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## **Negative concord in creole languages: commonality and variation in the perspective of Bickerton's legacy.**

### **Abstract**

In his ground breaking 1981 book /Roots of Language/ Dereck Bickerton was amongst the first linguist to propose a list of properties that he hypothesized to be common to all creole languages. While this list of properties has sometimes inspired research promoting creole languages as unique, Bickerton's original view should better be understood as a claim that these properties were possibly universal properties of language at least abstractly and as such instantiated the roots of all languages, not just creole ones. In my contribution here, I revisit and reassess Bickerton's observations about the generality of negative concord as a common property of creole languages and beyond, sorting out what remains of his legacy in this domain from what has been discovered since then about the nature of negation and negative dependencies in creole languages. I will base myself more specifically on a detailed comparison of the French based creoles, but appeal as well to other creoles to confirm patterns discovered there or to complete them with additional possibilities.

### **1. Bickerton's legacy on negation and negative dependencies.**

In his Roots of language chapter on creole languages, Bickerton discusses a list of features he argued to be common to creoles languages that pertain to the following constructions:

1. Movement rules
2. Articles
3. Tense-modality-aspect(TMA)systems
4. Realized and unrealized complements
5. Relativization and subject-copying
6. Negation
7. Existential and possessive
8. Copula
9. Adjectives as verbs
10. Questions
11. Question words
12. Passive equivalents

The one that is focused on in the present paper is negation. Although earlier lists of pan-creole features had been offered, for instance in Taylor (1971), the 12 features discussed there did not include negation. A later list from Markey (1982) does mention negation, but only with respect to its positioning in relation to verbs. So by and large, it would seem that Bickerton was possibly the first to note the commonality of negative doubling constructions in the creole languages. Bickerton's remarks on this topic in the original volume are quite brief, and yet also quite remarkably informative. They could be summarized as follows. First, Bickerton perceptibly noted that negated indefinite nominal expressions, subjects and objects, often tend to be redoubled by the presence of negation on the verb in creole languages, supporting his remark with examples like (1)

- (1) non dag na bait non kyat  
 'No dog not bite no cat' GC  
 No dog bit any cat

Then he further remarked that sentences of this type, while occasionally found in Hawaiian English Creole (HEC), tended to manifest negation doubling more frequently with 'negated VP constituents' than with subjects. (Bickerton 1981 p 61). That is, in his very short paragraph on negation, we can see with hindsight that Bickerton put his finger first on the common occurrence in creole languages of the construction now known under the term 'negative concord' and second, on one of its major possible variant, namely, the distinction between so called strict negative concord, in which the relevant indefinite expressions are uniformly redoubled by negation in all of their possible syntactic positions as in (1), and non-strict negative concord, which characteristically manifests a pre-verbal, post-verbal asymmetry with respect to negation doubling by a sentential negative morpheme. These are indeed the two types of negative concord constructions that have further been noted to occur in creole languages, as well as in other non-creole languages and whose distribution is discussed below.

In his *Roots of language* volume, Bickerton further takes up the topic of negation in his chapter on acquisition (p 123). There, he ponders on the why and how at the root of the creole negative doubling dependencies. Reflecting first on the doubling of subject nominals, he asks whether sentences like (2) are found in child language, guessing, in the absence of relevant empirical data at the time, that they may be rather rare in child productions.

- (2) Nobody don't like me

His initial suggestion for English was to offer the hypothetical speculation that the root of this negative subject doubling construction could perhaps be found in the order of acquisition of the quantifiers *somebody*, *nobody* and *anybody*. If *somebody* were to be acquired first with negation, with *nobody* acquired second coming to replace it, this could lead to the child production of a doubling construction that the acquisition of *anybody*, presumably occurring last, would eventually come to replace. But Bickerton quickly abandoned this English centered speculation, noting that even if it could turn out to explain data like (2) in child language, it would be unlikely to generalize and account for the frequency of negative doubling constructions across creoles. At this point, while questioning his own acquisition speculation, Bickerton takes a quick stab at the then common belief that faulty 'child constructions' could be a solid source of pan-creole features. As he characteristically puts it in his frank language, rather than limiting our search to what children may erroneously produce 'There must be some way in which multiple negation is more natural than single negation, despite the pedagogues and logicians. 'p 171. This remark prefigures what is at present a current claim, namely that negative concord is amongst the most frequent type of negative dependencies not just in creole languages, but more generally across the world's languages (Penka 2011, De Swart 2010) following (Haspelmath 1997) claim that 'it is actually the non-cooccurrence of sentential negation with negative indefinites that is remarkable" (cited in Von Auwera & Alsenoy 2016: p 80<sup>1</sup>. Bickerton

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<sup>1</sup> In their paper on the Typology of Negative Concord, Van der Auwera and Alsenoy (2016) argue that contrary to a number of (supposedly mostly generative) assertions negative concord is not the most common type of negative dependencies in the world's languages. Taking into account the difficulty of defining what a negative concord language may actually be, their conservative count ends up taking as solid members languages that actually display (or inherited) a negative morpheme on their negative dependent indefinite expressions. Note that this makes a language like French where expressions like *rien*, *personne* and *jamais* do not display negative morphology an unclear member of the class.

