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# 1 **Atoms of negation: An outside-in micro-parametric** 2 **approach to negative concord**

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5  
6 *Viviane Déprez*

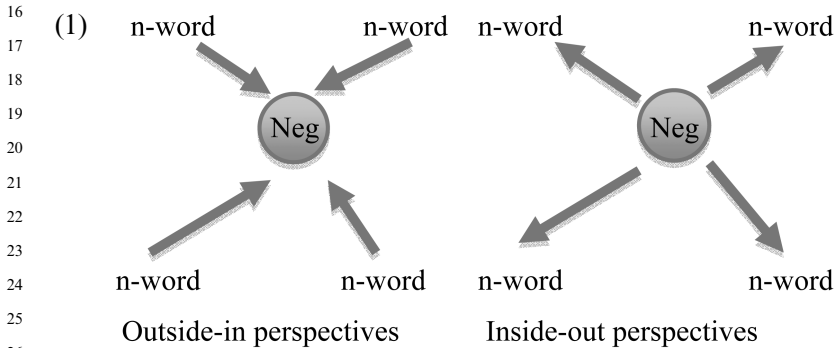
## 7 8 9 **1. Contrasting theoretical outlooks: Inside-out vs. outside-in perspectives**

10  
11 In this paper, two core perspectives on variation in negative concord are  
12 distinguished, one that focuses on the syntactic nature of negation as the  
13 central factor of variation, and one that focuses on the internal make-up of  
14 the negative dependent terms, the n-words. The first part of the paper out-  
15 lines the different predictions that emerge from these differing perspectives.  
16 The second part provides evidence in support of the latter perspective.

17 Recent work in the Minimalist framework has revamped the classic  
18 idea pioneered by the nineteenth century linguist Otto Jespersen that there  
19 is “a strong correlation between the syntactic status of the sentential nega-  
20 tion marker and the phenomenon of negative concord” (Zeijlstra 2008:1).  
21 For Jespersen, negative relations were subject to a cycle largely conditioned  
22 by the syntactic nature of the sentential negation marker as weak or strong.  
23 Similarly, with their core reliance on the strength or interpretability and  
24 weakness or uninterpretability of negative features, Minimalist approaches  
25 such as Zeijlstra’s (2008) (see also Zeijlstra 2004; Willis 2004; Penka 2007),  
26 which cast negative concord as a prime case of an Agree relation à la  
27 Chomsky (2000, 2001), operate a terminological and conceptual fusion  
28 with the classic Jespersen view. Like Jespersen’s, these approaches are  
29 macro-parametric in nature, as they seek to formulate “a single theory  
30 of negative concord, that also predicts the parametric variation between  
31 negative concord languages (strict vs. non-strict NC languages) as well as  
32 the variation between NC languages and DN languages” (Zeijlstra 2008:  
33 3). But furthering Jespersen, these perspectives extend the cycle’s purview  
34 beyond the syntax of negation proper to include negative dependencies in  
35 a broader sense, i.e. relations between sentential negation and dependent  
36 nominal terms.

37 In this paper, this neo-classic macro-parametric view to negative con-  
38 cord variation is contrasted with a distinct micro-parametric approach  
39 to NC whose core idea is to move away from the classic and neo-classic  
40 Jespersonian focus on the syntactic properties of the sentential negative

1 marker to center instead on the syntactic properties of the n-words them-  
 2 selves. This approach takes the negative dependent expressions as key  
 3 factors of variation in negative concord systems (Corblin, de Swart &  
 4 Déprez 2004; Déprez 1997, 1999, 2000; Déprez and Martineau 2004;  
 5 Tovená, Déprez, and Jayez 2004; Londhal & Haegeman 2010). At the heart  
 6 of this micro-parametric approach is the claim that the diverse properties of  
 7 negative concord observable in a great variety of languages, synchronically  
 8 or and diachronically, primarily derive from the *internal* micro-morpho-  
 9 syntax and resulting differences between participating negative expressions  
 10 at the syntax-semantics interface, rather than from the syntactic nature  
 11 of clausal negation. On this perspective negative concord works *from the*  
 12 *outside-in*, that is, from the micro-syntactic level of negative expressions to  
 13 the macro-syntactic level of the clause unlike Jespersen's and the neo-classic  
 14 approaches, which work *from the inside-out*, that is, from the macro-level  
 15 of sentential negation to the n-expressions as schematized in (1):



27 One could perhaps counter at the outset that, given the Agree operation  
 28 (Chomsky 2001) that underlies the neo-classic approaches, and the corre-  
 29 spondence of features that checking presupposes between the *internal* syntac-  
 30 tic domain of n-expressions and the larger sentential domain that con-  
 31 tains them, the directionality argued for in our micro-parametric approach  
 32 could turn out to be a mere matter of favoured perspective, so that  
 33 outside-in and inside-out perspectives would in the end boil down to the  
 34 same. Not so for negative concord I argue here. The paper endeavours to  
 35 demonstrate that for an empirically adequate account of variation and  
 36 variety in negative relations, the direction of perspective in fact matters  
 37 considerably and has a number of significant theoretical and empirical  
 38 consequences that are calculable and factually verifiable in non-trivial  
 39 cases. Below, it is first argued that the general direction in perspective,  
 40 i.e. focus on n-expressions rather than on the sentential negation marker,  
 sets out opposite empirical expectations in regards to the internal homo-

1 geneity of negative systems in particular languages. It is further argued  
2 that this also has important consequences from a diachronic point of view.  
3 In its second part, the paper then endeavours to demonstrate that, within  
4 a restricted empirical domain, the predictions of the micro-parametric  
5 approach are clearly verified.

6 The paper is structured as follows: Section 1.2. contrasts the theoretical  
7 predictions of a Jespersonian neo-classic inside-out macro-parametric  
8 model of negative concord, like that of Zeijlstra (2008), with those of our  
9 micro-parametric outside-in approach for both synchronic comparative  
10 linguistic variation and diachronic language change. Section 3 presents  
11 comparative data from contemporary European French and French-based  
12 Creoles that underscore the importance of inner language diversity expected  
13 under the micro-parametric approach, but not under a macro-parametric  
14 model. Section 4 offers a detailed study of the internal structure of the  
15 French n-word *rien* and *personne* and of their historical evolution as a  
16 further diachronic confirmation of the importance of internal structural  
17 changes for the correlated changes in the properties of negative concord.  
18 In this section, an in-depth look at diachronic changes in the modification  
19 possibility of French n-words across time is presented that allows their  
20 internal evolution to be charted.

### 21 1.2. Cross-linguistic variation and inner language homogeneity

22 On what has been termed here a ‘neo-classic inside-out perspective’ on nega-  
23 tive relations, variation in the negative concord properties of a language  
24 is expected to concur with variation in the syntactic nature of the sen-  
25 tential negation marker. Thus, if a given language presents a given type  
26 of sentential negation marker, then expectations are that this language  
27 should manifest a given type of negative relations quite generally. Such  
28 a perspective is common to a number of generative approaches, starting  
29 from Zanuttini (2001) up to the more recent works of Zeijlstra (2004) and  
30 subsequent publications. Concretely, for Zeijlstra (2008) for instance, a core  
31 generalization that his approach is designed to predict is that:  
32

- 33 (2) Every language that has a negative marker  $X^0$  is an NC language  
34 (provided that n-words are present). (Zeijlstra 2008: 17)<sup>1</sup>  
35

---

36 1. In Zeijlstra’s model, a negative  $X^0$  is allowed to be phonetically null. This is  
37 unfortunate, because to a large extend, it quite significantly hollows out the  
38 empirical bite of this model, making it quasi impossible to be empirically con-  
39 tradicted. Indeed, any language that manifests negative concord can in princi-  
40 ple be claimed to have a null  $X^0$  negation, thus meeting (2), so to speak, by  
theoretical brute force.

1 The implication here is unidirectional, as is customary with other macro-  
 2 parameters proposed in the literature (Baker 2008), so that if the sentential  
 3 negation marker of a language L is not an  $X^0$ , no prediction is made with  
 4 respect to negative concord. Note, however, and this is fundamental, that  
 5 the generalization in (2) makes sense only in so far as the notion of  
 6 *negative concord language* can be well defined *independently*. Assume, for  
 7 the sake of the argument, the fairly uncontroversial view that a *negative*  
 8 *concord language* is a language in which negative relations generally take  
 9 the characteristic shape of multiple negative marking for a single negative  
 10 interpretation. What is clear then, given (2), is that a language with an  
 11  $X^0$  negation should manifest negative concord throughout. That is, inner  
 12 language homogeneity with respect to negative concord, with multiple  
 13 negative dependent terms interpreted as a single sentential negation, is  
 14 expected. Such homogeneity must, in fact, quite simply, on Zeijlstra's  
 15 perspective, be a defining criterion for what a *negative concord language*  
 16 is, if circularity is to be avoided. What is in question, here, however, is  
 17 whether such homogeneous languages are in fact ever empirically observed.<sup>2</sup>  
 18 In the realm of negative dependencies, this turns out to be, it would seem,  
 19 far from obvious. If anything, after years of careful observations in the  
 20 literature, what seems to be quite characteristic of languages that effec-  
 21 tively manifest negative concord is that they regularly present a rather  
 22 theoretically unsavoury patchwork of surprising inner variation. That is,  
 23 languages in which a single clearly uniform type of negative dependencies  
 24 prevails do not seem that common; what detailed empirical linguistic  
 25 observations have commonly unearthed within particular languages are  
 26 rather mixed systems in which there are some negative relations that present  
 27 a certain type of linguistic behaviour along with others that present distinct  
 28 ones. To wit, Italian or Spanish, which are treated as negative concord  
 29 languages in Zeijlstra (2004 & following), but also have distinct NPI expres-  
 30 sions that function quite differently (Zanuttini 1991; Laka 1990). Another  
 31 such language is Greek, where negative dependent terms partition into  
 32

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33  
 34 2. The question is put in the strongest terms here, but note that a weaker form  
 35 would be sufficient to raise doubts about the typological predictions of (2).  
 36 Indeed, even if a few truly homogeneous NC languages could be found, with  
 37 all the negative relations taking the same shape, this would still not show that  
 38 most languages allowing NC are of this sort, as the generalization in (2) leads  
 39 us to expect. The existence of only a few truly homogenous languages is  
 40 compatible with a micro-parametric approach, if it can be shown that all the  
 n-expressions share crucial internal structures.

1 two sets with distinct negative relations depending on their stress patterns,  
2 and which has additional NPI expressions that fall under different licens-  
3 ing conditions (Giannakidou 1997). Yet another such language is Serbo-  
4 Croatian, where two sets of negative dependent terms (*ni*-NPIs vs *i*-NPIs)  
5 with different distributions and licensing conditions are distinguished (see  
6 Progovac 1994 among others).<sup>3</sup> Finally, even American English, which,  
7 according to Zeijlstra (2004), is a clear example of non-NC language, can  
8 manifest unquestionable examples of NC. Witness the attested uses of the  
9 expression *diddly squat* that clearly functions as a negative in (3a), but just  
10 as clearly manifests concord when in co-presence with negation in (3b), or  
11 with another negative quantifier as in (3c):

- 12 (3) a. Alan Cumming To Obama: You've Done Diddly Squat'  
13 For Gay Rights.  
14 (http://www.thefreelibrary.com/ Oct 25, 2010)  
15 b. Those shiny cars won't mean *diddly squat* when you die.  
16 (http://www.urbandictionary.com/ Oct 25, 2010)  
17 c. Nobody knows squat about your topic.  
18 (= Nobody knows anything)  
19 (Internet data cited in Postal 2004)  
20

21 In short, in the realm of negative relations, within-language diversity ap-  
22 pears to be more often the rule than the exception. From a general macro-  
23 parametric inside-out perspective such as the one laid out in (2), the ques-  
24 tion that arises is: what should be made of such common inner-language  
25 variation for languages in which the sentential negation form stays reason-  
26 ably constant? Faced with an inner-language diverse reality, should one  
27 conclude that either we do not have a bona-fide *negative concord language*  
28 even if some instances of negative concord can be observed, or if the given  
29 language is classified as a negative concord one, are we then not compelled  
30 to concede that at least some negative relations fail to consistently behave  
31 as predicted by the syntactic nature of sentential negation? In sum, what  
32

---

33  
34 3. Although Progovac's (1994) study is limited to characterizing the licensing  
35 conditions of negative dependencies in Serbo-Croatian, she wonders about  
36 the source of the variation she observes in the conclusion of her chapter on  
37 language variation as follows: "If negative polarity items are homogenous  
38 class, why should they select different (LF) landing sites? First of all, they  
39 might not be a homogenous class at all. [...]. Perhaps the clues might be  
40 sought in their morphological properties." (Progovac 1994: 90). The fruitfulness of this suggested approach is precisely what we aim at defending here.

1 is far from obvious from an inside-out macro-parametric perspective is  
2 to see how a theory of NC whose determining factor is the syntactic  
3 nature of sentential negation could account for a language in which dis-  
4 tinct n-expressions behave differently while sentential negation, in contrast,  
5 remains constant. More generally, although an inside-out perspective such  
6 as Jespersen's or Zeijlstra's could well be adequately equipped to deal  
7 with cross-linguistic diversity given language-internal homogeneity, inner-  
8 language diversity, in contrast, appears to present a serious challenge to it.  
9 That inner language diversity does in fact occur even in languages that  
10 otherwise present a fairly solid reliance on negative concord will be force-  
11 fully argued and instantiated in what follows.

