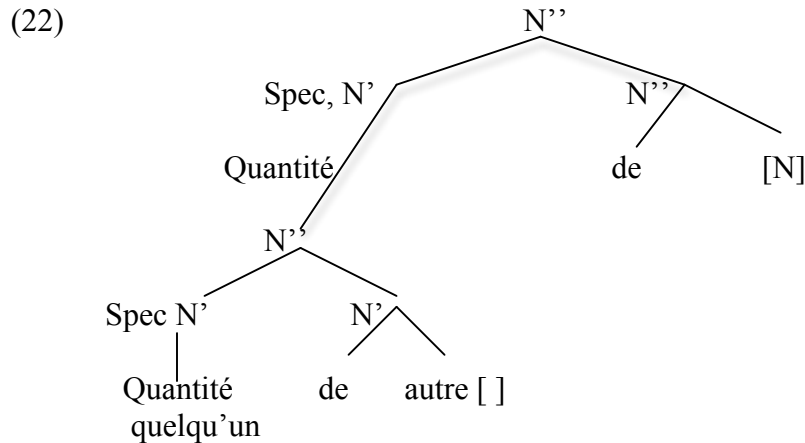
¹⁰ Post-nominal *autre* is also marginally possible but with a meaning closer to that of *différent* ‘different’: *une personne autre*.

¹¹ Confirming this evolution, it is notable that in some French based Creoles (particularly in Guadeloupe Creole) *zot* ‘other’ is used as a plural marker.

modification with regular adjectives is sometimes possible with noun phrases as in (21), indirect modification with *d'autre* is always excluded:

- (21) *Il y avait plusieurs voitures de bleues /*d'autres.*
 there were several cars of blue/*of other¹²

In sum, indirect modification with *d'autre* is only possible with bare nouns, bare existential quantifiers and question words, never with other nominal expressions. This clearly gives it a peculiar status, shared by no other adjectival modifiers. Huot (1981) suggests that *autre* involves quantity not noun modification, grouping in effect modification by *d'autre* with comparative degree modifiers like *de plus* 'more', or *de moins* 'less' (*Quelqu'un/quoi de plus/de moins* 'someone/what more/less'). She proposes the structure in (22):



In a current model, a possible re-interpretation of her insight would assume that *d'autre* involves NumP and not NP modification.¹³ We have seen above Kayne's (1994) proposal for indirect *de*-modification with regular adjectives. Transposing Huot's suggestion, we propose to account for the stacking effect that *autre* is a NumP modifier that can move with it out of the clausal constituent of the indirect adjectival *de*-modification and be stranded in Spec DP, while the n-word moves yet higher in the DP structure as in (23a), in a fashion akin to CP recursion.

¹² Indirect "de modification" is also possible with so-called quantitative *en*-pronominalization. As (ia) shows, for regular adjectives both direct and *de*-modification are possible. Here again, however, indirect modification with *d'autre* is excluded:

(i) *J'en ai TROIS (de) petites /*d'autres, pas quatre*
 I of-them have three of small /*of other, not four

¹³ Throughout, we assume NumP to be the projection that houses numerals and weak quantifiers, not grammatical number. Number could be a separate PIP (Plural Phrase) projection as in Heycock & Zamparelli (2005).

- (23) a. [FP *personne*_i [DP/PP *de* [t_i *autre* t_k]_k [*de* [IP *sympathique* Infl t_k]]]]
 no one of else of sympathetic
- b. [CP [*Qui*_k [t_k *d'autre*]] [C' *as tu* [IP *invité de* *sympathique*]]]
 who of else have you invited of sympathetic
- c. [CP [*Qui*_k *as tu invité* [DP/PP [t_k *d'autre*] [*de* *sympathique* t_k]]]]
 who have you invited of else of sympathetic
- d. *Je n'ai rien*_k *vu* [DP/PP [t_k *d'autre*] [*d'intéressant* t_k]]
 I NEG have nothing seen of other of interesting

That *d'autre* can indeed move along with a quantity expression (i.e. be pied piped) is confirmed by (23b) in which *d'autre* has moved along with a *wh*-term to Spec CP. That movement out of the projection containing the modifier is also possible is confirmed by (23c), in which *d'autre* is optionally stranded by the moved *wh*-term. (23d) replicates this structure with the moved n-word *rien*.¹⁴ (23a) accounts, on the one hand, for the exceptional stacking possibility with *d'autre* and on the other hand, for the restricted nature of the elements that allow it. Only elements moving out of NumP to a higher position in DP, here termed FP, manifest this DP recursion possibility.