ends his brief remarks speculating that if sentences like (2) turn out to be rare in child language, then 'in light of the creole evidence, the workings of the bioprogram must again be suspected' p 171. Recent work on acquisition has in fact concluded that even in English, a language whose standard dialect is known for not allowing negative concord, this construction turns out to be a default interpretation for young children when tested on doubling negative constructions they may or not actually produce (Thornton et al 2016). As (Thornton et al 2016) argue their study provides evidence for the existence of a negative concord grammar in English speaking children, for which they do not receive much input from adult standard productions, which is later on switched to the standard more 'logical' dialect where there is a one to one correspondence between negative marking and negative interpretation. In short, current works in child language acquisition have updated our knowledge in this respect and turn out to corroborate the view that negative concord is in a sense a default construction and interpretation for children, even when they are exposed to dialects that do not produce it. Hence, as long as it is understood along with Lightfoot's remarks on Bickerton's 2014's bioprogram hypothesis that beyond Bickerton's original views, the bio-program should extend to non-creole languages as well, the current cross-linguistic and acquisition evidence provide little grounds to disagree with Bickerton's insights. Given its commonality within and beyond creoles, negative concord must indeed result from very general/universal principles of the language faculty. The questions that are now left to be pondered concern a deeper understanding of what language faculty principles it may build upon, a question for which a variety of hypothesis have been proposed in the literature but for which they remain much current debate and little consensus. But of course, as Bickerton makes clear, first and foremost is the need for a refined attention to the actual data and in this sense, it useful to revisit what the landscape of negation and negative dependencies look like in creole languages at the present time to summarize what turns out to have been discovered since Bickerton's first observations. This is what the following sections endeavor to accomplish looking first at negation itself and second at negative dependencies primarily in French based creoles, with an eye, however to what happens elsewhere, when it is known.

## **2. Standard Negation in creole languages: a cursory look at the crosslinguistic landscape. Does the position of negation matters for negative concord?**

It is not the intention of this section to dwell too long on the features of the negative markers in the so called 'standard' negation (Mietsamo 2005) of creole languages but only to offer a rather rapid overview in order to explore possible relations with negative concord, the core object of our discussion here. Indeed, one set of hypothesis entertained by a variety of authors under a diversity of theoretical nuances is that the possibility of negative concord dependencies could at least partially depend on the nature of negative markers in given languages and/or their syntactic positioning. The goal of this brief overview is to assess what such views may entail for creole languages given the type of negation they harbor.

In her early works of the 90's Zanutini (1991) hypothesized that the possibility of negative concord was in part linked to the syntactic position of negation with preverbal negation favoring negative concord while post-verbal negation did not. In a somewhat different vein, Zeijlstra (2004) offers a neo-Jespsonian hypothesis, linking the parametric possibility of negative concord to the syntactic status of negation as a head. While evidence for this latter hypothesis is harder to survey with a simple cursory typological look at a language sample, since the status of negation as a head or a maximal projection cannot be easily established without a deeper look at the properties of the

negative marker (Gianollo 2020) , I will start by inspecting the position of negation in the creole languages of the Apics data base and what expectation it may lead for negative concord dependencies. The table of the surveyed creoles is given below.

**Table 1. Positioning of the negative marker in Creole languages**

	excl	shrd	all
Before the verb	57	8	65
Immediately after the verb	2	5	7
After verb plus postverbal object	5	2	7
Bipartite, before verb and immediately after	0	1	1
Bipartite, before verb and after object	3	1	4
Bipartite, other possibilities	1	0	1
Representation:			76

As is immediately evident, the majority of creole and pidgin languages surveyed in the Apics Atlas manifest a pre-verbal particle negation, a feature that was once thought to be common to all creole languages, but that has since then been shown to suffer a few interesting exceptions. This finding simply confirms that in negation ordering, creole languages essentially align with the most frequent negation type and position in the world's languages (525 languages in the WALS 1325 language sample). So creoles, quite clearly are not unique in any way with respect to negative constructions, quite the opposite. They manifest rather what appears to be default options, preverbal particle negation and negative concord dependencies, under at least some linguist's understanding of this type of dependency. As is generally the case, however, with such broad cross-linguistics surveys, the focus is largely on the most common forms of negation in the sample languages, leaving aside less prominent alternative constructions that can reveal unexpected and yet fascinating variation within a broader rather uniform picture.

If we narrow our perspective for a moment to look only at the French lexifier creoles, we see in the Apics Atlas that only Réunion creole and Louisiana creole are noted as allowing post-verbal negation as a variant to the preverbal one. Although this is surely correct when focus is restricted to simple regular declarative sentences, it is shown in Déprez (2021), however, that a post-verbal negation variant can be found in essentially all the French lexifier creoles, with a surprising and interesting variety of uses. The table below offers a quick picture of the diverse extent of these post-verbal uses and a list of examples is provided in (3) below:

Construction type	Fixed forms ve pa	Modal scope marking	Neg Raising	Short vs Long V form+ aspect	+Finite -Finite distinction

Haitian C	√	√			
Martinique	√	√			
Guadeloupe	√	√			
Mauritian	√	√	√		
Louisiana	√	√	?	√	
Reunion	√	√	?	?	√

Table 2. Post-verbal negation in the French lexifier creoles.