12 It is further important to note that such inner-diversity situations are  
13 precisely the ones that the micro-parametric outside-in approach to nega-  
14 tive concord defended here is particularly well equipped to handle theoret-  
15 ically. Since on this micro-parametric view, it is the internal make-up  
16 of an n-expression and its interpretation at the syntax-semantic interface  
17 that centrally determines its 'external' behaviour at the sentence level,  
18 and thus ultimately, its concord properties, then n-expressions do not need,  
19 and are not predicted to be homogeneous within any given language. In  
20 other words, on our micro-parametric perspective, inner-language or dialect  
21 homogeneity across all n-expressions is not required. Yet, the appearance  
22 of inner-language or dialect homogeneity could of course occur, since it is  
23 always possible that a majority of n-expressions within a given language  
24 have comparable inner structure. Note, incidentally, that this demonstrates  
25 the ability of the outside-in micro-parametric perspective to handle situa-  
26 tions of inner language homogeneity, should they ever arise. However, inner  
27 language homogeneity is not a necessity on this view. What is predicted  
28 instead on a micro-parametric-outside-in perspective is that *n-expressions*  
29 *with a common internal make up should behave homogeneously whether*  
30 *within or across languages*. So there is homogeneity expected here as well,  
31 but it is homogeneity of a different kind.

32 On the micro-parametric perspective, homogeneity across all the n-  
33 expressions within a single given language is not necessary. What is  
34 expected is homogeneity across n-expressions that can be shown to have  
35 the same syntactic make-up, in whichever language, dialect, or historical  
36 stage they may happen to occur. As a result, within languages, variation  
37 is not problematic for this perspective and is in fact expected whenever  
38 it can be shown that n-expressions differ significantly in their internal  
39 make up. In short, inside-out perspectives, such as Jespersen's or Zeijlstra's,  
40 which centre on the properties of sentential negation, produce expectations

1 of homogeneity within languages that have a unique sentential negation  
2 marker, thereby raising the delicate question of what a (homogeneous)  
3 *negative concord language* should ultimately be. In contrast, the micro-  
4 parametric outside-in perspective produces expectations of *homogeneity*  
5 across types of *n-expression structures*, conveniently sidestepping the very  
6 delicate question of *language homogeneity*, characteristically an E-language  
7 perspective problem.

8 Within a micro-parametric approach, generalizations are defined not  
9 over negative concord E-languages, but over types of internal-structures  
10 independently of their actual proportional embodiment in particular lan-  
11 guages, dialects, sociolects or historical stages. As a result, if the morpho-  
12 structure of an n-expression were to stay constant through time, then so  
13 would its negative concord properties. In contrast, internal changes should  
14 foster changes in external behaviour and, in particular, changes in the  
15 interaction with sentential negation, which may itself well remain con-  
16 stant. These are the expectations under the inside-out perspective defended  
17 here, and the following discussion will detail empirical evidence gathered  
18 in support of this view.

### 19 20 1.3. Historical variations

21  
22 The direction in perspective that distinguishes an inside-in macro-parametric  
23 approach from an outside-in micro-parametric model also has important  
24 consequences from a diachronic point of view. Given the focus in the  
25 former on the properties of sentential negation as a key factor of variation,  
26 it is clearly change in the nature of sentential negation that is expected to  
27 drive changes in the properties of negative relations. This is the core idea  
28 of Jespersen's negative cycle. For Jespersen, it is the (phonological) weaken-  
29 ing of negation that calls for its reinforcement by added negative expres-  
30 sions. For Zeijlstra, given the principle in (2), a change in the 'weakening'  
31 syntactic status of negation, i.e. if negation becomes an  $X^0$ , would also  
32 change the negative concord expectation for any given language. Unfortu-  
33 nately, change in the other direction, from a weakened  $X^0$  negation, to an  
34 XP one, does not lead to any clear predictions in Zeijlstra's model. The  
35 spirit of the proposal leads to the expectation that if sentential negation  
36 changes, then negative relations will be affected. But the second part of  
37 (2) only predicts the development of negative concord in case negation is  
38 or becomes an  $X^{0,2}$ .

39 Let us consider the case of French, which probably offers one of the best-  
40 documented examples of diachronic evolution for negation and negative



1 dependencies. The in-depth historical and comparative dialectal research  
2 on the evolution of the French negative operator *ne* and *ne ... pas* con-  
3 ducted by Martineau & Mougeon (2003) and Martineau & Déprez (2004)  
4 shows that changes in the sentential marker do not drive changes in the  
5 nature of negative dependencies or the behaviour of n-words. By the time  
6 that *ne* and *pas* had acquired their current syntactic and semantic proper-  
7 ties, n-words still largely behaved like dependent NPIs. They therefore  
8 acquired their current intrinsic negative meaning and their current nega-  
9 tive concord properties well after *ne* had weakened and *pas* had been  
10 strengthened. *Pas* already had the properties it has nowadays in the  
11 fifteenth century, a time at which, as our work demonstrates, n-words  
12 like *rien*, *personne* and *aucun* were mostly not negative by themselves but  
13 instead quite clearly dependent on negation for their negative meaning.  
14 That is, they manifested NPI like properties. Moreover, they clearly also  
15 had distinct syntactic properties. In short, the acquired negative character  
16 of contemporary n-words, and hence of negative concord, cannot be  
17 directly triggered by the weakening of sentential negation (interpretable  
18 negation switching to uninterpretable negation or vice versa, however this  
19 is encoded) and so it appears equally misguided to assume that the proper-  
20 ties of negative concord in contemporary French could causally result  
21 from a change in the nature of sentential negation. Strictly speaking, a  
22 principle like (2) simply appears to be unable to explain the historical rise  
23 of French negative concord, since it links negative concord to a weak/ $X^0$   
24 status of negation while French negative concord and n-words did not  
25 arise until *ne* was strengthened by the non- $X^0$  negation *pas*.

26 Ingham's work on the diachronic replacement of *nul* by *aucun* in  
27 medieval to Middle French and in Anglo-Norman also sharply demon-  
28 strates the occurrence of changes in negative relations and n-words that  
29 are fully independent of any changes in sentential negation. In the same  
30 vein, it is equally well acknowledged that the French negation *ne* already  
31 resulted from the weakening of the Latin negation *non* and yet, it has  
32 come to no one's mind to claim that French negative concord derived  
33 from this first negative weakening. On the basis of these results (see also  
34 Martineau in this volume for a further study on the diachronic changes of  
35 sentential negation), it can thus be quite firmly concluded that, in French,  
36 the expected causal direction of an inside-out perspective, i.e. changes in  
37 sentential negation driving changes in the nature of n-words dependencies  
38 towards negative concord, is simply not supported by the available his-  
39 torical evidence.

40

1 Interestingly, moreover, such a causal relation does not appear to be observed in the diachrony of Greek either. As explicitly noted by Kiparsky & Condoravdi (2005b: 2) there are “numerous instantiations of the (Jespersen) cycle from Medieval to Modern Greek, but the syntax of negation stays the same”. That is, changes occurred in negation dependent elements, while negation remained constant. So here, again, diachronic evidence does not support the view that it was changes in the syntactic properties of sentential negation that drove the changes in negative relations.

9 In contrast, if we take the outside-in perspective, defended here and in previous works, expectations are that, in negative relations, historical change should proceed from the internal morpho-structure of n-expressions to their external sentential behaviour, and not the other way around. That is, change should primarily operate from the internal micro-domain of the n-expressions to the external macro-domain of clausal negation. In other words, this view makes clear empirically verifiable predictions on the general course of historical development of negative relations positing that changes in the internal structure of n-expressions will drive changes in negative relations. Section 3.2 presents a detailed analysis of the internal changes in the structure of French n-words supporting this view. It discusses historical data on the modification of n-words. The key idea pursued here, as before (Déprez 1997, 1999, 2000, 2004) and also adopted in Roberts & Roussou (2003), is that restructuring arose in the internal structure of French n-words as a consequence of the loss of bare noun phrases, i.e. the gradual loss of null determination in Modern French, which, as argued previously in Déprez (2000, 2005), is itself a consequence of the evolution of morphological number marking in French.<sup>4</sup> In simple terms, what is defended here, as before, is that the historical change of French negative relations is in large part a consequence of the internal syntactic restructuring of its n-expressions, which was triggered by yet a distinct change in the expression of number in the language, causing the suppression of null determiners. Although changes also occurred in

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4. It is thus the weakening of number marking rather than the mere existence of bare noun phrases that Déprez (1999, 2000) proposes as a factor of change in the internal structure of French n-words. Crucially, as discussed in detail in Déprez (1999), it would be wrong to assume, as for instance Willis (2007) mistakenly does, that the claim is that the mere existence of bare nouns should coincide with negative concord. Counterexamples to such a claim abound, as noted in Déprez (1999), with English and German being quite obviously languages in which bare NPs are possible, but negative concord supposedly is not.

1 sentential negation, the claim is that this change is not at the root of the  
2 current properties of negative concord in contemporary French.

#### 3 4 1.4. Micro vs Macro-parametric perspectives

5 The points made in this section relate to more general issues on language  
6 variation and the nature of parametric distinctions. In short, following  
7 in Jespersen's footsteps, Zeijlstra's principle (2) amounts to claiming that  
8 there is a macro-parameter that distinguishes negative concord languages  
9 from non-negative concord ones, and that the formulation of this macro-  
10 parameter centers on the properties of sentential negation. In contrast, the  
11 perspective defended here is that the phenomenon of negative concord  
12 arises through the convergence of micro-parametric settings that constrain  
13 the inner structure of n-expressions with predicted consequences on their  
14 semantics and on how they interact with sentential negation. Many ap-  
15 proaches to negative concord have, at some level, recognized the necessity  
16 of understanding the interactions between the micro-level of negative rela-  
17 tions, i.e. the nature of the n-expressions, and the macro-level of their  
18 effects at the sentential level. It seems, however, that the majority of  
19 approaches proposed in the recent generative literature have followed a  
20 Jespersonian perspective and focused on a macro inside-out perspective  
21 that concentrates on the syntactic or semantic properties of sentential  
22 negation as the locus of the crucial defining factors of the nature of nega-  
23 tive concord relations. This was true also of approaches based on a NegP  
24 constituent and the Neg Criterion that sought to draw similarities between  
25 negative relations and wh-dependencies.<sup>5</sup> It is both my hope and my con-  
26 viction that looking negative relations from, so to speak, the other side of  
27 the lens, i.e. from the micro to macro outside-in perspective can but bring  
28

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29  
30 5. In Déprez (1999), I provide a thorough criticism of this approach, showing  
31 that the syntactic properties that characterize negative concord relations are  
32 quite distinct from those of wh-dependencies. I demonstrate in particular that  
33 negative concord is subject to locality constraints that are much closer to  
34 those of QR than to those of wh-movement. Quite strikingly moreover, ques-  
35 tion words display an language internal homogeneity in behaviour that con-  
36 trasts with the diversity found with n-words, suggesting that wh-dependencies  
37 may be more amenable to a macro-parametric variations approach than  
38 negative dependencies. That is, while it is common to find negative dependent  
39 terms that differ in behaviour within a single language, the same is not true for  
40 wh-terms. To my knowledge, it is not common to find wh-terms in a given  
language that must undergo wh-movement, while others must remain in situ.

1 fruitful new discoveries. Although it might seem at the outset that detailed  
2 studies of the inner structure of n-expressions could bring out awareness of  
3 greater diversity than has so far been acknowledged, with the consequence  
4 of putting some previously held generalizations on shaky grounds, I am  
5 convinced that such an approach will bring in the end the clear potential  
6 of new generalizations that will deepen our level of understanding of the  
7 atomic structure of negative relations. It is as if after spending many years  
8 successfully characterizing and refining the overall syntactic properties of  
9 negative relations, it was now time to delve into their details to try to  
10 understand how the broad characteristics of these relations, which are  
11 now rather well known, could be deduced at least in part from the micro-  
12 structure and inner relations of their composite elements.

## 14 **2. Testing the empirical grounds**

16 In this second part of the paper, empirical evidence of the importance of  
17 the inner structure of n-expressions is examined. We first discuss evidence  
18 of inner language diversity in a fairly strong case of a so-called ‘strict  
19 negative concord language’, namely Haitian Creole. We then turn to his-  
20 torical evidence of the evolution of the inner structure of French negative  
21 expressions. In both cases, what is emphasized is how much the inner  
22 nature of n-words matters for an understanding of their contribution to  
23 the fabric of negative relations.

### 25 **2.1. Inner language diversity and negative concord**

27 In previous work (Déprez 1997, 1999, 2000), negative concord systems  
28 have been distinguished on the basis of 1) the internal syntax of their  
29 n-words and 2) the semantic interface that these syntactic structures imply.  
30 It was argued that n-words in languages like Haitian Creole (HC) occupy  
31 a low position in the functional structure of their nominal constituent,  
32 manifesting syntactic and semantic properties relating to those of bare  
33 nominals. Negative concord there involves an operator variable system in  
34 which negation binds a bare nominal variable. By contrast, in languages  
35 like French n-words are placed high in their DP, behaving syntactically  
36 like determiners with the semantics of quantificational expressions. Negative  
37 concord in this case is quite distinct and involves resumptive quantification  
38 between negative quantifiers that are syntactically and semantically parallel,  
39 as proposed for English in May (1989). These two systems instantiate polar  
40 extremes between which micro-variations unfolds Déprez 1999, 2000).

1 Motivation for this proposal was based on the observation that although  
 2 n-words share the appearance of bare nominals in both languages –  
 3 *pesonn, anyen* in HC and *personne, rien* in French – the general licensing  
 4 conditions on bare N-arguments radically differ in each, bare-arguments  
 5 occurring freely in HC, and not at all in contemporary French. Assuming  
 6 a null determiner structure for bare-N, this difference implies that null-D  
 7 are fully licensed in HC, but generally banned in French, leaving for  
 8 French the structure (1b), in which the bare n-words occupy the deter-  
 9 miner position.<sup>6,7</sup>

- 10 (4) a. [DP D<sup>0</sup> [NP *pesonn* ]] Haitian Creole  
 11 b. [DP *Personne* [NP N<sup>0</sup> ]] Contemporary French  
 12

13 Because they contrast Haitian Creole and European French n-words,  
 14 these previous works seemingly perpetuate the impression that what is  
 15 compared are again homogeneous languages that have uniform character-  
 16 istic properties throughout. However, this is misleading, as these previous  
 17 studies clearly concentrated on a restricted set of n-words, i.e. the nominal  
 18 ones and specifically focused on their syntactic properties. Recall, how-  
 19 ever, that as argued above, the micro-parametric approach defended here  
 20 predicts that distinct n-words may well have distinct properties so that  
 21 within language diversity is expected if there are distinct inner structures  
 22 for negative dependent terms.