To sum up, we have shown that the modification properties of n-words are very different from those of regular nouns. The facts reviewed above provide evidence for the quantificational nature of n-words and for the proposal that they occupy a high position within DP. We have spent some time detailing the peculiar facts of *d'autre* modification here because, as discussed below, there are, in this respect, revealing changes in the internal structure of n-words that are important in delimiting steps in their historical evolution.

2.3 Mapping the structure

The above discussion provided much empirical evidence of the complex internal structure of n-words, but remained imprecise as to the detailed mapping of their internal structure. In this section, adopting Zamparelli's (1995) proposal to subdivide the DP in three quantificational zones SDP, PDP, and KIP we flesh out this internal structure.¹⁵ Only weak quantifiers housed in PDP license *ne* cliticization, because only they are close enough to license a trace in NP. The Italian quantifier *qualcuno* 'someone' is

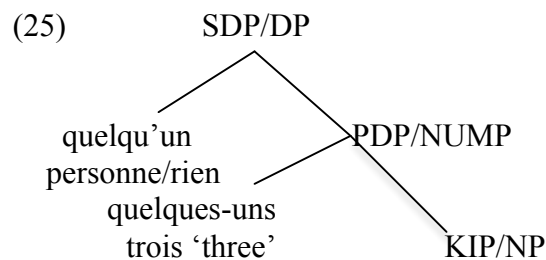
¹⁴ Curiously and interestingly, stranding, in this case is obligatory. I do not at this point have an explanation for this fact.

¹⁵ Respectively: SDP = strong determiner phrase, PDP predicative determiner phrase, KIP Kind Phrase.

ambiguous in this respect. When compatible with *ne* cliticisation, *qualcuno* is an equivalent of *some*. When incompatible with it, *qualcuno* is restricted to human reference and is a pronominal meaning ‘someone’. To account for this ambiguity, Zamparelli proposes that *qualcuno* is merged as a weak quantifier in PDP/NumP that can move or re-merge higher as a strong quantifier in SDP/DP. From this higher position, a Q cannot license the trace of partitive *ne*. Transposing this approach to French, we note that the ambiguity observed for *qualcuno* is replicated with *quelqu’un* ‘someone’ vs *quelques-uns* ‘some’. Like the invariable *qualcuno*, invariable *quelqu’un* means ‘someone’ and fails to allow *en* cliticization and the combination with a true partitive (24a-b). The variable *quelques-uns* in contrast, means ‘some’ and is compatible with *en* cliticization and with a partitive (24c-d).

- (24) a. **J’en ai vu quelqu’un.*
I of-them have seen someone
- b. **J’ai vu quelqu’un de mes amis.*
I have seen someone of my friends
- c. *J’en ai vu quelques-uns.*
I of-them have seen some ones
“I have seen some.”
- d. *J’ai vu quelques-uns de mes amis.*
I have seen some ones of my friends
“I have seen some of my friends.”

Let me hence suggest that, in similarity with *qualcuno* + *ne*, variable *quelques-uns* is merged in PDP/NumP, while invariable *quelqu’un* in contrast, is directly merged to SDP/DP. Since, as seen above, the n-words *personne* and *rien* behave like the invariable existential quantifier *quelqu’un*, we have analogical grounds to posit the same structure for these contemporary n-words. This motivates the structure in (25) for the French n-words:



(25) proposes that in contemporary standard French, n-words are merged directly in SDP/DP. Note that as expected on this proposal, n-words are incompatible with true partitivity and with quantitative *en* cliticization (26):

- (26) a. ??*Je ne connais personne de tes amis*

- I NEG know no one of your friends
 b. **Je n'en connais personne*
 I NEG of-them know no one

(26) shows that n-words cannot license a null N/NP category; they are merged too high in the DP structure. Strictly speaking then, (1b) above should be amended so as to not contain a null NP. If so, n-words are intransitive D that license no null NP complements. (25) accounts for all the n-word properties detailed above, as it gives them the highest position in DP and makes the claim that they behave essentially as strong existential quantifiers. Expected on this view is their invariability, given that they are merged in SDP, above the DP layer where number agreement is syntactically negotiated. Also expected are their modification possibilities, given that they behave essentially as quantity expressions. For indirect ‘de modification’, we have adopted Kayne’s (1994) structure to which we have added a layer to allow modification by *d’autre* as in (23a) above. On this view, *d’autre* modification, and the lack of partitive structure, can be taken as evidence of an additional movement step towards the highest layer of SDP/DP, possibly recursive, in similarity with CP recursion. In contrast, the noun *personne* is merged in NP and acquires number features like other French NPs, possibly through movement to PIP (Heycock & Zamparelli 2005).¹⁶