- (3) a. Fixed form  
 an vlé on negress bombé, an vlé pa vouè pon fèy tol' Gwadelouean Creole  
 I want a woman shapely I want not see bride of metal  
 I want a shapely woman not one that looks like a metal stick  
 (lesnyck'gwada, Fresh Badam)
- b. modal constructions  
 pé pa rivé bien lwen TPL p16 Martinique Creole  
 can not arrive very far  
 could not have gone far
- c. Neg Raising  
 Mo krwar pa [ki li pou vini] Mauritian Creole  
 1sg believe not that 3sg would come  
 I think he would not come
- d. Short form + aspect  
 Mo **lav** pa mo figi Short form= habitual Mauritian Creole  
 1sg wash.neg 1sg.poss face  
 I don't wash my face
- e. Finite/non-finite  
 i M'i touch **pa** aou Reunion Creole  
 1s-touch Neg obl-2 Cellier 1982 : 42  
 I do not touch you

I will make two observations with respect to this data discussed in far more details in Déprez (2021). First, they clearly complexify the picture inviting to caution the validity of too strong typological generalizations or sweeping statements about creole simplicity. That a language is classified as displaying a specific ordering for negation does not entail that it never permits other ones nor that these possible exceptions are of little interest. Second, as Déprez notes, the constructional ordering exceptions that arise in the French based creoles often find echoes in other languages, indicating that as far as exceptions are concerned, these may not in fact be uncommon ones. For instance, the fixed use of a post-verbal negation can also be found in English expressions such as 'he loves me, he loves me not', a potential frozen remnant of a previous stage of the language when verb movement was possible. Marking the scope of negation with respect to modals with a

position change is a possibility also exemplified in French, English or German. Thus, in French the differing positions of a negative marker 'ne' can be used to mark the negation scope (Tu ne dois pas voter en faveur de cette loi, tu dois ne pas voter en faveur de cette loi) Yet, while in languages like English, scope marking with the positioning of negation is not obligatory, since negation can clearly take scope higher or lower than where it is syntactically expressed, it seems more rigid in the French based creoles, possibly owing to the rather rigid and transparent ordering of negation and TMA in these languages. The position of negation is also sometimes used in English or French to differentiate Neg raising interpretations from non-neg raising ones, as we can see in the following examples. Do you think he will win? I don't think so (ambiguous negation scope). I think not.(low negation scope only). Finally the distinction of negation with respect to finite vs non-finite V is found in a number languages and obviously in French, the clear source of this alternation in these creoles. As Déprez (2021) argues, it is quite likely that these observed negation ordering exceptions exemplify remnants of the verb movement option in French, generally no longer available in these creoles apart from Louisiana and Réunion creole, and with differing oppositions. The same may be true for the parallel constructions found in English, inviting the speculation that exceptions to negation ordering could be more common in the creoles that have verb movement languages as substrate or superstrate, a speculation left here for further comparative research.

Beyond possible variations in the ordering of negation, of particular interest here is the question of whether the ordering of negation could have an impact on the type of negative dependencies that a creole manifest. This is not a question that Bickerton raised but it is one that has arisen in the study of negative concord in the Indo-European languages and that is worth glancing at here, given Bickerton's more general interrogation for possible motivations behind the common occurrence of negative concord in the creole languages. While initially raised in Zanuttini (1991) dissertation investigating negative concord in Romance, it was promptly answered to the negative, since there are clear evidence of languages with either pre-verbal or post-verbal negation that manifest negative concord. Van Auvera and Anselnoy (2016) revisit this question within a larger and more diverse sample of 31 negative concord languages and again conclude that there is no discernible correlation. As they note 'negative concord does not seem to be related very strongly to any particular word order regularity' Van Auvera and Anselnoy (2016) p.19 and they include in their consideration both the overall main constituent S O V word order of languages and the relative order of negation with respect to V. In their sample, 10 out their 31 NC languages have preverbal negation, 13 have post-verbal negation and finally 6 combine both possibilities. To reconsider this question now focusing on the creole languages, it is easiest to start by looking at the few creoles that do not manifest a Neg V order, asking whether they could fail to instantiate negative concord with any systematicity. Skipping for now the creoles that manifest an alternating Neg V order, or a double negation on both side of the verb, we are left with 5 creoles in the Apics sample with V O Neg order and 4 where Neg immediately follows the V. As has previously been noted, neither the WALS nor the Apics Atlases furnish easily quantifiable information on negative concord, largely because of how negative indefinites are defined in the feature inventory used. As the author of the feature 102 specify, "in this feature, we are not interested in whether the indefinite pronoun itself carries negative meaning, i.e. the issue of "double negation" is left aside. Sentences like *I didn't see anybody* and *I didn't see nobody* have the same status". What this means for our purpose is that the feature does not distinguish negative polarity dependencies from negative concord ones. Consequently, although all 5 of the creoles with a V O Neg order manifest a positive result for the co-presence of negation with indefinites, a closer inspection is required. For Berbice Dutch, the Apics indefinite expression in the examples provided involve expressions with the indefinite 'one' respectively *en gutu* for one thing and *en kene* for one person as in (4). From the

examples provided, we see that the interpretation is one of single negation, but this is expected if the relevant expressions simply never allow for a negative interpretation. What we can deduce from the examples provided is that the sentence final negation can have scope over an indefinite in subject position, but not that the language manifests NC.