23 It has often been noted in the literature that n-words in French are not  
 24 all homogeneous in their ‘negative’ behaviour, and that they do not all  
 25 participate in negative relations in exactly the same way. For instance, it  
 26 has been commonly shown that the n-word *jamais* behaves somewhat dif-  
 27 ferently from *personne* and *rien*, which themselves are not entirely parallel  
 28 either. In particular, for many speakers including myself, *jamais* can still  
 29 be found in formal register (mostly written) with a non-negative meaning  
 30

31 6. The analysis of French n-words as determiners is also independently proposed  
 32 in Sleeman (1996).

33 7. Zanutini’s (1991) original approach differed from other NegP, Neg-Criterion  
 34 based approaches such as Rizzi’s and Hageman’s in attempting to correlate  
 35 the properties of concord to parametric variations in the syntactic position of  
 36 negation with respect to VP. Although this approach fails to identify a macro-  
 37 parameter between languages allowing negative concord or not, it may well  
 38 play a renewed role within a micro-parametric approach as one of the factor  
 39 that can influence the interpretation of negative dependencies. How this factor  
 40 could be connected to the internal structure of n-words, however, remains to  
 be explored.

1 in some characteristic NPI contexts such as, for instance, the rhetorical  
2 question in (5) and the contexts in (6):

- 3 (5) a. *A-t-on jamais vu pareilles choses?*<sup>8</sup>  
4 'Has anyone ever seen such things?'  
5  
6 b. [...] *mais le ferai-je jamais?*  
7 'but will I ever do it?'  
8  
9 (6) a. *Je ne crois pas qu'il soit jamais possible* [...].  
10 'I don't think it will ever be possible.'  
11 b. [...] *dialogue où Socrate se montre plus sophiste que jamais* [...]  
12 'a dialogue in which Socrates reveals himself more sophist  
13 than ever'  
14  
15 c. *Si jamais tu venais* [...].  
16 'If you ever came'

17 Such is not the case for the n-word *rien* for instance.  
18

19  
20 8. Note, interestingly, that such rhetorical contexts also permit remnant bare NP  
21 (*pareilles choses*), a fact that we have argued goes along with an NPI inter-  
22 pretation of n-words under the assumption that both sport a remnant null  
23 D (Déprez and Martineau 2004). Of further interest is the form of these ques-  
24 tions. The examples provided in the text, some of them borrowed from Maj-  
25 Britt Mosegaard Hansen (this volume), and thus drawn from the Frantext  
26 data-base in a period from 2000–2007, manifest characteristic stylistic features  
27 that clearly flag them as part of a formal high (written) style. These features  
28 include: inverted question structure, use of bare nouns, which are notably  
29 absent from informal oral registers. It is interesting to note in this regard,  
30 that at least in my variety of French, *jamais*, when used in a non-inverted  
31 yes-no question, has a negative meaning. Thus a question like (i) must be  
32 answered with *si*, and cannot be answered with *oui*, a fact that clearly flags it  
33 as negative:

- 32 (i) *T'as jamais mangé des sushis?*  
33 You have never eaten sushis?  
34  
35 *Si, mais j'ai pas aimé.*  
36 Yes, but I did not like it.

37 Questions with an inverted structure that contain an n-word cannot be so  
38 answered, since they essentially have a rhetorical meaning.

- 39 (ii) *A-t-on jamais vu chose pareille? #Si.*  
40 Has one ever seen such things? #Yes.

- 1 (7) a. *N'a-t-il rien vu?* – *Si*.  
 2 'Did he see nothing? Yes.'<sup>9</sup>  
 3 b. *Je ne crois pas qu'il ait rien fait*.  
 4 'I don't believe he did nothing.'  
 5 c. *Si tu ne fais rien* [. . .].  
 6 'If you do nothing'

8 This illustrates the fact that distinct n-words within a given linguistic  
 9 variety may have distinct properties and as a result, enter in different  
 10 compositional processes in given contexts. It is entirely possible within  
 11 our approach that *jamais* presents a more ambiguous internal structure  
 12 than other contemporary French n-words. Indeed, the hypothesis made  
 13 in Déprez (1999, 2000, 2004) that the change of nominal n-words in  
 14 French involves the suppression of a null determiner structure does not  
 15 immediately transpose to the internal structure of adverbial n-words,  
 16 unless it could be argued following Larson (1985) that adverbs in general,  
 17 and *jamais* in particular, have a hidden nominal structure. If so, the dis-  
 18 appearance of bare nominals in French, which we argue to be at the root  
 19 of the change of French n-words, may not directly concern adverbs, and it  
 20 could well be that, for n-words like *jamais*, their historical development  
 21 towards a negative quantifier was only triggered indirectly by some simi-  
 22 larity with other n-words like *rien* and *personne* and not directly by the  
 23 disappearance of bare nouns. On this view, note that the possibility that  
 24 *jamais* still allows a structure that other n-words have eliminated is not  
 25 unexpected. Of course, such conjectures, although quite plausible, remain  
 26 at this point tentative, and only a careful study of the internal structure of  
 27 adverbs in general and of *jamais* in particular, could provide support for  
 28 it. Such a study, however, is quite beyond the scope of the present paper.

29 Of direct interest to the general thesis of the paper, however, is the fact  
 30 that n-words in French, whatever the French variety considered, are rarely  
 31 fully uniform in their properties. To wit, despite many similarities, the  
 32 very obvious fact that *rien* generally occurs in a non-argument position,  
 33 being subject to something akin to the *tous-à-gauche* construction (Kayne  
 34 1977) while *personne* is not, at least in the contemporary standard lan-  
 35 guage.<sup>10</sup> This could well reflect a slight difference in internal structure, in  
 36

37  
 38 9. Yes in (5a) above imperfectly translates French *si*, an affirmative answer that  
 39 can only be used in the context of a negative meaning.

40 10. In Geneva French, *personne* is apparently found in the same type of preverbal  
 structure as *rien* (Ur Shlonsky, personal communication).

1 relation with the fact that while *personne* still has a nominal counterpart in  
 2 contemporary French, *rien* no longer does. A possible structural encoding  
 3 of this difference would preserve for *personne* the trace/copy of an internal  
 4 displacement from its original noun position, while there would be none  
 5 for *rien* as in (8):

- 6 (8) a. [DP *personne* [. . . [NP ~~personne~~]]]  
 7  
 8 b. [DP *rien*]

9  
 10 With this structure, *rien* is closer to clitic pronouns like *le* that have often  
 11 been analyzed internally as intransitive determiners (Postal 1966).

12 Confronted with this well-known variability in the behaviour of French  
 13 n-words, Zeijlstra (2008) suggests that this state of affair is symptomatic of  
 14 languages in which sentential negation is currently evolving. On his view,  
 15 French is exceptional because its sentential negation is currently under-  
 16 going change (cf. the loss of *ne*). As noted above, however, such a correla-  
 17 tion is not supported by available historical evidence. Moreover, this view  
 18 makes the prediction that only languages whose negation is currently  
 19 ‘changing’ should manifest inner language variability. As demonstrated  
 20 below, however, such a prediction is not confirmed either. There are clearly  
 21 languages in which negation appears quite robustly constant while none-  
 22 theless manifesting intriguing inner language variation with respect to  
 23 distinct n-words. Below, such a case is detailed with a careful look at the  
 24 properties of the equivalent of *jamais* in Martinique Creole.

25 As shown in Déprez and Martineau (2004), the behaviour of n-words  
 26 like *pesonn* and *anyen* in Martinique Creole is quite uniform, supporting  
 27 general description of this language as instantiating strict negative concord  
 28 of the variable binding type, with n-words in a low nominal position as in  
 29 (2). There are nonetheless some very interesting facts about the n-word  
 30 *jamn* that are at odds with too broad a generalization of this picture. As  
 31 some of our informants have pointed out to us, *jamn* does not fully behave  
 32 like the other n-words in their Creole variety<sup>11</sup>. N-words such as *person*,  
 33 *anyen*, *oken moun* require the obligatory presence of the sentential nega-  
 34 tion *pa* when they occur in declarative contexts, behaving in this regard

35  
 36  
 37 11. The data in this section comes from original fieldwork realized in (2001) under  
 38 our supervision by Timothee Montoute, a native speaker of Martinique  
 39 Creole with relatives of his. This fieldwork was funded by the European Project  
 40 Eurocores, granted to Peter Ford Dominey and myself.



1 like standard NPI expressions.<sup>12</sup> For *janm* in contrast, the co-presence of  
2 *pa* appears to be optional:

- 3 (9) a. *Man (pa) janm dir u bagay kon sa.*  
4 'I never told you things like that.'  
5  
6 b. *Man janm ale Martinik.*  
7 'I never went to Martinique.'

8  
9 What is of particular interest here is that this optional co-occurrence  
10 requirement correlates for *janm* with the possibility of giving rise, in  
11 certain contexts, to a double negation reading in the co-presence of *pa*.

- 12 (10) a. *Man pa janm ale Martinik.*  
13 'I didn't *never* go to Martinique. (In fact, I went often.)'<sup>13</sup>  
14  
15 b. *Je ne suis pas jamais allé à la Martinique.*  
16 *(En fait, j'y suis allé souvent.)*

17 In other words, in this variety of Martinique Creole *janm* seems to fluctuate  
18 between an NPI like behaviour, where it combines with sentential  
19 *pa* to produce a single negation reading that is parallel to that of the other  
20 n-words of this language, and a negative quantifier behaviour that is closer  
21 to the one observed with French n-words and produces a double negative  
22 reading when combining with sentential negation. To our knowledge,  
23 however, there are in MC no comparable known fluctuations in the be-  
24 haviour of sentential negation. *Pa* is a preverbal head in present day MC,  
25 and to our knowledge has always been in the available historical records

26  
27  
28 12. Haitian Creole manifest so called 'strict negative *noncord*', which means that  
29 n-words are also found in subject position with a co-occurring negation, in  
30 contrast to so-called standard, i.e., English-like, NPIs, which cannot occur  
31 in subject position. In Déprez (2008), we proposed that n-words licensing in  
32 subject position requires the conjunction of two factors: 1) a negative operator  
33 that is a head, and 2) DP internal licensing of a null D. If one of these con-  
34 ditions is not met, subject/object asymmetries in NPI licensing are expected.  
35 In English, for instance, the sentential negation operator is arguably not a  
36 head. In Italian, by contrast, it is DP internal null D licensing that is not  
37 possible. Thus for both languages, NPI and n-words display subject/object  
38 asymmetries, but this same effect may result from distinct constraints in the  
39 two languages.

40 13. Such a contrastive negative statement requires of course an appropriate con-  
text. This is the one provided by our informant: 'You don't even know our  
foods. I bet you have never ever been to Martinique!'

1 (see for instance Hazael Massieux 2008). The survey we conducted of  
2 available historical texts on the internet<sup>14</sup> has not revealed any differences.  
3 What this illustrates is a characteristic inner variability within an other-  
4 wise rather homogeneous language, with a sentential negation form that  
5 has remained stable since its known formation. One could argue that this  
6 situation illustrates de-creolisation, and that *jamn* for our informants has  
7 been subject to influence from French. This is indeed quite likely, given  
8 the situation of diglossia that is typical of Martinique nowadays. Even  
9 so, the interesting point here is that such a decreolizing influence seems to  
10 have affected only one n-word and not the whole class of these items. Nor  
11 does it concern the behaviour of negation, which in the texts surveyed  
12 by Pascal Vaillant (2009) does not occur in post-verbal position (Pascal  
13 Vaillant, personal communication). Clearly, in this variety the relation  
14 of the n-word *jamn* to negation is distinct from the one exhibited by the  
15 other n-words, but one would be hard pressed to argue that this can be  
16 explained by distinct properties of sentential negation. More plausible is  
17 the suggestion that it is the internal structure of the adverbial *jamn* that  
18 is in part different from that of nominal n-words. Incidentally, it is quite  
19 striking that this distinction should concern the equivalent of *jamaïs*,  
20 which itself, as noted above, shows a greater instability in French too.  
21 Put together, these facts clearly suggest that adverbial n-words behave  
22 somewhat differently from nominal ones. What the exact structure of  
23 adverbial n-word is, and how they differ from nominal ones no doubt  
24 deserves further in-depth investigation. But the fact that interesting dis-  
25 tinctions appear to group distinct n-words by category, i.e. nominal vs.  
26 adverbial ones, already provides interesting support to the view defended  
27 here that it is the internal syntax of n-words that governs the nature of the  
28 negative relation they are involved in, rather than the nature of the senten-  
29 tial negation maker.

30

### 31 2.1.1. *Looking inside n-words*

32

33 Support for our micro-parametric approach to negative concord requires  
34 evidence of robust correlations between the inner syntax of n-words and  
35 distinctive properties of the concord relation. But for this to be shown, it  
36 is of course necessary to provide first and foremost a detailed analysis of  
37 the internal structure of n-words. The goal of this section is to provide

38

39

---

14. The old text consulted have been made publicly available by Hazael-Massieux  
40 at <http://creoles.free.fr/Cours/>

1 such an analysis for standard contemporary European French n-words  
 2 focusing on their feature composition and their modification possibilities.  
 3 Once the structure is established on solid empirical grounds, the paper  
 4 then offers an in-depth exploration of the changes that have affected the  
 5 internal structure of French n-words in the course of their historical devel-  
 6 opment. It attempts to chart the detailed diachronic evolution of the  
 7 internal structure of n-words during their diachronic grammaticalization  
 8 and discusses the correlations that these changes present with changes  
 9 in the concord relation they participate in. This section is structured as  
 10 follows. First, we focus on providing empirical evidence for the complex  
 11 structure of French n-words as opposed to their nominal counterparts.  
 12 We examine some distributional evidence, then discuss their feature  
 13 composition and modification possibilities and finally we take stock of  
 14 what these data mean for the internal structure of French n-words. In  
 15 section 3, we turn to historical changes and provide evidence of how  
 16 French n-words have evolved from a bare nominal type to their contem-  
 17 porary quantificational and determiner type through internal changes in  
 18 their structure. We examine the time course of feature changes and  
 19 changes in the modification possibilities.