For completeness, our study of the structure of contemporary French nominal n-expressions requires that *aucun N* ‘no N’, be considered. As this expression and the historical evolution of its internal syntax are discussed in great details in Déprez & Martineau (2004), we remain brief here. In contrast with *personne* and *rien*, *aucun N* clearly contains both a determiner element and an obligatory N, so that the status of *aucun* as a determiner is not in doubt. Unlike *personne* and *rien*, however, this n-word expression allows both quantitative *en* cliticization, and true partitive structures:

- (27) *Je (n’) ai vu aucun de tes enfants. Je n’en ai vu aucun.*
 “I have not seen any of your children. I have seen none of

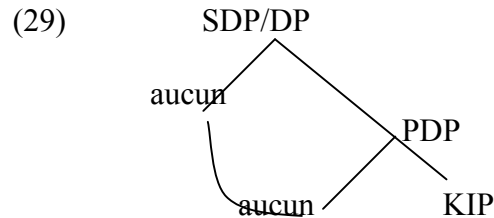
¹⁶ A reviewer asks whether we assume that there are one or two lexical items *personne*. Such a question only arises if the lexicon is conceived as a ‘list’ of preset words, a view I do not adopt. A lexical item on our view, is a set of semantic, formal and phonological features, sometimes associated with a concept that is built compositionally (Marantz to appear). Assume, as is current nowadays, that number features are an independent head that contribute to make a common noun by composing with a concept to derive an atomized representation. Then our assumptions that n-words are directly merged above the number node has the consequence that the n-word *personne* does not have the atomicity linked to common nouns, while the noun *personne* does. This is crucial to their respective (im)possible association with determiners. In short, the set of features that are eventually spelled out as *personne* = n-word, do not correspond to a predicate [λx [person x]] associated with number, but minimally to a set of formal features 3d person, human, quantificational.

them.”

In this respect, *aucun* seems to behave both like a numeral in French and like the strong quantifier *chacun*, that allows partitive structures and vary in gender, but notably, not in number.

- (28) *Aucune idée n'a* /**Aucunes idées n'ont été acceptée(s)*.¹⁷
 “No idea was/*no ideas were accepted.”

To account for these differences as well as for the similarities between *aucun* and the other n-words, I propose that the determiner part *aucun* be merged in PDP and moved to SDP as in (29). In contrast to bare n-words, *aucun* is a transitive D that can license a null N, as expected if it is merged in PDP.



Thus, like numerals, *aucun* participates in a strong/weak alternation, but unlike numerals, it does not allow a preceding determiner in contemporary French (*les trois*, vs **les aucuns*). This indicates that re-merge to the higher layer of the DP is obligatory for this n-expression like with *rien/personne*. This was not always true in the history of French. Expressions like *les aucuns amis* ‘the some friends’ were commonly found up to the 16th century (Martineau & Déprez 2004). This, and the fact that *aucun* is now invariable in number, motivates moving this n-determiner to the highest D position.

To sum up, on the basis of their distributional, feature, and modification properties, I have argued that all nominal French n-words occupy the highest quantificational position in the DP and as such behave syntactically like determiners and strong quantifiers. Of particular interest moreover is the fact that this high position correlates with the loss of number variation. All the nominal French n-words are invariable in number, and consequently always trigger singular or more exactly unmarked

¹⁷ One of our reviewer objected that plural *aucun* is still acceptable for her/him. The prediction of our approach is that such a speaker should also accept *aucun* in NPI non-negative contexts, which would indicate that for him/her *aucun* is still able to stay in PDP. As discussed in (Martineau & Déprez 2004), the decline of number variability historically correlates with an NPI-like interpretation. For speakers like myself, and for my consultants, (28) is judged infelicitous with a liaison (*[okynZide] vs. [okyNide]) and the plural auxiliary, which shows that plurality is clearly disfavored. Expressions like *aucunZanimaux* vs *aucunNanimal* are unacceptable.

agreement. It is these combined properties that account, in our view, for their possibility to ambiguously partake in the complex polyadic resumptive quantification that produces negative concord readings, as well as in the scopal quantification that produces double negative readings (Déprez 1999, 2000, 2004; May 1981). As will be seen in section 3, loss of feature variability historically starts the loss of nominal status and the development of a pronominal and quantificational status.