(4) Example 28-178:

*tut ju drai wɛɛ ju drai mɛtɛn gutu ka*  
*tutu ju drai wɛɛ ju drai mɛtɛ en gutu ka*  
 until 2SG turn again 2SG turn with one thing NEG  
 When you return, you return with nothing.  
 Source: [Kouwenberg 1994](#): 249

Example 28-179:

*en kɛnɛ kan kapo ka*  
*en kɛnɛ kan kapu o ka*  
 one person can cut 3SG NEG  
 Nobody can cut it down. (referring to a certain tree)  
 Source: [Kouwenberg 1994](#): 249

Turning to the other languages with the same Neg order, we find that three present the same facts as Berbice Dutch, i.e. a use of indefinite expressions with the numeral determiner one. For these languages as for Berbice Dutch there is, in short, no evidence that the relevant indefinites carry negative morphology, or can be interpreted negatively. This is not conclusive of course, as more information would be required to strongly dismiss this possibility, but at first view, it does not seem that these creoles permit negative concord. Yet, at least one of these creoles appears to provide strong evidence for NC, namely *Principense*. Here, the indefinite expressions used clearly carry negative morphology and/or are inherited from Portuguese expressions that do. This language then, provides solid evidence that NC can occur in creoles that manifest a negation in final position after the V and its object.

(5) a. N vê **ko nhon fa**.

N vê ko nhon fa  
 1SG see thing no Neg  
 I didn't see anything.

b. Ami n tɛndê **ningê nhon** na nixi ki gita **fa ô**.

Ami n tɛndê ningê nhon na nixi ki gita fa ô  
 1SG 1SG hear person no LOC here REL shout NEG VAL  
 I didn't hear anybody shouting myself.

Source: [Maurer 2009](#): 139

If we consider the creoles with negation immediately after the verb, only two have this order as their exclusive option Eskimo Pidgin and Yimas-Arifundi Pidgin. Unfortunately, the Atlas provides no information about their indefinite negation relations, most likely for lack of empirical data. For languages that present a bipartite negation one preverbal and one post verbal after the



object, they all have a Portuguese lexifier and appear to manifest NC. And finally concerning languages that feature a post-V negation as one of their options, the best examples are the Louisiana and Réunion French lexifier creoles, they both solidly feature NC, albeit slightly differently since the former features strict NC and the latter non-strict NC with a pre-verbal negative indefinite that suffices to render the sentence negative without the co-presence of negation.

To sum up, in this section, we have first looked at the position of sentential negation in creole languages and evoked some interesting variations to the generalizations provided in the Apics Atlas for a subset of the creoles, namely the French based creoles. We have then examined the question of whether the syntactic position of the negative marker could have an impact on the occurrence of negative concord and concluded that wherever matters were decidable, this factor did not seem to matter more in creole languages than cross-linguistically, beyond creoles. The discussion, however, revealed difficulties in deciding whether or not a given creole did manifest NC. In the following section, we further discuss this important matter before launching into a more narrowly empirical investigation of negative concord and its possible variations in the French based creole.

### 3. Questions of frequency and typological representativity of creole NC

After exploring the negation order in relation to the occurrence of NC in creole languages, one obvious question that arises is how frequent this phenomenon actually is. Clearly Bickerton noting negative concord as a possible pan-creole feature suggests high frequency. But the actual reality is a bit harder to establish. Indeed, as noted in many works on negative concord, the distinction between what can be considered a negative polarity dependency and what can be considered a negative concord one is often both empirically rather tenuous and theoretically contentious. The basic concept of negative concord can seem deceptively straightforward; One can speak of negative concord if there is evidence that the terms involved in the negative dependency can sometimes manifest an independent negative meaning, which at other times, appears to dissolve. Gianakidou (2006) proposes the following descriptive definition for the terms that can participate in a negative concord relation, which I refer to here as negative concord items or NCI, following Watanabe (2004).

(6) 'NCI': An expression  $\alpha$  is an 'NCI' iff:

1. (i)  $\alpha$  can be used in structures that contain sentential negation or another  $\alpha$ -expression, yielding a reading equivalent to one logical negation; and
2. (ii)  $\alpha$  can provide a negative fragment answer (i.e., without the overt presence of negation).

This definition, especially 2. clearly takes interpretation as the core criterion for the determination of what an NCI is, but curiously allows for only one rather narrow condition under which an NCI's negative value can be tested, namely fragment answers. In their paper on the typology of negative concord van der Auvera and Alsenoy (2016), criticize the validity of this test on the basis of Yiddish and Brabantian Dutch empirical data. In Yiddish, they note, indefinite negative expressions like *keyn*, which are etymologically directly related to the German negative quantifiers *kein* participate