### 21 2.1.2. *Distributional evidence*

22 At the outset, it is important to recall that the morpheme *personne* still  
 23 has a double life in contemporary French. On the one hand, it is a well  
 24 behaved common count noun meaning ‘person’, and on the other hand,  
 25 it is an n-word with an independent strong negative interpretation. A  
 26 careful comparison of the two words can thus determine minimal factors  
 27 that enter in their distinction. Given that the frequency of these items is  
 28 roughly the same,<sup>15</sup> how do speakers know which is which? A central dis-  
 29 tinguishing factor is that *personne* has a (positive) nominal interpretation  
 30 whenever it co-occurs with a determiner in an argument position (11a).  
 31 Conversely, its interpretation is generally that of an n-word, whenever it  
 32 occurs in argument position with no determiner as in (11b).  
 33  
 34  
 35

---

36 15. Our assertion here is based on a rough estimate of occurrences of *personne* in  
 37 the Elicop corpus. In each of the files of this corpus that we considered and  
 38 tallied, the count of negative *personne* yielded approximately the same result  
 39 as the count of the positive uses.  
 40

- 1 (11) a. *J'ai rencontré une/cette/la personne.*  
 2 I-have met a/this/the personne  
 3 b. *J'ai rencontré personne à cette soirée.*  
 4 'I have met no-one at this event.'

5  
 6 The complementary distribution between the presence of overt determiners  
 7 and the n-word interpretation of *personne* is quite general, apart from a  
 8 few interesting cases to which we return below, indicating a competi-  
 9 tion for the same syntactic position that quite clearly supports placing  
 10 the n-word *personne* in a determiner position. Besides accounting for (11),  
 11 this also provides a straightforward explanation of how a seemingly bare  
 12 nominal like *personne* succeeds in meeting the stringent French require-  
 13 ment for obligatory determination. *Personne* does not need a determiner,  
 14 whenever it is itself in a determiner position. Worth stressing is further-  
 15 more the fact that the presence or absence of a determiner is far more reli-  
 16 able a cue to the interpretation of *personne* than the co-occurrence of a  
 17 negative element like *ne*. As is well known, the presence or absence of *ne*  
 18 has no impact whatsoever on the n-word interpretation of a bare *personne*.  
 19 Similarly, adding *ne* to a determined *personne* as in (10) leaves its nominal  
 20 interpretation intact:

- 21 (12) ?? *Je n' ai vu une/la personne.*  
 22 I *ne* saw a person  
 23

24 Quite clearly then, the presence of a negative operator, even of the strong  
 25 negator *pas*, does not influence the interpretation of *personne*. In fact, a  
 26 subtle but nonetheless patent semantic distinction remains, even when a  
 27 negated nominal *de personne* in (13a) is compared with an n-word con-  
 28 struction like (13b). To get a feel for it, consider the following scenario.  
 29 Suppose that aliens that look like humans had invaded our world and  
 30 were hunting the remaining humans they call 'persons' for final annihila-  
 31 tion. Now imagine an alien hunter looking for humans in a crowded alien  
 32 party. If he came up empty handed, he could truthfully utter (13a), but  
 33 surely not (13b), given the crowd present at the party.  
 34

- 35 (13) a. *Je n'ai pas vu de personne(s) à cette soirée.*  
 36 'I did not see people.' = (humans)  
 37 b. *Je n'ai vu personne à cette soirée.*  
 38 'I did not see anybody at this party.'

40

1 Only in (13a) does the lexical meaning remain prevalent, as is expected if  
 2 *personne* is indeed a nominal predicate here only. (13a) is of even further  
 3 interest because of the peculiar [*de* NP] structure that it features. Kayne  
 4 (1977) has argued that this construction sports a remnant null determiner,  
 5 an analysis supported by the fact that, like other attested null D structures,  
 6 such as Italian bare NPs, [*de* NP] constructions manifest a characteristic  
 7 distributional subject/object or pre-verbal/post-verbal asymmetry, as (14)  
 8 illustrates:

- 9 (14) a. \**Je ne crois pas que [de personnes étrangères] seront invitées.*  
 10 I ne think not that of people foreign will be invited  
 11 ‘I don’t think foreign people will be invited.’  
 12  
 13 b. *Je ne crois pas qu’il sera invité [de personnes étrangères].*  
 14 I don’t think that there will be invited people foreign  
 15 ‘I don’t think there will be foreign people invited.’

16 The [*de* NP] structure further manifests a dependency on the presence  
 17 of an overt c-commanding operator, here negation. This is expected if  
 18 their remnant null D is interpreted as a variable that must be appro-  
 19 priately bound for interpretation. In short, distributional asymmetry and  
 20 necessary operator binding are a hallmark characteristic of remnant null  
 21 D. Since n-words, by contrast, manifest neither of these characteristics,  
 22 this is evidence that their structure does not contain a comparable null D.

23 This much secures the first part of an empirical demonstration that bare  
 24 n-words do not have the syntax of bare nominals. To yet strengthen the  
 25 argument, further<sup>16</sup> empirical evidence is needed that n-words such as  
 26 *personne* must be in D. Such evidence can be found, on the one hand, in  
 27 the interesting exceptions to the complementary distribution mentioned  
 28 above and, on the other hand, in the modification facts discussed below.

29 Turning to the exceptions first, (15) shows a surprising instance of bare  
 30 *personne* that can only be interpreted as positive:

- 31 (15) *Vous (?? ne) recevrez un livre par **personne**.*  
 32 ‘You will get one book per person.’  
 33

34  
 35 16. Note that the n-word within a DP in (i) can lead to negative concord reading  
 36 although the presence of *ne* and, hence, presumably of any negative operator  
 37 (even null) is in fact banned.

- 38 (i) *Le \*(ne) don de rien à personne est de nos jours presque un égoïsme*  
 39 *de rigueur.*

40 The gift of nothing to no one is nowadays quasi-standard egotism

1 In (15), despite its bareness, *personne* cannot be coerced into being nega-  
 2 tive. Yet as (16) shows, not all PP constructions have this effect on a bare  
 3 *personne*:

4 (16) *Je (n') y suis pour personne.*

5 'I am there for no-one.'  
 6

7 So why and how do (15) and (16) differ? Replacing *personne* by other  
 8 nominals, we quickly see that, while (17a) displays the properties of a  
 9 regular PP, taking all sorts of nominal as complements, this is not the  
 10 case with (17b). In (17b), the range of nominal complements allowed  
 11 is narrowly restricted, and in effect strictly limited to nominals without  
 12 determiners:

13 (17) a. *J'y suis pour les/(tous) mes/des amis/, pas pour les/(tous)*  
 14 *mes/des ennemis.*

15 'I am there for the/my/some friends, not for the/my/some  
 16 enemies.'  
 17

18 b. *Vous recevrez un livre par \*le/mon/un enfant.*

19 'You will receive one book per the/my/a child.'  
 20

21 (17b) shows that the presence of any overt determiner is simply excluded  
 22 in these constructions. Yet, as (18) shows, the construction allows adjecti-  
 23 val modification, which excludes an analysis of (15) involving N to P  
 24 incorporation or direct X<sup>0</sup> selection.

25 (18) *Vous distribuerez un cadeau par gros client fortuné.*

26 'You will distribute one present per big wealthy customer.'  
 27

28 Constructions as in (15) thus appear to strictly select bare singular NP  
 29 complements<sup>17</sup>, banning any nominal phrase with a more complex deter-  
 30 miner structure. This recalls Pereltsvaig's (2008) observation that some  
 31 Russian prepositions strictly select small nominals with no DP projection.

32 Returning to n-words, note that if the n-word interpretation of *personne*  
 33 were compatible with a bare NP structure, its exclusion from (15) would  
 34

35 \_\_\_\_\_  
 36 17. That the complement of such prepositions must be singular is demonstrated  
 37 by (i) below, where we see that a phonetically distinct form of plural is  
 38 unacceptable:

39 (i) *Vous mettrez un ballot d'avoine par cheval/\*chevaux.*

40 You will put one straw pile by horse-SG/\*horse-PL

1 be mysterious. If, in contrast, it requires a complex D-structure, as defended  
 2 here, the facts are entirely as predicted, since a complex D-structure fails to  
 3 meet the selection restriction of this PP construction. (15) further eliminates  
 4 a putative analysis of bare *personne* as an N-level pronoun and makes the  
 5 point that not all apparent bareness can be treated equally, providing clear  
 6 empirical evidence that the bare n-words of contemporary French must be  
 7 D-like structures.

8 Let us now briefly see how these observations about *personne* extend to  
 9 other nominal French n-words and, in particular, to *rien*. Although *rien*  
 10 no longer has a comparable common nominal counterpart in contem-  
 11 porary French, it is nevertheless not hard to find clear evidence that  
 12 support extending to it the structural conclusions reached above. First,  
 13 the complementary distribution with determiners is still, to some extent,  
 14 observable for *rien* in examples like (19).

15 (19) *Il est très sensible. Un rien le fait sursauter.*

16 'He is very sensitive. A little thing makes him jump.'  
 17

18 In (19), the nominal meaning of *rien* (thing) is still perceivable and, as  
 19 expected, the presence of a determiner is required to allow it. Moreover,  
 20 although (20) unlike (15) is strictly speaking not fully acceptable, it is none-  
 21 theless significantly improved by the addition of a pre-nominal modifier.

22 (20) a. \**Vous utiliserez un sac par rien.*

23 'You will use one bag per little thing.'

24 b. ?*Vous utiliserez un sac par petit rien.*

25 'You will use one bag per little thing.'

26  
 27 (20) illustrates that although the nominal equivalent of *rien* is no longer  
 28 in use in contemporary French, it can still be coerced provided that its  
 29 nominal structure is made obvious by the presence of a pre-nominal adject-  
 30 ive, forcing *rien*, in this case, to be construed in a low nominal position.  
 31 Note that remarkably, in this case *rien* loses its negative import. Hence,  
 32 the reasoning applied to (15) above extends to (20), leading us to conclude  
 33 that the n-word *rien*, just like *personne*, sports a complex determiner struc-  
 34 ture that makes it unsuitable in (18).

35  
 36 The tests used above do clearly not apply to the French nominal n-  
 37 word *aucun*, which, quite plainly, must be a D. We return to this n-word  
 38 below, showing that despite some differences, it nonetheless shares struc-  
 39 tural similarities with the bare n-words discussed above.

40

2.1.3. *The features and modification of n-words*

This section first offers a feature comparison between n-words and their nominal counterparts and then compares the modification possibilities allowed for each type of expression. Turning to features first, we consider gender and number. In (21a), the nominal *personne* is feminine and can vary in number, a property here reflected by the determiner, adjectival agreement and co-referring pronouns. The n-word in (21b), in contrast, triggers no adjectival agreement and has corresponding singular and masculine bound pronouns.

(21) 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 this respect, n-words behave like the existential quantifier *quelqu'un* (someone), also unmarked for gender and number. Interestingly, despite number invariability, n-words seem semantically plural, as shown by (22), where *personne* occurs with a verb that requires a plural subject.

(22) *Personne ne se rassemble plus ici.*

‘No-one gathers here anymore.’

In what respect do these facts support the view that n-words occupy a high D-like position in their functional structure? Note first that the lack of gender and number features make n-words characteristically un-nominal. Moreover, syntactic invariability and/or semantic plurality appears to be characteristic of a certain type of D-elements in French such as the existential quantifier *quelqu'un* or the bare quantificational pronouns or question words *qui* and *quoi*. These similarities support the view that n-words share feature properties with pronouns and quantifiers, but not with nouns, hence providing evidence that they are merged in a D position.<sup>18</sup> Further support arises from their modification properties. (23)

18. The view that n-words are pronouns has long been recognized in the classic literature (Gougeheim 1951, Grevisse 1980). The claim that n-words are in D, adds a hierarchical dimension to this claim that has consequences on adjectival modification.



1 shows that pre-nominal adjectives are excluded with n-words, while they  
2 are possible and stackable with their nominal counterparts.

- 3 (23) a. \**J'ai rencontré autre charmante petite personne.*  
4 'I have met other charming small nobody.'  
5  
6 b. *J'ai rencontré une autre charmante petite personne.*  
7 'I have met an other small charming small person.'

8  
9 In the spirit of Cinque's (1994) hierarchical approach to modification, the  
10 lack of pre-nominal modification is a further indication that these n-words  
11 must occupy a position at least higher than NP in the DP structure. But it  
12 is not just pre-nominal modification that is excluded with n-words. More  
13 generally, n-words like *personne* and *rien* do not allow direct adjectival  
14 modification; they require a specific modification construction with *de* as  
15 in (24), which I henceforth term 'indirect *de*-modification'. As (24) shows,  
16 this again is a property that n-words share with existential quantifiers like  
17 *quelqu'un* and bare question words like *qui* or *quoi*.<sup>19</sup>

- 18 (24) \**Personne/rien/quelqu'un/qui/quoi* \*(d)'intéressant  
19 'No one/nothing/someone/who/what (of) interesting'

20  
21 Kayne (1994) observes that indirect *de* modification is more constrained  
22 than regular modification, in that it disallows stacking, as in (25):

- 23 (25) \**J'ai rencontré personne/quelqu'un/qui de charmant de petit.*  
24 'I have met no one/someone/who/of charming of small.'

25  
26 He argues that this anti-stacking constraint speaks against assigning these  
27 constructions a traditional adjunction structure and following Huot (1981),  
28 proposes a structure akin to relative clause modification with *de* as a  
29 complementizer-like element as in (26):

- 30 (26) [D<sup>0</sup> [ DP/PP *quelqu'un/personne* [ *de* [<sub>IP</sub> *intelligent* I<sup>0</sup> t ]]]  
31 (Kayne 1994)

32  
33 In (26), the n-word or quantifier raises from a position internal to the  
34 clause to Spec *de*, in a fashion paralleling that of predicate inversion in  
35 DP (den Dikken 1998). Kayne, following (Huot 1981), notes one intrigu-

36  
37 19. As Déprez (2000) notes, indirect modification of this type is not possible  
38 with universal quantifiers, a fact that strongly suggests that n-words are like  
39 existential/indefinite quantifiers or numerals in their syntactic nature, i.e.  
40 quantificational indefinites.