3. *The internal evolution of French n-words*

Having discussed the syntactic nature and structure of contemporary French n-words, it is now time to turn to their historical evolution to chart the course of their internal change as well as to identify the micro-parametric nature of this evolution. We offer here a detailed examination of the evolution of *rien* and *personne* focusing on changes in their feature make up and changes in their modification capacities, centering on *autre* for reasons of space. Our study is based on data mined in the electronic databases Frantext and TFA.

3.1 *Changing Features*

Let us first consider feature changes. Both *personne* and *rien* started out as feminine and pluralisable nouns, and both ended up on their n-word interpretation as singular and masculine, or more exactly, as expressions unmarked for number and gender. Charting the course of changes of this nature in historical corpuses, however, is not easy largely because, for French, the best cues to determine the gender and number make up of nominal expressions involve only indirect inspection of their dependent satellites. In Old and Middle French *rien*, which comes from the Latin noun *res* (thing), was a feminine noun that could refer to inanimate or animate entities. (30) is an example from Chretien de Troyes, 12th century, of animate nominal *rien* preceded by a feminine definite determiner.

- (30) *Quant la rien* *voit que il plus ainme.*
 When the thing/the person sees that he most loves
 Chrétien, de Troyes, [1240], Chevalier de la Charrette

Examples with a clearly feminine determiner as *la rien* could be found up to the middle of the 16th century in the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles, as shown in (31):

- (31) *elle voit d'elle éloigner la rien en ce monde*
 she sees of her leaving the thing in this world
dont la presence plus luy plait

of-which the presence most her pleases
de La Roche [1550], Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles

This appears to be the last example of this sort in Frantext, which suggests that *rien* became unmarked for gender around the middle of the 16th century. Confirming this, it is around this time that the first examples of *rien* with a clear masculine determiner are found, as in (32), an example from the poet Ronsard from 1552:

- (32) ... *elle auroit cognoissance Qu'un rien qu'on ne voit pas, fait souvent un grand*
“she would have knowledge that a thing that one cannot see often makes a large...”
Ronsard, Pierre de. [1552], Les Amours (Garnier, Paris)

That *rien* becomes invariable for gender, does not mean, however, that it completely loses its nominal character. Indeed, *rien* was still found with a (masculine) determiner and a positive meaning up to almost the end of the classic period, as attested by (33). Interestingly, however, *rien* is then strictly inanimate in reference:

- (33) *pour moi, le rien qui m'arrive d'heureux, c'est toujours ...*
for me the thing that me happens of happy is always
Goncourt, Edmond et Jules [1896].

Thus, the loss of gender and animacy reference represents only a first step in the grammaticalization of this expression.¹⁸ Turning to number, we face the same difficulty in determining with precision when exactly *rien* stopped allowing number inflection, as it can still vary even nowadays, when it is a noun clearly accompanied by a determiner (cf. *des riens*). To get some idea nonetheless, we searched our databases for examples of *rien* overtly marked for number but with no determiner. The last example where *riens* occurs as a clear bare argument occurs in 1559 in Frantext.

- (34) *Le Roy ne luy respondit riens, sinon: m'asseurez-vous que vous l'avez*
“The king did not answer things, but: confort me that you have it...”
Marguerite de Navarre 1559 L'Heptaméron

Based on this indirect clue, we tentatively suggest that it is around the end

¹⁸ As pointed out by a reviewer, the picture of gender loss for *rien* is further complicated by the fact that *rien* could be used as a masculine noun synonymous with *le néant* ‘the nothingness’ (Gougenheim 1951:84) since the 16th century.

of the 16th century that bare *rien* effectively ceases to be variable in number. But again, *rien* does not immediately cease to have a nominal character, since it can be found as an invariable bare nominal expression without a determiner with a positive meaning in forclusive contexts up to the classic period:

- (35) *Diab!e m'emporte si j'entend rien en m!edecine (Med. III.1)*
 "The devil takes me if I understand anything to medicine."
 Moli!ere *Le malade imaginaire* (1673,1674)¹⁹

¹⁹ A reviewer objected that s/he could utter this sentence in his/her present day idiolect without a 'trace of archaism'. This, in contrast, feels strongly archaic in my own speech, a feeling fully replicated with 10 non-linguist scientific friends and relatives I poled informally. The preferred form here in my idiolect is with *quoique ce soit*. The claim that n-words can still be currently used as positive items in negative polarity contexts is common in the French conservative/normative grammatical literature on n-words, and it is quite clear that authors and speakers differ quite widely in their (social) acceptance of such examples. Acceptance can also vary depending on the type of polarity context considered. For instance, even in my own idiolect, a non-negative reading of *personne* and *rien* is fully available in exceptive contexts with *sans* as in (i):

- (i) *Il est difficile de vivre sans personne pour vous aider.*
 It is difficult to leave without anyone to help you.