in negative concord dependencies. Yet in fragment answers, they require the co-presence of negation. Likewise in Brabant Dutch, similar indefinite expressions that can both co-occur with negation or be used without it, also allow for the co-presence of negation in fragment answers. In their view, since both of these languages manifest negative concord, Giannakidou's criterion ii. cannot be taken as definitional. In the end, they leave quite open the definition of what NCIs ultimately are, but it can be surmised that in practice, in their own survey of NC in the world's languages they rely more on morphological evidence for negation than on semantic ones. As has been discussed since at least the 1990, however, (Laka 1990), the use of negative morphology, to determine whether given expressions are NCIs rather than negative polarity items also encounter problems. For instance, in a language like French where expressions like *rien* can clearly have a negative interpretation, there is no evidence of negative morphology. The picture gets even more blurry in languages like Catalan, where some negative indefinite expressions such as *nadie* appear to bear negative morphology, while others like *res* (from the Latin noun for 'thing') clearly do not. Yet, in spite of their morphological differences, both manifest the same behavior in negative dependencies. At the other end of the spectrum, Basque negative indefinite expressions like *i-nor* (neg-who-nobody) *e-zer* (neg-what-nothing) overtly feature negative morphology, yet, as Extebaria et al (2017) demonstrate these expressions are better analyzed as NPIs given their distributional and semantic properties as well as the fact they can never occur in fragment answers, be it with or without a sentential negation. Observations of the sort underscore the difficulty of determining whether or not given languages manifest NC and highlight the need for detailed analyses of each case, of the kind of those carried out in Déprez and Henry (2018) for a better understanding of this type of negative dependencies, their common characteristic across languages and their potential variations. Nonetheless since the goal here is in to assess the current state of knowledge concerning Bickerton's contention that NC is a good candidate for a pan-creole feature, and since Bickerton himself appeared to rely on the morphological criterion to characterize the construction, it is useful to attempt some inquiry about the frequency of this constructions in creole languages on the basis of morphological criterion, acknowledging all the while the fragility of such an enterprise as long as more detailed knowledge about the interpretation possibilities of these dependencies in the different creoles is still in large part missing. This is why, although here we offer a quick overview of whether different creoles have been observed to manifest NC, we endeavor in the next section to focus on a more detailed study of the similarities and interesting variations that a closer study of NC in a subset of the French based creoles reveal.

Proceeding with our rapid frequency review of the set of creole languages in the Apics, we can first rely on the results of van der Auvera (2017) who discusses frequency considerations for the English lexifier creoles. There he finds that all the Caribbean English creoles manifest NC, that African Creole also do with, however, an exception, namely Nigerian Pidgin English which seems instead to feature either non-doubled negative quantifiers or a negative dependencies that involve indefinite expression inherited from the English *anything*. Concerning Pacific creoles, Bislama and Tok Pisin do not appear to manifest NC, and NC appears to be very rare in Norf'k but is otherwise attested in the other creoles of this region. A&A conclude that in the English lexifier creoles, NC is frequent basing their observation on the co-occurrence of sentential negation, generally *no* and negative indefinite expressions inherited from the English negative quantifiers *nobody* or *nothing*. At present, however, it is not always known whether these expressions are in fact able to take on any negative meaning in these creoles. The possibility of fragment answers and a more detailed distribution of the co-occurrence of negation and these negative indefinites are studied for a variety of English creoles and more specifically in Jamaican creole in Belize Creole (Van der Auvera 2022) and in Pichi (Yakpo 2018) establishing NC, as well as in Singlish by (Zhiming et al 2019) demonstrating here the lack of NC. Turning to Portuguese lexifier creoles, the conclusions are

essentially similar. All appear to manifest NC, since in most cases, their negative indefinite expressions are directly inherited from their lexifier which already manifest NC. Detailed studies of the distribution and meaning of NCI can be found for Cap Verdean creole (Pratas 2018), San Tome (Hagermeier 2013) Korlai (Clements 2018) and Guinea Bissau Krio (Khim 2018) which all confirm the use of NC and the possible negative meaning of these creole NCI in fragment answers. For the other Portuguese lexifier creoles, the Apics data base furnish relevant examples for all except Angolar whose NC status remains unclear as the Apics example use indefinite expressions equivalent to 'one thing' for which the availability of a negative semantics would need confirmation. Concerning the Dutch based creole, Berbice Dutch was already discussed above, and the remaining one are Afrikans for which evidence and details of NC are much discussed in the works of (Biberauer 2007) among others, and Negerholland for which the Apics example provide positive evidence of at least morphological negation in its negative indefinites expressions. French lexifier creoles are discussed in more details below, but for now it can be noted that they all manifest NC under the Giannakidou definition. For creoles with Spanish as a lexifier, matters appear to be more complex, which in itself is interesting given that the lexifier language clearly manifests NC. Only Papiamentu is noted as manifesting NC as its negative indefinites are inherited from the Spanish NCI. For all varieties of Chabacano, Apics only provides examples in existential constructions. Some of these use Spanish inherited negative indefinites doubled with negation in these constructions but this remains insufficient evidence. Finally, for Palenquero, Schwegler (2018) provides evidence of negative concord with post-verbal indefinites but leaves undiscussed the question of pre-verbal ones (as do the Apics examples) or that of the occurrence of negative indefinite in fragment answers, so that the information remains at present incomplete. For the Bantu based creoles, as well as a few other grouped with them, the Apics examples are inconclusive as they are based on negation co-occurring with what appears to be positive indefinites. Finally for Malay lexifier creoles, here again Apics data are inconclusive since the relevant indefinites that are noted to co-occur with negation are either of the positive type (one NP) or questions based items (what NP) for which there is no evidence of negative morphology or interpretation.