1 ing exception to the stacking constraint that occurs with the modifier  
2 *autre*:

3  
4 (27) *Personne|rien|quelqu'un|qui|quoi d'autre d'intéressant*

5 'No one/nothing/someone/who/what of else of interesting'

6 *D'autre* modification is also possible with *quelqu'un* or question words,  
7 but, expectedly, not with the nominal *personne*, for which modification  
8 by *autre* must be strictly pre-nominal and direct:<sup>20</sup>

9  
10 (28) *Une autre personne (\*d'autre)*

11 'An other person (of other)'

12  
13 The modifier *autre* is peculiar in other respects that are of interest here.  
14 First, like a few other pre-nominal adjectives in French (*divers*, *différent*),  
15 *autre* can sometimes play the role of a determiner and/or a pronoun.

16 (29) *Autres temps, autres moeurs, autre histoire!*

17 'Other times, other mores, other stories!'

18  
19 Clearly as well, it must always be the highest pre-nominal modifier in  
20 any noun phrase, as it can never be preceded by any other pre-nominal  
21 adjective, like for instance *petit*.

22 (30) *\*Une petite autre voiture|une autre petite voiture*

23 'A small other car/another small car'

24  
25 In these respects, *autre* differs from regular adjectives, appearing instead  
26 to share properties with numerals. In fact, like numerals, it can modify  
27 pronouns.

28  
29 (31) *nous trois, nous autres*

30 'we three, we others'

31  
32 Interestingly, however, *autre* can also modify numerals, as in (32a), but  
33 the stacking of pronouns and numerals is not allowed (cf. 32b):

34 (32) a. *trois autres* 'three others'

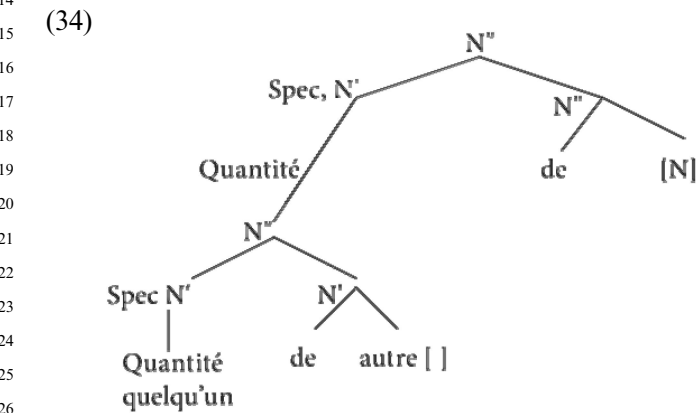
35 b. *\*nous trois autre* '\*we three others'

36  
37  
38  
39 20. Post-nominal *autre* is also marginally possible, but with a meaning closer to  
40 that of *different*: *une personne autre*.

1 Furthermore, while indirect *de* modification is sometimes possible with  
 2 regular adjectives where the noun phrase is contrastively focused as in  
 3 (33), indirect modification with *d'autre* is always excluded. With nouns,  
 4 *autre* must always remain pre-nominal with direct modification.

5 (33) *J'ai trois voitures de bleues/\*d'autres, pas quatre.*  
 6 'I have three car of blue/of other, not four.'<sup>21</sup>  
 7

8 In sum, indirect modification with *d'autre* is only possible with n-words,  
 9 existential quantifiers and question words, never with other nominal ex-  
 10 pressions. This clearly gives it a peculiar status, shared with no other  
 11 adjectival modifiers. Noting this peculiarity, Huot (1981) suggested that  
 12 *autre* involves quantity, not noun modification, and proposed the structure  
 13 in (34):  
 14



27 Huot's suggestion in effect groups modification by *d'autre* with other  
 28 degree modifiers like *de plus* (more), or *de moins* (less) (*quelqu'un/quoi de*  
 29 *plus/de moins* 'someone/what more/less'). In a current model, a possible  
 30

31  
32  
33 21. Indirect *de*-modification is also possible with so-called 'quantitative *en*-prono-  
 34 minalization'. As (ia) shows, for regular adjectives, both direct and *de* modifica-  
 35 tion are possible. Here again, however, modification with *d'autre* is excluded:

- 36 (i) a. *J'en ai TROIS (de) petites, pas quatre.*  
 37 I of them have three of small, not four  
 38 b. *J'en ai trois (\*d') autres.*  
 39 I of them have three of other, not four  
 40

1 interpretation of this insight would assume that *d'autre* involves NumP<sup>22</sup>  
 2 and not NP modification. To account for the above modification possibil-  
 3 ities as well as for its similarity with numerals, we propose that *autre* can  
 4 occupy the head of NumP, so that it can be preceded by elements that  
 5 occupy either the Spec of NumP or the head of D. We have seen Kayne's  
 6 (1994) proposal for indirect *de* modification with regular adjectives. Adapt-  
 7 ing Huot's suggestion, we propose to account for the stacking effect by  
 8 assuming that *autre* can be a NumP head modifier that can move along  
 9 with the head out of the clausal constituent of the indirect adjectival *de*-  
 10 modification and be stranded in Spec DP, while the n-word moves even  
 11 higher in the DP structure as in (35a), in a fashion akin to CP recursion.

- 12 (35) a. [<sub>FP</sub> *personne*<sub>i</sub> [<sub>DP/PP</sub> *de* [<sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub> *autre* <sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub>]<sub>k</sub>] [<sub>de</sub> [<sub>IP</sub> *sympatique* Infl <sub>t<sub>k</sub></sub> ]]]  
 13 noone of other of friendly  
 14 'no one else friendly'  
 15  
 16 b. [<sub>Qui</sub><sub>i</sub> [<sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub> *d'autre*]]<sub>k</sub> *as tu invité* [<sub>de</sub> *sympatique* <sub>t<sub>k</sub></sub> ] ?  
 17 who of other has you invited of friendly  
 18 'Who else friendly have you invited?'  
 19  
 20 c. [<sub>Qui</sub><sub>i</sub> *as tu invité* [[<sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub> *d'autre*] [<sub>de</sub> *sympatique* <sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub> ]]  
 21 who has you invited of other of friendly  
 22 'Who else have you invited that is friendly?'  
 23  
 24 d. *Je n'ai rien*<sub>i</sub> *vu* [[<sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub> *d'autre*] [<sub>d'intéressant</sub> <sub>t<sub>i</sub></sub>]]  
 25 I ne-have nothing seen of-other of-interesting  
 26 'I have seen nothing else interesting.'

27 That *d'autre* can indeed move along with a quantity expression is con-  
 28 firmed by (35b), where *d'autre* has moved along with a wh-term to  
 29 SpecCP. That movement out of the projection containing the modifier is  
 30 also possible is further confirmed by (35c), where *d'autre* appears option-  
 31 ally stranded by the moved wh-term. (35d) replicates this structure with  
 32 the moved n-word *rien*.<sup>23</sup> (35a) accounts, on the one hand, for the excep-  
 33 tional stacking possibility with *d'autre* and on the other hand, for the  
 34

35 22. Throughout, we assume NumP to be the projection that hosts numerals and  
 36 weak quantifiers, not number. Number in our view is a separate PIP projec-  
 37 tion as in Zamparelli's more recent work.  
 38 23. Curiously and interestingly, stranding in this case is obligatory. I do not at  
 39 this point have an explanation for this fact.

1 restricted nature of the elements that allow it. Only elements moving out  
2 of NumP to a higher position in DP, here termed ‘FP’, manifest this DP  
3 recursion possibility.

4 To sum up, we have shown that the modification properties of n-words  
5 are very different from those of regular nouns. The facts reviewed above  
6 provide evidence for the quantificational nature of n-words and for the  
7 proposal that they occupy a high position within DP. We have spent  
8 some time detailing the peculiar facts of *d’autre* modification here because,  
9 as discussed below, there are revealing changes in this respect in the evolu-  
10 tion of the internal structure of n-words.

11

#### 12 2.1.4. Mapping the structure

13 The above discussion has provided some empirical evidence for the com-  
14 plex internal structure of n-words, but has so far remained theoretically  
15 imprecise with respect to the detailed mapping of their internal structure.  
16 This section presents an effort to flesh out this internal structure in more  
17 details. For a start, we adopt Zamparelli’s (1995) proposal to subdivide  
18 the DP structure in three hierarchical quantificational zones that he termed  
19 ‘SDP’, ‘PDP’, and ‘KIP’. For Zamparelli, only weak quantifiers that are  
20 housed in PDP are compatible with *ne* cliticization in Italian, because  
21 only these are close enough to license the trace of *ne*. As Zamparelli notes,  
22 the Italian quantifier *qualcuno* is ambiguous in this respect. When com-  
23 patible with *ne* cliticisation, *qualcuno* simply is an equivalent of *some*.  
24 When incompatible with it, *qualcuno* is restricted to human reference  
25 and is a pronominal meaning ‘someone’. To account for this ambiguity,  
26 Zamparelli proposes that *qualcuno* is merged as a weak quantifier in  
27 PDP/NumP and has the possibility to move or remerge higher as a strong  
28 quantifier in SDP/DP.

29 Adapting this approach to French, we note that the ambiguity observed  
30 for *qualcuno* is replicated by *quelqu’un* vs *quelques uns*. Like *qualcuno*, which  
31 means ‘someone’, singular *quelqu’un* fails to allow partitive/quantitative  
32 *en* cliticization and has the same meaning (cf. 36). *Quelques uns*, by contrast,  
33 has the meaning of ‘some’ and is compatible with partitive and with *en*  
34 cliticization and inflected for number.

35  
36 (36) *J’en ai rencontré quelques uns/\*quelqu’un/\*quelqu’une de mes amis.*

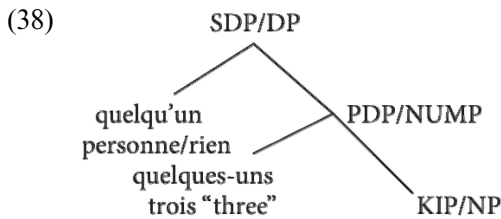
37 ‘I have met some-PL/someone/some of my friends.’

38  
39 I thus suggest that, similarly to *qualcuno* + *ne*, *quelques uns* is merged in  
40 PDP/NumP, while *quelqu’un* is either directly merged or obligatorily moved

1 to SDP/DP. Since, as seen above, the n-words *personne* and *rien* behave in  
 2 many respects like the existential quantifier *quelqu'un*, we now have analog-  
 3 ical evidence to posit the same structure for these contemporary n-words.  
 4 Note that, as expected on this proposal, n-words are essentially incom-  
 5 patible with true partitivity and with quantitative *en* cliticization (37):

- 6 (37) a. ?? *Je ne connais personne de tes amis.*  
 7 'I know no one of your friends.'  
 8  
 9 b. \**Je n'en connais personne.*<sup>24</sup>  
 10 'I know no one of them.'

11 Assuming that the similarities warrant a parallel treatment, I propose the  
 12 following structure for the French n-words:  
 13



21 (38) accounts for all the properties of the n-words detailed above, as it  
 22 assigns them to the highest position in DP and implies that they behave  
 23 essentially as strong existential quantifiers. On this view, their invariability  
 24 is expected, given that they are merged above the DP layer where number  
 25 agreement is syntactically negotiated, as are their modification possibilities,  
 26 given that they behave essentially as quantity expressions.<sup>25</sup> For indirect  
 27 *de*-modification, we have adopted Kayne's (1994) structure to which we  
 28 have added a layer to allow modification by *d'autre* as in (33a) above. On  
 29 this view, *d'autre* modification and the lack of partitive structure can be  
 30 taken as evidence of the additional movement step towards the highest  
 31 layer of SDP/DP.  
 32  
 33

34  
 35 24. One should not confuse true partitive constructions, which take a full DP as a  
 36 complement, with pseudo-partitive ones. The latter is permitted and commonly  
 37 derives apparent quantitative *en* constructions with *rien* (cf. *De ça, il n'en reste*  
 38 *rien/peu de chose* 'of that there is nothing/little left' vs. *?\*De tes jouets, je n'en*  
 39 *casse rien.* 'of your toys, I broke none').

40 25. Recall that as posited in section 2.1, *rien* differs from *personne* in being directly  
 merged in this high position and leaving no trace of any displacement.

To be complete, our study of the structure of contemporary French nominal n-expressions requires that one more expression, namely *aucun N*, be considered. As this expression and its historical evolution is discussed in great details in Déprez and Martineau (2004), our discussion here will remain brief. In contrast to *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 nominal n-word expression allows both quantitative *en* cliticization, and true partitive structures.

(39) *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 them.'

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

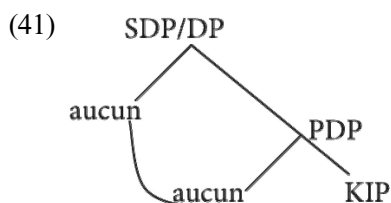
(40) a. *Aucune idée n'a été acceptée.*

'No idea was accepted.'

b. \**Aucunes idées n'ont été acceptée(s).*

'No ideas were accepted.'

To account for these differences as well as for the similarities between *aucun* and the other nominal French n-words, I propose that the determiner part *aucun* is merged in PDP and moves to SDP as in (39), while the nominal part continues to behave like a regular NP.



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 movement to the higher layer of the DP is obligatory for this n-expression, as in the case of *rien/personne*. As Martineau & Déprez (2004) have shown, this was not always true in the history of French. Expressions like \**Les aucuns amis* 'the some friends' are commonly found up to the sixteenth century. This, and the fact that *aucun* is invariable in number, motivates an analysis in which this n-determiner is merged in the highest D position.