Notably, however, these contexts are peculiar in other respects. First, they continue to allow nominal expressions without determiners as in (ii), in contrast to standard verbal argument contexts, where such bare arguments are excluded.

- (ii) *Il est difficile de vivre sans argent et encore plus sans amis.*
 It is difficult to live without money and even more, without friends.

Second, these contexts also allow, in an elevated style, a post-nominal *aucun* (cf. '*sans raison aucune* (without any reasons)) a construction that was common in the 16/17th (see Martineau & Déprez (2004) for discussion) but which is clearly excluded in more standard arguments contexts **il n'a aucune raison/ *raison aucune* (He has no reason...) nowadays. Given these possibilities, our approach correctly predicts that in such contexts that polarity readings of n-words are possible (since remant null D is licensed) just as they were in argument positions in classic French. The exact reason why this should be so remains, however, to be elucidated. Note that this clearly reveals that the landscape of polarity licensing is complex, more so than generally thought, and probably not uniform, contrary to what many semantic approaches to the phenomenon often presuppose. So there might well be divergence in acceptability in distinct polarity contexts for distinct speakers and for distinct reasons. Here again a detailed analysis would be required but this is beyond the scope of the present paper. In any event, what is surely the case here as well as in concord phenomena is that the flexibility of a micro-parametric approach is necessary to allow an empirically correct account of this diversity. It is largely on the basis of this widespread diversity, which is influenced by differing normative attitudes towards spoken vs. written language, as well as by the type of polarity context considered, that I advocate a micro-parametric approach to the analysis of negative dependencies, concord and polarity relations included that allows for variation within languages, within dialects and idiolects and not just for cross-linguistic variation. As defended in my recent writings (see in particular Déprez (forthcoming) for an extensive discussion), the micro-parametric approach based on the internal structure of n-words I defend contrasts in this respect with many popular current formal Minimalist approaches to negative concord (Zeijlstra 2004, among others) that are strongly macro-parametric, and predict a strict within language uniformity that is rarely observed and often problematic.

Evidence confirming the enduring nominal quality of *rien* is based on modification possibilities to which we turn in section 3.2. Before that, however, let us first detail the time course of feature change for the n-word *personne*. Turning to *personne* the exact time course of the loss of its features is even more difficult to compile from corpus searches given the continuous current use of its nominal counterpart. We have nonetheless endeavored to chart an approximate course by looking at examples of bare *personne* triggering feminine agreement with an adjective, a past participle or a co-referring pronoun. In Old French, bare *personne* was clearly feminine as witnessed by (36) from the Vie de St Alexis (11th) with a co-referring feminine pronoun.

- (36) *Car la sainte Ecriture si nous dit et tesmoigne, Qu'au monde n'a personne, pour tant qu'elle se joigne...* (in Nguissaly 2003)
 “Because the Saint Writing here tells us and witnesses, That in the world there isn't (a) person for as much as she takes...”

The capacity to trigger feminine agreement for bare *personne* seems to have lasted, with some amount of flux, up to the 17th century, as witnessed by (37) with a past participle agreement from l'Astree (1607-1625).

- (37) *Je ne puis dire avec vérité que jamais personne ne fut plus aymée que moi*
 “I cannot tell with truthfulness that ever person was more loved than me.” (H.Durfé, Astrée, p536, (cited in Nguissaly 2003)

Yet, as early as the mid 14th century, some examples lack agreement:

- (38) *Jamais nouvelle n'en seroit a personne vivant*
 never news NEG of-it would be to person alive.MASC
 (Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles, 387,73)

More generally, it seem that after the Renaissance, bare *personne* had largely lost its capacity to be marked for gender and, thus, came to trigger default masculine agreement and co-reference, as shown in (39) from Pascal (1670), with pronominal reference:

- (39) *Personne n'a d'assurance – hors la foi, s'il veille ou s'il dort*
 anyone does not have assurance, besides faith, of whether he wakes or sleeps
 (Pensées, 164. cited in Nguissaly 2003)