Overall, with this rapid tour of the Apics creoles, we find that NC is indeed quite frequent, but also that this seems in large part an inheritance from the lexifiers they are built upon. While standard English or Dutch are usually assumed not to be NC languages, most of their dialects are and so it still comes as no surprise that their lexifier creoles should also manifest NC. In reviewing the frequency of NC in a larger language set, van der Auvera and Alsenoy (2016) concluded that NC appears to be most frequent in Indo European languages. In this respect then, we again find a great parallel between what happens in creole languages to what happens in the world languages, namely the influence of Indo-European subset. Yet one cannot but wonder whether NC is actually a truly an areal feature or whether this could rather be a consequence of the fact that these languages are the better studied ones, so that the characteristic of their negative dependencies are more researched. Both for the non-creole sphere and for the creole one, the question remains of whether or not upon further detailed inspections, non-Indo-European lexifier creoles could display just as high a frequency for NC once their empirical landscape is better mapped out.

In favoring negative concord dependencies, it is of interest to note that creole languages clearly depart from fiercely analytic languages such as Mandarin Chinese or Cantonese, to which they are not uncommonly typologically compared. As is well known, these languages severely preclude concordant negative constructions<sup>2</sup>. If creole are indeed analytic languages, why is there such a strong difference ? In considering the question of creole as analytic languages, Szeto et al (2019) endeavor to compare common features of two groups of such languages, Sinitic and Kwa,

to creole languages. They conclude that if on the one hand, creole languages, do indeed arguably belong to an analytic typological type, in as much as such a type can be defined, on the other hand, not unlike other analytic languages, their features also reveal their structural debt to their relevant substrates. Indeed, not surprisingly, Szeto et al (2019) find that creole languages divide into those which most resemble the analytic type of the Kwa languages and those which don't. Even though these authors do not include negation among the features they discuss, it seems plausible that creole negative dependencies would end up owing more to Kwa analytic type than to the Sinitic one. When peeking at the other end of the spectrum, we see Singlish stand out among the creoles as one that clearly lacks the concord type of dependencies, no doubt due to the influence of Chinese, as is explicitly argued in Zhiming et al (2018). In sum, the common occurrence of negative concord in creole languages only seems typologically surprising if the Sinitic languages are taken as a model for analyticity. So here again, in the frequency of negative concord, creole languages affirm strong roots both to their Kwa substrate analytic type and to their lexifiers, leaving little space for any considerations of creole uniqueness.

#### 4. Variations in negative concord: a look at French lexifier creoles.

One question that a discussion of the frequency of NC leaves untouched is that of its diversity. For the creoles that display NC, do these essentially exhibit a uniform landscape or can we detect substantial variations, and if so are any of these variations specific to the creole languages in any way? These questions are addressed here by discussing the constants and variations in the NC dependencies of a subset of creole languages, namely the French lexifier creoles.

To begin our empirical survey of negative concord dependencies in the French lexifier, let's start by observing that in most French lexifier creoles, negative concord dependencies appear at first view to be of the strict NC type, requiring negative doubling with both pre-verbal and post-verbal NCIs as exemplified in (7). Note that, since there is empirical confirmation for all of these NCIs that they can be used without negation in fragment answers, we are here in NC dependencies as defined by Giannakidou (2000) and not on the basis of negative morphology.

- (7) a.HC: Pèsonn \*(pa) wè anyen  
 b.Mau C: Personn \*(pa) vwar nanye  
 c.Mart C: Pèsonn \*(pa) wè ayen  
 d.Guad C: Ponmoun\*(pa) vwè ayen  
 e.Guy C: Pésonn \*(pa) wè ayen  
 f. Sey C: Personn \*(pa) vir naryen  
           Nobody not see nothing  
           Nobody saw anything

Despite this first appearance of strong homogeneity, note that there is at least one among the French lexifier creoles, i.e. Réunion Creole that displays non-strict negative concord. As the example in (8) clearly illustrates, the same NCI expression requires a doubling negation when occurring in a post-verbal position but not in a pre-verbal one.

- (8) **Personne** la aprivoiz a zot e zot la **pa** aprivoiz **personne**.  
 Nobody Past tame prep 3PL and 3PL Past Neg V nobody.  
 Nobody tamed anyone and they did not tame anyone.

On a first pass, then negative concord in the French based creoles appears to uphold the distinctions noted in Bickerton as well as in cross-linguistics studies for two main types of negative concord relations, strict and non-strict ones, with the former clearly more common than the latter, as has also been observed in the Romance languages (Benini. and Ramat 1996) and beyond. Van Auvera et als (2016)

Upon a closer look, however, this neat picture dissolves rather quickly. Starting with Reunion creole, observe that the co-presence of negation with preverbal arguments if dis-preferred is not fully precluded as the example in (9) taken from the same corpus indicates. Although it is clear that doubled cases are rarer than non-doubled ones in this text, the exact conditions under which doubling is possible for pre-verbal argument more generally remain at present to be further investigated.