1 To sum up, on the basis of their distributional, feature and modification  
2 properties, I have argued in this section that all nominal French n-words  
3 occupy the highest quantificational position in the DP and, as such,  
4 behave syntactically like determiners and strong quantifiers. With respect  
5 to some of their other properties, these n-words seem to partake both in  
6 the behaviour of strong and of weak quantifiers. To account for this, I  
7 proposed that they be merged in PDP, a position equated elsewhere with  
8 NumP, and move to SDP, a position equated elsewhere with DP. Of  
9 particular interest moreover is the fact that this high position correlates  
10 with the loss of number KIP variation. All the nominal French n-words  
11 are invariable in gender and number, and consequently always trigger  
12 singular or more exactly unmarked agreement.

13 As will be seen in section 3, the loss of feature variability historically  
14 correlates with the loss of nominal status and the development of a pro-  
15 nominal and quantificational status. What we observe for all French  
16 nominal n-words is the loss of variability and the rise up the DP structure  
17 to the highest position, correlating with a gain in pronominal and quanti-  
18 ficational strength. It is these combined properties that account, in our  
19 view, for their possibility to ambiguously partake in the complex polyadic  
20 resumptive quantification that produces the negative concord readings as  
21 well as in the scopal quantification that produce double negative readings  
22 as discussed in Déprez (2000), following May (1989).

23

### 24 3. The internal evolution of French n-words

25

26 Having discussed in detail the syntactic nature and structure of contem-  
27 porary French n-words, it is now time to turn to their historical evolution,  
28 in order to chart the course of their internal change as well as to identify  
29 the micro-parametric nature of this evolution. We offer here a detailed  
30 examination of the evolution of *rien* and *personne* focusing on two central  
31 aspects, changes in their featural make up and changes in their modifica-  
32 tion possibilities. Our study is based on searches in the electronic data-  
33 bases Frantext and TFA.

34

#### 35 3.1. Changing Features

36

37 Let us first consider feature changes. Both *personne* and *rien* started out as  
38 feminine and count nouns, and both ended up on their n-word interpreta-  
39 tion as singular and masculine nominal expressions or, more exactly, as  
40 expressions unmarked for both number and gender. Charting the course  
of changes of this nature in historical corpora, however, is a difficult under-



1 taking, as in French, cues to determine the gender and number make up of  
 2 nominal expressions are accessible only indirectly, i.e. through inspection  
 3 of their dependent satellites.

4 In Old and Middle French, *rien*, which derives from the Latin noun *res*  
 5 (thing), was a feminine noun that could refer to inanimate or animate en-  
 6 tities. (42) provides an example from Chretien de Troyes thirteenth century  
 7 of an animate nominal *rien* preceded by a feminine definite determiner.

8 (42) *Quant la rien voit que il plus ainme [...]*

9 when the thing sees that he most loves

10 ‘When he sees the person he most loves’

11 (Chrétien, de Troyes, 1240, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)*)

12 Examples with a clearly feminine determiner as *la rien* can be found up to  
 13 the Middle of the sixteenth century in the (the prose text) *Cent Nouvelles*  
 14 *Nouvelles* (cf. 43):

15 (43) [...] *qu’elle voit d’elle éloigner la rien en ce monde dont la presence*  
 16 *plus luy plait [...].*

17 ‘that she sees leaving her the thing in this world of which she most  
 18 like the presence’

19 (Monseigneur de La Roche, 1550, *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*)

20 This appears to be the last example of this sort found in Frantext, which  
 21 suggests that *rien* became unmarked for gender around the middle of  
 22 the sixteenth century. Indeed, confirming this, it is around this time that  
 23 the first examples of *rien* with clear instances of masculine determiners  
 24 are found, as attested in (44), an example from the poet Ronsard dated  
 25 from 1552:

26 (44) [...] *elle auroit cognoissance Qu’un rien qu’on ne voit pas,*  
 27 *fait souvent un grand [...].*

28 ‘She would have knowledge that a thing that one cannot see  
 29 often makes a large [...].’

30 (Pierre de Ronsard, 1524–1585, *Les Amours*)

31 That *rien* becomes invariable for gender does not however mean that it  
 32 completely loses its nominal character. Indeed, *rien* could still be found  
 33 with a (masculine) determiner and a positive meaning up to almost the  
 34 end of the classical period, as attested by the following 1896 examples  
 35 from the famous Goncourt Brothers. Interestingly, *rien* is now strictly  
 36 inanimate in reference:

1 (45) [...] *pour moi, le rien qui m'arrive d'heureux, c'est toujours* [...].

2 'For me, the thing that happens to me that is happy is always [...].'

3 (Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, 1822–1896, *Journal*)

4  
5 Thus, the loss of gender and animacy reference represents the first step  
6 in the grammaticalization of this expression. Turning to number, we face  
7 the same difficulty in determining when exactly *rien* stopped allowing  
8 number inflection, as it can vary even nowadays, when it is a noun clearly  
9 accompanied by a determiner (cf. *des riens*). To get some idea we searched  
10 our databases for examples of *rien* overtly marked for number without a  
11 determiner. The last example where *riens* occurs as a clear bare argument  
12 occurs in 1559 in Frantext.

13 (46) *Le Roy ne luy respondit riens, sinon: "m'asseurez-vous que vous*  
14 *l'avez* [...].

15 'The king did not answers things, except: "confort me that you  
16 have it'

17 (Marguerite de Navarre, 1559, *L'Heptaméron*)

18 Based on this indirect evidence, we tentatively suggest that it is around the  
19 end of the sixteenth century that bare *rien* effectively ceases to be variable  
20 in number. But again, *rien* does not immediately cease to have a nominal  
21 character, since it can be found as an invariable bare nominal expression  
22 without determiner, with a positive meaning in downward entailing con-  
23 texts up to the classical period:

24  
25 (47) *Diable m'emporte si j'entends rien en médecine.*  
26 devil takes-me if I-understand anything in medicine

27 'The hell if I understand anything about medicine.'

28 (Molière, 1673, *Le malade imaginaire*)

29  
30 The continuing nominal character of *rien* is confirmed by evidence based  
31 on modification possibilities, to which we turn in Section 3.2. Before, how-  
32 ever, let us first detail the time course of feature change for the n-word  
33 *personne*. Turning to *personne*, the exact time course of the loss of its  
34 features is even more difficult to determine from corpus searches, given  
35 the continuous current use of its nominal counterpart. We have nonethe-  
36 less endeavoured to chart an approximate course by looking at examples  
37 of bare *personne* triggering feminine agreement with an adjective, a past  
38 participle or a co-referring pronoun. In Old French bare *personne* was  
39 clearly feminine, as witnessed by (48) from the *Vie de St Alexis* (eleventh  
40 century) with a co-referring feminine pronoun.

- 1 (48) *Car la sainte Ecriture si nous dit et tesmoigne,*  
 2 because the Saint Writing here us tells and witnesses,  
 3 *Qu'au monde n'a personne, pour tant qu'*  
 4 that-in-the world there-isn't (a) person for as-much-as  
 5 *elle se joigne.*  
 6 she REFL joins  
 7 'Because the Holy Bible tells us here that in the world that there  
 8 is no one that would be found.' (Sarre Nguissaly 121: 2003)  
 9

10 The capacity to trigger feminine agreement for bare *personne* seems to  
 11 have lasted up to the seventeenth century, as witnessed by (49) with a  
 12 past participle agreement from *L'Astrée* (1607–1625):

- 13 (49) *Je ne puis dire avec vérité que jamais personne*  
 14 I ne can tell with truthfulness that ever person-FEM  
 15 *ne fut plus aimée que moi.*  
 16 ne was more loved-FEM than me  
 17 'I cannot tell in truth that anyone was ever loved more than me.'  
 18 (H. Durfé, 1607–1625, *Astrée*, 536, in Nguissaly 126, 2003)  
 19  
 20

21 Yet, as early as the mid fourteenth century, there are also examples without  
 22 agreement:

- 23 (50) *Jamais nouvelle n'en seroit a personne vivant.*  
 24 Never news ne it-GEN be-COND-3PSG to person alive  
 25 'Never will this be news to any person alive.'  
 26 (Monseigneur de La Roche, 1550,  
 27 *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, 387, 73)  
 28

29 More generally, it would seem that after the Renaissance, bare *personne*  
 30 had definitely lost its capacity to be marked for gender. It thus came  
 31 to generally trigger default masculine agreement and co-reference, as is  
 32 shown in (51) from Pascal 1670, where both pronominal reference and  
 33 past participle agreement show masculine and singular agreement:  
 34

- 35 (51) *Personne n'a d'assurance – hors la foi, s'il veille ou s'il dort.*  
 36 'Not anyone has assurance – outside faith, of whether he is  
 37 awake or asleep.'  
 38 (Pascal, 1670, *Pensées*, 164, in Nguissaly 2003: pages 132)  
 39  
 40

1 To sum up, evidence from our corpus searches reveals that both *rien* and  
2 *personne* seem to have lost their characteristic nominal features of, first,  
3 gender (by the middle of the sixteenth century) and, second, number (at  
4 the end of that century).

### 5 6 3.2. Changing Modification

7 This section focuses on historical changes in modification possibilities. I  
8 will argue that even more than feature loss, the changes in modification  
9 provide a striking window into the evolving internal structure of n-words.  
10 Going back to its earlier occurrences, *rien* was modifiable by a number of  
11 pre-nominal adjectival quantifiers, like *nulle* and *toute*, all of which attest  
12 to its feminine gender. In Frantext, the last example of *nulle riens* ‘no  
13 things’ is found in the fifteenth century in Christine de Pisan’s work:

14  
15 (52) *Ne deüst faire nulle riens, Toute fois entr’eulx une riens* [...]   
16 ‘I had to do no thing, yet between then one thing [...]’

17 (Christine de Pisan, 1402, *Le Livre du chemin de lonc estude*)

18  
19 There are 94 further occurrences of *toute rien* ‘all things’ in the TFA  
20 database. Our searches in this database revealed that this feminine modi-  
21 fication was possible up to 1381. In Frantext, the last example of this  
22 modification is found in 1550, again in the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*.

23 (53) [...] *et sur toute rien luy estoit* [...] *defendu le mestier* [...].  
24 ‘and on everything it was forbidden to him to take up the  
25 profession’

26  
27 (Monseigneur de La Roche, 1550, *Les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*)

28 It is of course difficult to identify regular modifiers in a corpus, which is  
29 why we chose to focus in our searches on modification by *autre*, which  
30 turns out to be particularly revealing in its evolution. In some early exam-  
31 ples, we see that *autre* began as a prenominal modifier of *rien* as in (52).  
32 This is comparable to today’s modification of regular nouns.

33  
34 (54) *Nous ne demandons autre riens Que nous y mettre.*

35 ‘We are not asking for other things than to put ourselves to it.’

36 (Anonymous, 1376, *Miracle de sainte Bauteuch*)

37  
38 The last example of this kind given here in (53) occurs in 1606. *Rien* in  
39 (55) is clearly masculine, and also plausibly invariable in gender, but still  
40 positive and here preceded by a determiner.

1 (55) *Dieu qui de rien fit tout, et qui de tout encore peut faire un*  
 2 *autre rien*, [...]

3 ‘God who out of nothing made everything and who of everything  
 4 can yet make another thing.’

5 (J. Bertaut, 1606, *Recueil Qq. Vers Amoureux*)  
 6

7 Taking the pre-nominal position of *autre* to be indicative of the nature of  
 8 *rien*, examples like (54) and (55) suggest that its nominal character, as  
 9 indicated by its positioning in the N projection, lasted somewhat beyond  
 10 the loss of its gender and number features, up to the beginning of the  
 11 seventeenth century. Yet, the fact that no example of this sort occurred  
 12 after this date can be taken to mark the end of a historical phase. From  
 13 1606 on, throughout the classical period and up to the early twentieth  
 14 century, our data indicate that *autre* has become a post-nominal modifier  
 15 of *rien* as in (56).

16  
 17 (56) [...] *elle me dit adieu, et se retira sans me donner rien autre chose*  
 18 *qu’une bague* [...].

19 ‘She said goodbye and left without giving me anything other  
 20 than a ring.’ (A.-R. Lesage, 1732, *Histoire de Gil Blas de Sant*)  
 21

22 Despite the change of position, modification by *autre* remains direct at this  
 23 time, i.e. with no linking *de*. In its shape then, this modification remains  
 24 seemingly close to regular post-nominal adjectival structures. However,  
 25 recall that as seen above, modification by *autre* of regular nouns is strictly  
 26 pre-nominal up to contemporary French. Thus, in effect, post-nominal  
 27 direct modification by *autre* can be taken to indicate that *rien* no longer  
 28 behaves like a regular noun in the language. Taking the position of *autre*  
 29 to mark the upper limit of NP internal modification, as is suggested by its  
 30 high contemporary position, examples like (56) imply that by the seven-  
 31 teenth century, *rien* had definitely left the nominal domain for the NumP  
 32 domain. That is, after a period of transition where *autre* could occur  
 33 alternatively as pre or post-nominal modifier, i.e. where on our view,  
 34 movement of *rien* from the nominal domain to the NumP domain re-  
 35 mained optional, *rien* came to be directly merged in NumP, accounting  
 36 for obligatory post-nominal *autre*. This form of direct post-nominal modifi-  
 37 cation in turn is maintained through the classical period and is found rather  
 38 late, i.e. up to 1925, in the writings of Claudel. Of interest is the fact that  
 39 in Claudel’s writings, as well as throughout the classical period, character-  
 40 istic NPI uses of n-words in downward entailing contexts are commonly  
 found. As shown by the following table reproduced from Déprez and

1 Martineau (2004), positive uses and polarity context uses (excluding nega-  
 2 tion) of n-words amounted to about 30% during the seventeenth and 20%  
 3 during the eighteenth century.

4  
 5 *Table 1.* Frequency of aucun in positive, polarity and negative contexts

6 periods	7 positive contexts	8 polarity contexts	9 negative contexts
10 17th century	11 3.5% (7/200)	12 27.5%	13 69%
14 19th century	15 0%	16 20.5%	17 79%

11 Against the background of this diachronic study, we can see that direct  
 12 post-nominal modification with *autre* appears to be a characteristic feature  
 13 of the classical period (seventeenth–eighteenth century), which coincides  
 14 with the increasing use of n-words as NPIs (Déprez and Martineau).