In sum, our corpus searches reveal that both *rien* and *personne* seem to have lost their characteristic nominal features of gender first, and number second, respectively about the middle or by the end of the 16th century, although, according to Grevisse (1980:650), some flux lasted up to the 17th century.²⁰

3.2 Modification

This section focuses on historical changes in modification possibilities. I argue that the striking changes in modification possibilities, to my knowledge discussed here for the first time, provide a revealing window into the evolving internal structure of n-words. Going back to its earlier occurrence, *rien* was modifiable by a number of pre-nominal adjectival quantifiers like *nulle* ‘no’, *toute* ‘every’, that all attest of its feminine gender. In Frantext, the last example of *nulle riens* is found in the 15th century in Christine de Pisan’s work:

- (40) *Ne deüst faire nulle riens, Toute fois entr’eulx une riens*
 Not need to do no things, yet between them a thing
 Christine, de Pisan, ca. 1364-ca. 1431. [1402], *Le Livre du chemin de lonc estude*.

There are furthermore 94 occurrences of *Toute rien* in the TFA database. Our searches in this database revealed that this feminine modification was possible up to 1381. In Frantext, the last example of this modification is found in 1550, again in the text of the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles.

- (41) *esté bien court tenu; et sur toute rien luy estoit et fut defendu le mestier*
 was very narrowly held and on every thing to him is and was forbidden the profession
 De La Roche [1550], *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*

It is not easy to look for regular modifiers in a corpus, there are of course too many possibilities. This is why we chose to focus our searches on modification by *autre*, a strategy that allowed us to compare through different times and turned out to be particularly revealing in its evolution. In some early examples, we see plainly that *autre* began as a prenominal modifier of *rien* as in (42). This is clearly comparable to today’s modification of regular nouns.

- (42) *Nous ne demandons autre riens Que nous y mettre.*
 “We are not asking for other things than to put ourselves to it.”

Anonymous (p.164) [c. 1376], *Miracle de sainte Baetheuch*

The last example of this kind given here in (43) occurs in 1606. *Rien* in (43) is clearly masculine, plausibly, invariable in gender, but still positive and here, preceded by a determiner.

- (43) *Dieu qui de rien fit tout, et qui de tout encore peut faire un autre rien,*
 “God who out of nothing made everything and who out of everything can yet make another thing.”
 Bertaut J. [1606], *Recueil Qq. Vers Amoureux*

Taking the pre-nominal position of *autre* to be indicative of the nature of *rien*, examples like (43-44) suggest that its nominal character, as indicated by its positioning in the N projection, was maintained somewhat beyond the loss of its gender and number features, up to the beginning of the 17th century. Thus, the interesting fact that no example of this sort occurred past this date can be taken to mark the end of a historical phase. From 1606 on, throughout the classic period and up to the early 20 century, our data indicate that *autre* has resolutely become a post-nominal modifier of *rien* as in (44).

- (44) *elle me dit adieu, et se retira sans me donner rien autre chose qu'une bague...*
 she said goodbye et left without giving me anything other than a ring
 (Lesage A.-R. [1732], *Histoire de Gil Blas de Sant.--1732* (In Romanciers du 18^e S., Ed.)

Despite the change of position, modification by *autre* remains direct at this time, never making use of a linking *de*. This modification remains seemingly close to regular post-nominal adjectival structures. However, recall that as seen above, modification by *autre* of regular nouns is strictly pre-nominal up to contemporary French. Thus, in effect, we must conclude that post-nominal direct modification by *autre* is not equivalent to a regular case of post-nominal adjectival modification. Instead, the contrastive position of *autre* with *rien*, as opposed to regular nominals, must be taken to indicate that it is *rien* that no longer behaves like a regular noun in the language. Taking the position of *autre* to marks the upper limit of NP internal modification, as suggested by its high contemporary position in a modification stack, examples like (44) imply that by the 17th century, *rien* had definitely left the nominal domain for the NumP domain. That is, after a period of transition where *autre* could occur alternatively as pre or post-nominal modifier, i.e. where the movement of *rien* from the nominal domain to the NumP domain was optional, *rien* came to be directly merged

in NumP, accounting for the obligatory post-nominal position of *autre*. In this, n-words were similar to current numerals, which also display direct post-nominal modification with *autre* as in *trois autres* (three other ones). This form of direct post-nominal modification, in turn, lasts through the classic period and is found rather late, up to 1925, in the writings of Claudel. Of interest is the fact that in Claudel's writings as well as throughout the classic period, characteristic NPI uses of n-words in forclusive contexts are commonly found. As shown by the following table reproduced from Déprez & Martineau (2004), positive uses and polarity context uses (excluding negation) of n-words amounted to about 30% during the 17th and 20% during the 18th century.