- (9) Me **persone pa** vouli kroir a li akoz la maniere li te kostime.  
 But nobody not want believe to him because the way he Past dressed  
 But nobody wanted to believe him because of the way he was dressed

In this respect, the type of negative concord manifested in Reunion creole resembles the one observed in Catalan in the Romance area. There are, however other interesting cases in the other French lexifier creole in which negative doubling with pre-verbal arguments also appear to be optional. Looking at Haitian creole for instance, Déprez (2018b) report that for one of her native informant of a Gonaive dialect and his family, while the negation *pa* is obligatory with the NCI *pèsonn*, it is optional with expressions such as *Pyes moun*, but again, only in pre-verbal position. A similar observation is recorded in Albert Valdman's (2017) English Haitian-Creole bilingual dictionary (p 629) for a complex nominal expression using the NCI *oken* in pre-verbal position. Valdman provides the example (10b.), in which the doubling negation is missing.

- (10) a. *Pyes moun (pa) pati*  
 Piece person not left  
 Nobody left
- b. *Okenn lòt moun vini* (Valdman 2017: 629)  
 No other people came  
 Nobody else came

Finally, still in Haitian creole, we observe that with more complex subject nominal expressions, the negation *pa* is also optional. Hence examples like (11) found on the internet are accepted by our informants.

- (11) a. Anyen **pase san** Jezu-**Kri kapab** geri tout kè-**m**  
 Nothing over blood Jesus-Christ can heal all my heart  
 Nothing but the blood Christ can heel my heart
- b. *Pèsonn ki te wè sa a ta rapòte li*  
 Nobody who Pst see that Cond report it  
 Nobody who would see that would report it

Similar examples can be also found for Mauritian creole, where the speakers consulted reported a distinction. When comparable complex DP were used in a pre-verbal subject positions as opposed to a post-verbal one, only in the former did negation doubling become optional.

- (12) a. Nanye ki to fer kapav aret li  
 Nothing that you do able stop him  
 Nothing you do can stop him
- b. Nanye apart to lakor neserer pou gagn sa drwa la  
 Nothing but your agreement is necessary to win this right
- c. Mo **pa**'nn invit personn apart twa pou sa dine la  
 I did not invite anyone but you for this dinner

The generalization across this novel data, seems to be that there is a difference between simple pronominal NCI and complex DP NCI (Déprez 2018b). While the former generally require doubling in pre-verbal subject position, doubling becomes optional for more complex DP NCI. Yet this complexity does not have the same effect for post-verbal NCIs where doubling remains obligatory. Moreover, although syntactic complexity seems to be a factor, there can be also lexical differences. Hence while our Haitian native speaker accepted (10), he did not like the same sentence with another expression *Pèsonn moun* where he required negative doubling. Comparable distinctions in the optionality of negative doubling in preverbal position between bare pronominal expressions and complex DP are also reported by for Jamaican creole in van der Auwera and De Lisser (2019) and Belize creole Van der Auwera (2022). Beyond creole, Déprez and Poletto (2019) also discuss comparable variation for the northern Italian dialects. This type of variation is thus not specific to creole negative concord and it calls into question the distinction between strict and non-strict negative concord, since here doubling optionality concerns not language types but specific expression types within the same languages.

Yet further distinctions in doubling can be observed for other NCIs in the French lexifier creoles as well as in the Northern Italian dialects. As Deprez (2017) observes, adverbial expressions equivalent to *never* display interesting variation in their doubling requirement in Seychelles creole as well as Mauritian Creole. As the examples in (13) show, pre-verbal adverbs that occur most likely in a focused position at the beginning of the clause do not require doubling. Moreover, they display sufficient negative force to be able to license other NCIs under negative spread, that is without the co-presence of the sentential negation.

- (13) a. e **zanmen** son ansennyan in bezwen pran roten avek li p82  
 And never his teacher cl need take hard with 3sg  
 And never has his teach needed to be hard with him
- b. Remon pa frekant dimoun isi e **zanmen** i pou anmenn **okenn zanmi** dan son lakaz.”  
 Raymon no mingle people here and never cl would bring no friends in his house  
 Raymond did not mingle here and never would he bring any friends to his house
- c. Mis mwan mon **pa'n zanmen** fer mon zanfàn soufer.p89  
 but 1sg poss Neg never make poss child suffer  
 but I would never make my child suffer

Note that in contrast, argumental NCI within the very same creole clearly continue to require negative doubling in preverbal positions. We see again that within the same language, some NCIs can require strict negative concord, while others can display non-strict negative concord. This shows that languages are not homogeneous with respect to negative concord and exhibit differences that could either concern a particular class of NCI, namely adverbial ones are opposed to nominal ones, the syntactic complexity of the NCI or a lexical difference. What these data clearly demonstrate is that strict vs non-strict negative concord is not a language distinction here but can concern a subset of the terms involved in NC dependencies within the same language. These data provide clear counter examples to the idea that the distinction between strict and non-strict negative concord could be a matter of crosslinguistic parametric difference.

Distinctions in doubling requirements are not the only type of variations that the creole negative concord dependencies display. As discussed in Déprez (2017), different NCIs or the same NCIs in different creoles also display variations in their possibility to occur in characteristic non-negative NPI contexts without a doubling negation. The following table sums up the different type of licensing contexts in which argumental NCI in Haitian creole vs Mauritian creole can occur.