15 As evidenced in Martineau & Déprez (2004), Quebec French also  
 16 contrasts with contemporary continental French in commonly allowing  
 17 the co-occurrence of the negation *pas* with n-words as well as common  
 18 NPI uses of these expressions. In short, there are both diachronic and  
 19 comparative evidence of the correlated occurrence of direct post-nominal  
 20 modification by *autre* and of the use of n-words as polarity items.<sup>26</sup>

21 The next pattern of *autre* modification observed in our diachronic  
 22 corpus is that of indirect modification with *de*. Notably, this indirect  
 23 modification appears to have a peculiar historical evolution. In Frantext,  
 24 it is first found in the twelfth century in the works of Chretien de Troyes,  
 25 but it occurs only sporadically. After this, rather curiously and quite  
 26 interestingly, this pattern disappears entirely from the corpus until 1843,  
 27 where we see it re-surface, after a seven century gap, in the writings of  
 28 Honoré de Balzac.

29  
 30 (57) [...] là, madame; ne vous faut-il rien d'*autre*?

31 'There madam; do you need nothing else?'

32 (H. de Balzac, 1843, *La Rabouilleuse*)

33  
 34 The use of this indirect pattern with *autre* remains fairly infrequent until  
 35 about 1890, where it finally reaches about equal status with the previously  
 36 discussed post-nominal direct modification *rien autre* and *rien autre*  
 37 *chose*. Yet it is not until 1909, in the writings of André Gide, that the  
 38 indirect *de*-modification pattern firmly dominates and definitely wins over

39  
 40 26. For a more detailed discussion of the NPI uses of n-words both in classical  
 French and in Quebec French, see Déprez and Martineau (2004).

1 the direct modification pattern. Worth stressing here is the fact that this is  
 2 an interesting discovery, as our research shows, apparently for the first  
 3 time, that the use of the modern indirect modification pattern with *de*  
 4 as in *rien d'autre* was not firmly established until essentially the beginning  
 5 of the twentieth century. Referring back to the findings of Déprez and  
 6 Martineau (2004) again, this appears to coincide with the rise of the  
 7 strongly negative interpretation of n-words.

8 For further empirical evidence, let us briefly consider the modification  
 9 possibilities with bare *personne*, for the sake of brevity concentrating on  
 10 modification by *autre*. As in the case of *rien*, we observe that the first  
 11 occurrences of the modifier *autre* with a bare *personne* are pre-nominal,  
 12 as in (58). In Frantext, the last example of bare *personne* modified by pre-  
 13 nominal *autre* is found in the seventeenth century.

14 (58) [...] *on n'entend autre personne qu'un sonneur de cloches.*

15 'One cannot hear anyone other than a bell ringer.'

16 (P. de Deimier, 1610, *L'Academie de L'Art Poetique*)

17  
 18 After this date, the prenominal modifier *autre* is only found in the Det +  
 19 *personne* combination, which, as discussed above, is the nominal construc-  
 20 tion still currently in use. Thus, the modifier *autre* occurs strictly in post-  
 21 nominal position with a bare *personne*, as in the following characteristic  
 22 example:  
 23

24 (59) [...] *pour le sens commun de croire qu'elle n'est apperçue par*  
 25 *personne autre.*

26 '[...] for the common sense to believe that she was not seen by  
 27 anyone else' (J.-J. Rousseau, 1776, *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*)

28  
 29 With bare *personne*, this type of modification is found up to the early  
 30 twentieth century. Again it is quite striking to discover that the current  
 31 form of indirect modification with *de*, i.e. *personne d'autre*, arose only quite  
 32 recently. Searching Frantext for indirect modification with *d'autre*, we see  
 33 that it first occurred in Chretien de Troye in the twelfth century, but, as in  
 34 the case of *rien*, the pattern completely disappears to finally resurface only  
 35 very recently, in 1902 in the writings of Paul Adam.

36 (60) [...] *quand elle rentrait, personne d'autre ne se dérangeant pour elle?*

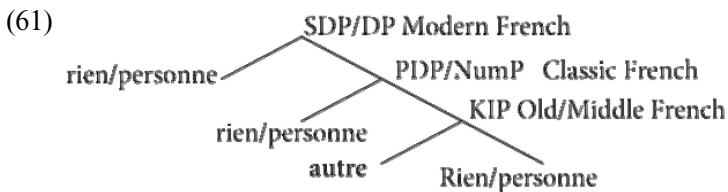
37 'When she would come in, none else would trouble themselves  
 38 for her?' (P. Adam, 1902, *L'enfant d'Austerlitz*)

39  
 40 Thus we see here again that indirect modification with *d'autre* is not  
 dominant with bare *personne* until the early twentieth century.

3.3. Theoretical implications and conclusions

The previous section has provided detailed evidence for the evolution of the n-expressions *rien* and *personne*, attempting to establish, first, the time course of their feature loss, and second, correlated structural changes. It is now time to take stock of these observations and to consider their theoretical consequences.

Summarizing and highlighting the central facts, we have observed three stages in the syntactic evolution of n-expressions. In the first stage, n-words are essentially nominal in nature, as evidenced by the use of determiners, 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 of the sixteenth century and the disappearance of the pre-nominal modification pattern by the beginning of the seventeenth 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 lost their nominal features and became invariable with respect to both number and gender. Modification by *autre* is now post-nominal but it remains direct, without *de*. We have suggested that at this stage, which essentially spans the classical period, these n-words 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 indirect *de* modification. As discussed in Section 2.3., this type of modification with *d'autre* corresponds to quantity or degree modification, like modification with *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 evidence has unearthed.



On this view, the evolution of n-words corresponds to a gradual three-step movement up the DP-structure. Of particular interest are the parallels that



1 can be observed between the historical course of this evolution and the  
2 findings that Déprez and Martineau (2004) and Martineau & Déprez  
3 (2004) report on the historical evolution of the meaning of n-words.  
4 Focusing on the interpretation of *aucun*, they have distinguished three  
5 periods that largely correspond to the ones we have distinguished here. In  
6 the first period, corresponding to Old and Middle French, the interpreta-  
7 tion of n-words seems largely context independent and positive. Beginning  
8 with the sixteenth century and into the classical period, however, the inter-  
9 pretation of n-words becomes context dependent. As Martineau & Déprez  
10 (2004) argue, n-words at this period manifest characteristic features of  
11 NPI: They are licensed only in restricted contexts, i.e. the so-called ‘affec-  
12 tive’ contexts, which in addition to downward entailing contexts include  
13 interrogatives and comparatives; they can be licensed at long distance;  
14 they are not licensed in subject position and are compatible with negation,  
15 including the negation *pas*, which is dominant at the time at the sole  
16 exponent of sentential negative meaning. Finally, in the last period, which  
17 corresponds to the birth of Modern French at the beginning of the twen-  
18 tieth century, n-words come to take on a negative meaning of their own,  
19 now occurring alone, i.e. without the co-presence of the sentential negative  
20 marker *pas*. This evolution is well known. What had not been put together  
21 up to now is the parallelism that the meaning evolution of n-words shows  
22 with the changes that affect their internal structure. This is what this  
23 section hopes to have accomplished by coupling the historical evolution  
24 of the meaning contribution of n-words at the sentential level, with a  
25 careful study of their internal change.

26 To finalize the correlation of the two, we propose that n-words undergo  
27 the following evolution. In the first period of their evolution, their struc-  
28 ture contains a null determiner that is essentially equivalent to the one  
29 posited for existentially or generically interpreted bare noun phrases.  
30 That is, for all intent and purposes, *rien* and *personne* function like bare  
31 indefinite noun phrases. At the beginning of this period, *personne* and  
32 *rien* are still nominal and count nouns, and their null determiner is essen-  
33 tially the same as that of other indefinite noun phrases in the language.  
34 Following Eckardt’s (2006) very interesting analysis of the semantic evolu-  
35 tion of French negative elements within a focus alternative semantics  
36 model à la Rooth (1985), we take this to be a period in which, when used  
37 in negative contexts, these expressions came to be used in emphatic denial  
38 first, simply under contingent circumstances, that is, only when their con-  
39 texts license plausible alternatives to their very general predicative mean-  
40 ing of ‘person’ or ‘thing’. Such contexts were essentially comparable to

1 what is needed in current modern French to license the denial of a regular  
 2 indefinite noun phrase like *une personne*. That is, they are for instance  
 3 comparable to the alien context we set up in (11) above to make sense of  
 4 the denial of the determined expression *de personne*. This context is set up  
 5 to contingently oppose *personne* to ‘aliens’, thus introducing a plausible  
 6 alternative that is disjoint from the meaning of ‘person’, as required under  
 7 Rooth alternative-focus semantics. Other relevant plausible contexts could  
 8 set up relevant alternatives by opposing ‘persons’ to objects, plants, animals  
 9 or more generally, to ‘non-person’ entities, following Eckardt (2006).

10 Gradually, however, as the n-words lose their ability to be marked for  
 11 gender and number, their nominal quality is altered. At the same time,  
 12 regular indefinite null determiners start to become increasingly rare in  
 13 assertive contexts, due to the general decline (phonetic erosion) of plural  
 14 marking on nouns, and the consequent growing reliance on overt deter-  
 15 miners marking for number distinctions. We would like to propose that  
 16 the conjunction of these syntactic changes is what sets up the stage to alter  
 17 the structure of n-words and the type of alternative they evoke for a non-  
 18 contingent use of *personne* in emphatic negative constructions. In other  
 19 words, it is at this time, following Eckardt (2006), that n-words become  
 20 focused existentially quantified predicates which call for other predicates  
 21 as their alternatives. Eckardt (2006: 256) formalizes this change as follows:

22 (62)  $[[ \textit{personne} ]] = \lambda Q \exists x ( \text{PERSON}(x) \wedge Q(x) )$  ‘some person’  
 23  $\text{Alt}(\textit{personne}) = \{ \lambda Q \exists x (\text{BAKER}(x) \wedge Q(x)), \lambda Q \exists x (\text{PRIEST}(x) \wedge$   
 24  $Q(x)), \lambda Q \exists x (\text{BUTCHER}(x) \wedge Q(x)), \dots \}$

25 Pragmatic function: Must be used in emphatic focus.  
 26

27 In (62), the alternatives to *personne* are no longer non-persons, but rather  
 28 subtypes of persons, such as bakers, priests, scholar, students, i.e. alterna-  
 29 tives to predicates describing human types. A consequence of this change  
 30 is that alternative propositions constituting the ‘focus semantic value’  
 31 (Rooth 1985) of these expressions are now in a logical entailment relation  
 32 with the stated proposition that contains them. (Being a baker, butcher, or  
 33 scholar entails being a person.) As a result, the stated proposition can  
 34 meet the pragmatic requirement of being the most striking one among  
 35 the space of alternatives, only under special conditions, i.e. only under  
 36 negation or when occurring in downward entailing contexts (see Eckardt  
 37 2006 for precisions). During this period of gradual change, culminating  
 38 in the second period of their evolution, the one starting with the end of  
 39 the sixteenth century and spanning the classical period, we propose that  
 40 the n-word gradually moved up their DP, to Zamparelli’s PDP part of

1 the structure. In this step in their evolution, n-words are semantically NPIs  
 2 and we have seen above that modification with *autre* then regularly occurs  
 3 in a post-position. Now according to Eckardt (2006) again, NPIs are char-  
 4 acterized by a lexical requirement for focus, which enforces their use in re-  
 5 stricted environments. Eckardt, however, does not specify how this lexical  
 6 requirement comes about. Given the evidence we provide of internal  
 7 change at this level, we would like to suggest that the requirement for  
 8 focus on *rien* and *personne* is not really lexical, as Eckardt supposes, but  
 9 rather syntactic. More specifically, the proposal is that the focus require-  
 10 ment corresponds to a distinctive DP internal syntactic structure that  
 11 encodes DP internal focus-movement. In short, we propose that the internal  
 12 move of the n-word to the PDP zone both encodes and satisfies the require-  
 13 ment for the focus marking characteristic of NPI, and at the same time  
 14 provides a way to license a null D in NumP, which now fails to be licensed  
 15 under number agreement.

16 For a brief clarification and justification of this view, let me quickly  
 17 return to Kayne's (1994) discussion of the internal structure of possessives  
 18 and other [*de* NP] structures in French. For constructions such as (63a),  
 19 Kayne proposes the complex structure in (63b), which essentially exploits  
 20 and expands the strong parallelism assumed to hold in generative perspec-  
 21 tives between the internal structure of DP and the structure of sentences.  
 22 Thus DP, on Kayne's view, contains a clause-like structure with an IP  
 23 that is the complement of *de*, here conceived as a complementizer equiva-  
 24 lent in the nominal domain.