periods	positive contexts	polarity contexts	negative contexts
17 th century	3.5% (7/200)	27.5%	69%
19 th century	0%	20.5%	79%

table 1: frequency of *aucun* in positive, polarity and negative contexts

Against the backdrop of this previous study that made use of the same data source, we can see quite distinctly that direct post-nominal modification with *autre* appears to be a characteristic feature of the classic period (17-18th) that coincides with the rising use of n-words as NPI (Déprez & Martineau 2004)²¹. In this regard, it is of further interest to note that this direct modification pattern with *autre* is also sometimes found in contemporary Quebec French, a construction noted as an apparent “canadianism” in Clas (1976). (45) shows one such example, found in an online corpus:

- (45) ... *la censure n'est rien autre chose que l'examen ...*
 censure is nothing else than the examination...
[\\$bilan.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/pages/collaborations/8580.html](http://$bilan.usherbrooke.ca/bilan/pages/collaborations/8580.html)

As evidenced in Martineau & Déprez (2004), Quebec French also contrasts with contemporary continental French in commonly allowing the co-occurrence of the negation *pas* with n-words as well as common NPI uses of these expressions. In short, there are both diachronic and comparative evidence of the correlated occurrence of direct post-nominal modification by *autre* and of the use of n-words as polarity items.²²

The next pattern of *autre* modification observed in our diachronic

²¹ For some speakers, and in some contexts, NPI readings have not completely disappeared from the modern language. For some discussion, see footnote 19.

²² For a more detailed discussion of the NPI uses of n-words both in classic French and in Quebec French, see Déprez & Martineau (2004) and for modern French see footnote 19.

corpus is that of indirect modification with *de*. Notably, this indirect modification has a peculiar historical evolution. In Frantext, it is first found in the 12th century in Chretien de Troyes, but very sporadically. After this, rather curiously, this pattern disappears entirely from the corpus until 1843, where we see it re-surface after a seven-century gap, in the writings of Honoré de Balzac.

- (46) *Là, madame; ne vous faut-il rien d'autre?*
 “So madam, don’t you need anything else?”
 Balzac (1843) *La Rabouilleuse*

The use of this indirect pattern with *autre* remained fairly infrequent until about 1890, when it finally reached about equal status with the previously discussed post-nominal direct modification *rien autre* and *rien autre chose*. Yet it is not until 1909 with the writings of André Gide that the indirect *de* modification pattern comes to firmly dominate and ultimately win over the direct modification pattern. Worth stressing here is the fact that this is an interesting discovery, as our research serves to establish, I believe for the first time, that the use of the modern indirect modification pattern with *d'autre* as in *rien d'autre* is not firmly established until essentially the beginning of the 20th century. Referring back again to the findings of Déprez & Martineau (2004), this appears to quite strikingly coincide with the rise of the strongly negative interpretation of n-words.

For further empirical evidence, let us now consider the modification possibilities with bare *personne*, concentrating again for the sake of brevity on the modification of bare *personne* with *autre*. Here, of course, precaution must be used to avoid confusion in considering only examples in which *personne* occurs without a co-occurring determiner, lest we include in our observations irrelevant contemporary uses of the nominal form. As for *rien*, we observe that the first occurrences of the modifier *autre* with a bare *personne* are pre-nominal as in (47). In Frantext, the last example of bare *personne* modified by a pre-nominal *autre* is found in the 17th century.

- (47) *on n'entend autre personne qu'un sonneur de cloches.*
 One did not hear an other person than a bell ringer
Deimier P. de [1610], L'Académie de L'Art Poétique (Paris,
 J. de Bordeaulx, 1610)

After this date, the prenominal modifier *autre* is only found in the Det+*personne* combination, which is the nominal construction still currently in use. After this date, as well, with a bare *personne*, the modifier *autre* occurs strictly in post-nominal position, as in the following characteristic example:

- (48) *pour le sens commun de croire qu'elle n'est aperçue par*

personne autre

for the common sense of believing that she is not seen by any other person

Rousseau, J.-J. [1776], Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques

With bare *personne*, this type of modification is found up to the early 20th century. Again, it is here as well quite striking to discover that the current form of indirect modification with *de* i.e. *personne d'autre* arose only quite recently. Searching Frantext for indirect modification with *d'autre*, we observe again that it first occurred in Chretien de Troyes in the 12th century. But, as above, the pattern disappears entirely for a period of eight centuries to finally resurface only in 1902 in the writings of Adam Paul.