25 (63) a. *Le crayon de rouge*

26 b. [D [ DP/PP [NP *crayon*]<sub>j</sub> *de* [IP [AP *rouge*]<sub>k</sub> [I<sup>0</sup> [FP [NPe]<sub>j</sub> [F<sup>0</sup> [e]<sub>k</sub> ]]]]]]]

28 The construction in (63a) is derived as follows. The lowest part of the  
 29 structure FP in (63b) is a kind of small clause, headed by F<sup>0</sup>, in which  
 30 the adjective *rouge* is predicated of the NP *crayon* (in Spec FP at the start  
 31 of the derivation). That is, FP is some kind of predicative structure akin to  
 32 *Le crayon est rouge* 'The pen is red', but with a null copula. From this  
 33 structure, there is first movement of the adjective *rouge* to Spec IP. This  
 34 adjective movement is taken to be triggered by a focalization somewhat  
 35 similar to what motivates predicate inversion in so-called 'inverse copular  
 36 constructions' like 'the cause of the riot was a picture on the wall' (see  
 37 Moro 1991). That is, the adjectival predicate *rouge* is 'focus-fronted',  
 38 deriving a kind of inverse copular sentence, abstractly similar to 'tasty,  
 39 this coffee', but here DP internal. Finally, the NP *crayon* also undergoes

40

1 focus movement to the top of the structure, i.e. the specifier of *de*, the  
2 functional equivalent of  $C^0$  in nominal structures.<sup>27</sup>

3 With this structure in hand, we can now return to our proposal con-  
4 cerning the internal structure of n-words and their syntactic and semantic  
5 evolution. In short, what we are proposing here is that, in the course of  
6 their evolution, the French n-words have undergone successive movements  
7 inside the structure of their nominal constituent that parallel the move-  
8 ments proposed by Kayne for the derivation of nominal structure like  
9 those in (63) above. Below is a sketch of the detail of this syntactic pro-  
10 gression, as we see it:

11 (64) [D [DP/PP [*personne*3]j] *de* [IP [AP [*personne*2] [I<sup>0</sup> [FP *autre* [NP *personne*1]  
12 SDP PDP NP  
13

14 For ease of reference in the following discussion, the respective positions  
15 of *personne* in the structure (64) have been labelled *personne*1, *personne*2,  
16 *personne*3 in (64) and the correspondence with Zamparelli's proposed  
17 quantificational structure is given directly under it. At the bottom of the  
18 structure, 'personnel' is just a noun. Contingently (and thus optionally)  
19 at first, *personne* can undergo internal focus movement to Spec IP/PDP,  
20 the position of *personne*2, for emphasis. We propose to view the head I<sup>0</sup>/  
21 PDP as some kind of null nominal functional projection, or null D,  
22 licensed under Spec-head gender/number agreement with the moved  
23 nominal *personne*. As a result of a gradual loss of gender and number  
24 features, agreement with this D is lost, so that movement to Spec IP/  
25 PDP, i.e. *personne*2, comes to be licensed only under focus. This focus  
26 movement serves two purposes. First it structurally encodes the supposed  
27 lexical requirement for focus that Eckardt (2006) deems to be the hallmark  
28 of NPIs. Second, it licenses the null head of I<sup>0</sup>, now no longer licensed  
29 under agreement. It also has further interesting consequences. It syntacti-  
30 cally crystallizes the change in the nature of the alternatives to which  
31 *personne* is now compared under emphatic negation. Following Eckardt,  
32 the semantic change is as in (63) above. Note that on this view, *personne*  
33 is now a predicate nominal akin to so called 'professional bare nouns' like  
34 *priest*. As a predicate nominal, it has become 'more adjectival' as it were,  
35 which could explain why it can undergo a focus movement that parallels  
36 that of adjectives such as *rouge* in Kayne's structure (63). We can speculate  
37

38 \_\_\_\_\_  
39 27. For a discussion of these structures, see Kayne (2004: Chapter 8).  
40

1 that this movement to the higher position in the structure was optional at  
 2 first, becoming gradually obligatory later, to eventually lead to structural  
 3 reanalysis and direct merge/insertion of *personne* into this PDP specifier  
 4 position (*personne2*). This restructuring, in effect, grammaticalizes the focus  
 5 that Eckardt assumed to be a lexical requirement for NPIs.<sup>28</sup> So in the  
 6 spirit of Eckardt (2006), but now as an internal structural construct, we  
 7 propose that it is the reanalysis of this focus movement in tune with the  
 8 pragmatic change in the focus-alternatives that eventually turns the former  
 9 noun *personne* into a dependent NPI, i.e. an intrinsically and internally  
 10 focused structure. Note of course, and this is crucial as it provides support  
 11 for this view, that the post-nominal position of *autre* at this stage of the  
 12 historical evolution now straightforwardly derives from the proposed  
 13 structural change. It would not, in contrast, follow from any putative  
 14 lexical requirement for focus. It is thus no accident, under our proposal,  
 15 that the post-nominal position of *autre* coincides with an NPI interpreta-  
 16 tion of *personne*. In turn, we can take the post-nominal position of *autre* to  
 17 signal the focalisation of *personne* that for Eckardt (2006) centrally defines  
 18 what an NPI is.

19 It is time now to turn to the consideration of the final steps of the evolu-  
 20 tion of *personne*. In the final steps, *personne* reaches the highest position  
 21 in the complex structure in (64), namely the position of *personne3*. This  
 22 again, following Kayne (1994), involves a type of focus-movement. Here  
 23 as well interesting consequences follow from this structural change. First,  
 24 *personne* is predicted to precede the C/P head *de*, which accounts for its  
 25 obligatory indirect modification by *d'autre* at this stage of its evolution.  
 26 Furthermore as noted by Kayne, only elements that involve quantifica-

---

28 28. The analysis developed here suggests an exiting syntactic generalization for  
 29 NPIs: only nominal structures that encode focus movement internal to DP of  
 30 the sort discussed here can be NPIs. Note that this view provides a very inter-  
 31 esting way to explain the semantic nature of phrasal NPIs like: *qui que ce soit*,  
 32 literally 'who that this be'. Strictly speaking, these are grammaticalized (e.g.  
 33 nominalized) instances of wh-movement to a focus position inside a structure  
 34 that behaves like an NPI nominal. In contrast with characteristic lexical mini-  
 35 mizers or generalizers that have been assumed to crosslinguistically provide  
 36 good semantic source for NPI, these have none of the favoring semantics.  
 37 Why they should provide such common source of NPI thus remained so far  
 38 a bit of a mystery. The analysis provided here, resolves this mystery. These  
 39 are such good NPI because they encode lexicalized focus movement in their  
 40 internal structure.

1 tion, in his terms an operator variable relation, can occupy this CP-like  
2 position. This suggests that it is only when moved to this highest position  
3 that *personne* acquires the full quantificational nature that is now asso-  
4 ciated with its negative meaning. Again, we can think of this movement  
5 as optional at first, explaining why indirect *de* modification of n-words  
6 for quite some time alternate with direct post-position modification. It  
7 then becomes – gradually – becomes more obligatory, before eventually  
8 leading to structural reanalysis.

9 Now, although our proposal provides quite a detailed account of how  
10 n-words have structurally and semantically acquired an NPI character in  
11 the course of their evolution, it still falls short of accounting for how they  
12 acquired their final intrinsic negative meaning. Somewhat disappointingly,  
13 Eckardt (2006), who provides such a deep and fascinating explanation of  
14 the semantic evolution of reinforcers into NPIs, does not in fact provide  
15 an interesting explanation for the acquisition of negative meaning. In her  
16 view, this comes about simply as a stylistic reanalysis. But what a stylistic  
17 reanalysis formally is, and what the exact compositional semantics of this  
18 final step entails, remains, unfortunately, far from clear. The structure we  
19 have proposed above, provides, perhaps, the beginning of an understand-  
20 ing of the mechanics of this final steps, but again, no precise semantic  
21 account will be offered here either. Note that in (63), *personne*<sup>3</sup> is still  
22 dominated by a null determiner, which on Kayne's proposal is the D-  
23 head that closes off the entire nominal relative clause like structure. Yet  
24 as amply discussed above, n-words, in contrast to NPIs, present no distri-  
25 butional limitation of occurrence. They appear free of any c-commanding  
26 operator and can comfortably occur even in a subject position. As was  
27 argued above, this shows that *personne* must eventually come to occupy  
28 the position of this higher D, so that in effect, it comes to be incorporated  
29 into it, rather than being dominated by it. This incorporation in turn  
30 suggests a plausible pathway for understanding the negative meaning  
31 of *personne*. Conceivably, given contextual requirements on NPIs, this  
32 highest null D in the structure came to acquire a negative meaning. Per-  
33 haps as a precursory mid-step to this final change, *personne* and *rien* first  
34 became strong NPIs, licensed only in anti-veridical, i.e. strongly negative  
35 contexts. We can speculate that it would be on this step that the null deter-  
36 miner acquired a negative feature, as a sort of semantic encoding of this  
37 strong dependency on negation, i.e. a feature-sharing process encoding  
38 semantic rather than syntactic agreement. If so, *personne* would have  
39 come to inherit and intrinsically integrate this negative feature through its

40

1 final incorporation into the highest null D in the structure (64). If correct,  
2 note that this approach makes the interesting predictions that it is only  
3 when nominal n-words *occupy the highest position in their DP* that they  
4 could come to incorporate an essentially sentential negative feature. This  
5 is interesting because, in the current syntactic framework of Minimalism,  
6 the highest positions in constituents take on a particular status. They con-  
7 stitute the edge of phases, i.e. the only positions from which access to a  
8 higher domain of computation becomes possible. Within the Minimalist  
9 framework, the notion of phase conceptually recalls that of encapsulated  
10 domains. So the idea here is that to be visible from outside, the domain  
11 of a particular phase, i.e. to be visible to a higher structural domain, a  
12 feature must find itself at the edge of a phase domain. Specifically, it  
13 must not be properly contained within the boundaries of an encapsulated  
14 domain. This is in essence the core idea of Chomsky's PIC. Elements  
15 at the edge of a phase are visible to the next domain of computation.  
16 Elements contained within a phase are not. Within this framework, it  
17 becomes quite immediately obvious that structural change within a given  
18 domain can bring about visibility or invisibility to a higher domain of  
19 computation. It is this core idea that I wish to speculate could be at the  
20 basis of the correlated structural and semantic changes we have observed  
21 in the French n-words.

22 Applying this core idea to the case at hand, it would follow that the  
23 visibility of a negative feature, and hence its interpretability in a higher  
24 computational domain, here the sentence, should go hand in hand with  
25 its positioning at the edge of a domain. Suppose now that n-words were  
26 endowed with a negative feature from the onset of their development,  
27 perhaps for pragmatic reasons. If DP is a phase, an assumption that goes  
28 along with its similarity to CP, then as long as this negative feature occurs  
29 within the DP domain, it will essentially remain un-interpretable from  
30 outside, i.e. here specifically, at the level of the sentential domain. So a  
31 sensible interpretation of this situation is that such a buried negative  
32 feature could not have sentential scope. In the gradual change of their  
33 internal structure, n-words have, through a series of internal movements,  
34 been brought closer to the edge of DP, and in effect, so has their negative  
35 feature. Once the DP edge was reached, it directly follows from the PIC  
36 that their negative feature became visible outside their nominal domain  
37 or in other words, visible to the sentential domain. In this new situation,  
38 their negative feature can now take on sentential scope, i.e. be interpre-  
39 table at the sentential level. Schematically, the situation can be described  
40 as follows:

- 1 (65) a. [TP f. . . . [DP . . . . [ F ] ] F invisible to higher domain  
 2 = uninterpretable.  
 3 b. [TP f. . . . [DP F [ . . . . ] ] edge F is visible to higher domain  
 4 = interpretable<sup>29</sup>

5 In (65a), F is invisible for sentence interpretation because it is inside the  
 6 domain of D. From the perspective of a higher domain containing the  
 7 DP, the feature F is thus uninterpretable. In (64b) in contrast, because F  
 8 is at the edge of the DP, in D head or D specifier, it becomes visible to the  
 9 sentential domain, because it is part of this higher computation. Edges are  
 10 always computed as part of their containing domain. This leads us to the  
 11 following hypothesis:  
 12

- 13 (66) Feature Visibility principle:  
 14 The visibility/interpretability of a feature F relates to its position  
 15 inside/at the edge of a domain of Computation  
 16

17 Or more technically:

- 18 (66') Feature interpretability (uF/iF) is governed by the PIC.  
 19

20 Within this theoretical frame, an interesting interpretation emerges for the  
 21 structural changes we have observed. The hand in hand processes of struc-  
 22 tural change and semantic change we have brought evidence for here and  
 23 before (Déprez and Martineau 2004) can be seen as part of a more general  
 24 process of meaning change that is governed by very general principles of  
 25 computation.<sup>30</sup>  
 26  
 27

#### 28 4. Conclusions

29  
 30 To conclude, Jespersonian-inspired models such as Zeijlstra (2008) pro-  
 31 pose a macro-parametric approach to negative concord that locates the  
 32 central factor dividing negative concord languages from non-negative  
 33

---

34  
 35 29. The question also arise within traditional accounts of grammaticalization since  
 36 it is quite unclear in such a tradition how a semantic change from positive to  
 37 negative could be considered as a form of semantic bleaching that is assumed  
 38 to generally accompany grammaticalization.

39 30. For an application of the same principle, I call *Visibility at the edge*, see Déprez  
 40 (2007, 2008) studies of the grammaticalization of number and specificity/  
 definiteness features in French Based Creole noun phrases.



1 concord languages in the syntactic properties of the sentence negation  
 2 operator. The micro-parametric approach proposed in this chapter, by  
 3 contrast, takes negative concord to arise from a convergence of factors  
 4 that depend largely on the structural and semantic make up of the nega-  
 5 tive dependent terms, the n-words. Such a convergence of factors may dis-  
 6 tinguish only a subset of expressions in a given language, permitting as a  
 7 result inner language variations and historical changes that do not target  
 8 all expressions in the same way. We have provided empirical arguments in  
 9 favour of this approach showing that inner language diversity is found  
 10 even in a seemingly uniform language such as Haitian Creole. Moreover,  
 11 we have provided detailed empirical evidence of the complex structure of  
 12 contemporary French n-words and in particular of the fact that they  
 13 occupy a position at the highest level of their DP structure. We have fur-  
 14 thermore demonstrated that the historical evolution of these n-words  
 15 involved a change in their internal structure that goes hand in hand with  
 16 correlated changes in the types of negative relation they are involved  
 17 in, and we have charted the time course of these correlated changes. We  
 18 have argued that these internal changes provide evidence for a stepwise  
 19 rise of n-words inside the DP domain and have suggested that a negative  
 20 feature becomes interpretable at the higher sentential domain only when it  
 21 has reached the edge of the nominal structure. If correct, this proposal  
 22 predicts that only n-words that occupy the highest structural level in DP  
 23 could behave like intrinsically negative quantifiers, i.e. like quantified ex-  
 24 pressions whose negative interpretation has scope in the sentential domain.  
 25 Finally, we have sketched a model of feature interpretability that captures  
 26 these correlated changes and accounts for their effects through very general  
 27 principles of computation.

28

29

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