(49) *quand elle rentrait, personne d'autre ne se dérangeant pour elle?*

when she was getting back, noone else bothering for her

Adam, Paul, 1862-1920. [1902], L'enfant d'Austerlitz (Paris, Ollendorff, 1902.)

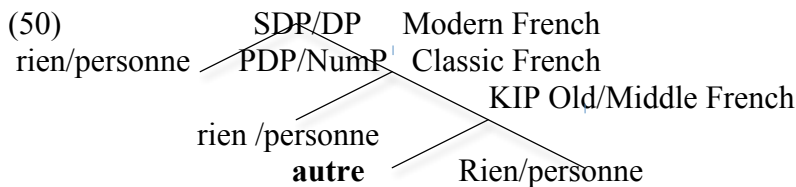
Thus we see here again that, significantly, indirect modification with *d'autre* does not occur with bare *personne* until the very beginning of the 20th century.

3.3 Theoretical implications and conclusions

The previous section has provided novel detailed evidence of the internal evolution of the n-words *rien* and *personne*, attempting to establish on the basis of data from extensive historical corpuses, the exact time course of their feature loss on the one hand, and related structural changes based on modification changes on the other hand. Let us now take stock of the observed facts to unfold their signification and theoretical consequences.

Summarizing and highlighting the central facts, we have observed three distinct stages in the evolution of these n-expressions. In the first stage, n-words are essentially nominal in nature, as evidenced by the use of a determiner, their gender and number features as well as by the pre-nominal position of the modifier *autre*. By and large, we have dated the loss of features to the middle or end of the 16th century and the disappearance of the pre-nominal modification pattern by the beginning of the 17th century. We concluded that, structurally, during this period, the n-expressions occurred within the NP layer of their nominal structure. In the second stage, the n-words have come to gradually lose their nominal features and to become invariable both in number and gender. Modification by *autre* is now post-nominal but, crucially, it remains direct, without the help of the linking functional *de*. We have suggested that at this stage, which essentially spans the classic period, these n-words have climbed a first step within the

nominal structure, reaching NumP, so that they are now directly merged in this position, accounting for the strictly post-nominal position of *autre*. The third stage corresponds in our data with the appearance of the indirect *de* modification. As discussed in section 2.2, this type of modification with *d'autre*, corresponds to quantity or degree modification, like *de plus*, or *de moins*, and indicates that n-words have now taken on a quantificational nature. Following Zamparelli (1995) we have assumed that this could correspond syntactically to yet another step up the structural ladder of the DP structure, reaching in Zamparelli's terms the level of strong quantification or SDP. Putting all these assumptions together, the following structure sums up the evolution of the n-word that our conjoined empirical evidence has unearthed.



On this view, it is visible that the evolution of n-words corresponds to a gradual step by step movement up the DP structure. Of particular interest are the parallels that can be observed between the historical course of this internal evolution and the findings that Déprez & Martineau (2004) and Martineau & Déprez (2004) report on the historical evolution of the meaning of n-words. Focusing on the interpretation of *aucun* these authors have distinguished 3 periods that largely correspond to the ones we have distinguished here. In the first period, corresponding to Old and Middle French, the interpretation of n-words seems largely context independent and positive. Beginning with the 16th century and into the classic period, however, the interpretation of n-words becomes context dependent. As Martineau & Déprez (2004) argue, n-words at this period manifest characteristic features of NPI. They are licensed only in restricted contexts, i.e. the so-called forclusive contexts. They can also be licensed at long distance, i.e. in cross-clausal domains. Moreover, they are not licensed in subject position and they are fully compatible with negation, including the negation *pas*, which is dominant at the time as the sole exponent of sentential negative meaning and can co-occur with them, sometimes even in conjunction with *ne*.²³ Finally, in the last period that corresponds to the birth of Modern French at the beginning of the 20th century, n-words come to take on a negative meaning of their own, now occurring alone, i.e. without the co-presence of the sentential negative marker *pas*. This evolution is well known. What had not been put together up to now, however, is the

²³ See Martineau & Déprez (2004) for concrete examples and relevant statistical computations.

parallelism that the meaning evolution of n-words shows with the changes that affect their internal structure. This is what this paper hopes to have now accomplished by coupling the historical evolution of the meaning contribution of n-words at the sentential level, with a careful study of their internal changes.

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