**Table 3. NCIs in common NPIs contexts**

NPI Contexts	Haitian Creole	Mauricien Creole
Yes/no Q	Yes	No
Conditionals	Yes	No
Adversative Predicates	Yes	No
Before Clause	Yes	No
Only	Yes	No
Without	Yes	Yes

As Déprez (2017) argues these variations very much parallel distinctions that are also found with NPIs and that have come to be characterized in terms of the strength of the negative relation involved in the dependency. In particular, distinctions in licensing context types differentiate so-called strong NPIs licensed in anti-additive contexts from super-strong NPI licensed only in antimorphic contexts. Here, the very same distinctions are seen to characterize the argumental NCIs of Haitian vs those of Mauritian creole. That NCIs are sensitive to the same type of distinctions as NPIs provides strong evidence that the former could well turn out to be a mere a sub-kind of the latter type of expressions as Déprez (2017) concludes, following Laka (1990) initial proposal among many others. It is to be noted additionally, that distinctions in the behavior of NCIs in non-negative contexts are not only limited to distinctions across creoles. In Guadeloupean creole, for instance, Petit Jean et als (2018) have found that two distinct forms for the adverb never, *jam* vs *jamen* actually behaved differently in non-negative contexts with the former being excluded while the latter was possible. Given such fine grained lexical distinctions, we are again strongly reminded here, of the diversity that studied NPIs have been shown to display language internally.

Yet another type of variation that distinguish NC relations in the French lexifier creoles concerns their locality conditions or more specifically the distance at which a licensing negation

can be separated from the licensed NCI. For Mauritian creole and Guadeloupean creole argument NCI, for instance, the negation must essentially occur within the same clause as the NCI. But this is not the case in Haitian creole or Martinique creole where the distance can be longer as the following HC examples taken from the Haitian Bible and verified with our informants attest. Note again that this distinction in locality is one that is also known to differentiate among types of NPIs cross-linguistically, which provides yet another argument to conceive of NC dependencies as a subtype of NPI.

- (14) a. \*Mo pa ti dir personn ti vini (Syea 2013) Mauritian creole  
I did not say anyone would come
- b. \*Mo pa kone si li finn apel personn (Syea 2013)  
I do not know if he called anyone
- c. \*Marie pa di ké ou vlé ban mwen anyen. (Petit-Jan et al 2018) Guadeloupe creole  
Marie neg say that 2sg want give me nothing  
'Marie didn't say that you don't want to give me anything'

Haitian Creole:

- (15) a. M'pa kwe Mari di li we pèsònn (Déprez 1999)  
I don't believe Mary said she saw anyone
- b. M pa kwe m pale ak pyes moun non, pa fache ou  
I don't believe I spoke with anyone no, do not get mad  
<https://www.facebook.com/video>
- c. mon pa ekspekte li rann mwan naryen an retour Seychelles creole  
I not expect he returns nothing to me in return
- d Man pa di ou pesonn telefone Martinique creole  
I did not tell you that anybody called

As these more fine grained comparisons reveal, the NC landscape of the French lexifier creole is far from homogeneous, displaying variations in negative doubling, contexts of licensing and locality conditions that in the end come to question whether negative concord could usefully be taken as a criterion to classify 'languages' rather than merely 'types of dependencies'. There has been a strong tendency in recent years to try to separate languages that manifest NC from languages that don't in terms of a parametric divide (Zeijlstra 2004). At the same time, nothing comparable has ever been hinted at for other negative dependencies such as polarity items dependencies. To my knowledge, indeed, no one has ever argued that languages that manifest negative polarity item dependencies should be parametrically distinguished from those that don't. If negative concord is but a sub-kind of NPI dependencies, i.e. a kind of dependency that is already known to come in different types and forces, why should one type of dependencies be understood as manifesting a parametric divide but not the other? As is well known, both types of dependencies can co-exist in given languages, as they do for instance in French, and they are also historically related, since polarity dependencies can evolve into concord ones and the other way around, though perhaps less frequently. In recent work, Zeijlstra (2021) has argued that polarity dependencies display far more diversity than NC dependencies and that the diversity that negative concord manifest is more systematic and not unlike what is observed in other types of dependencies like agreement. I



contend, however, that this kind of assertion mostly stems from insufficient knowledge and focus on the empirical extent of NC diversity and that increased attention to the details of NC diversity has and will unearth far more diversity than is presently discussed in the literature. In my own work (Déprez 2011 among other), I hence proposed that there should be no conceptual divide between negative polarity dependencies and negative concord but rather that these exemplify the two ends of a spectrum of the manifestation of negation in the sentential vs the constituent domain and that the focus of research should be on understanding the nature of the terms that participate in these two types of dependencies and their properties and not on the formulation of a putative parametric divide. When focusing on creole languages, one cannot help but noticing that the pervasiveness of negative concord sharply contrasts with the rarity of agreement relations, raising immediate concerns for any views that claims that both exemplify the same type of syntactic relations. Why should negative concord be so common a phenomenon in creoles while number or gender agreement is so rare? Contrasting with Zeijlstra's parametric agreement approach to negative concord, Preminger (2013) and Preminger and Polinsky (2015) have forcefully argued that agreement and negative concord do not in fact involve the same kind of syntactic dependencies, and that the similarities that proponents of such a view invoke represent a spurious unification. It is clear that at first sight, the empirical landscape of creole negative concord as opposed to that of number or gender agreement tend to support this position. It is of course always possible to claim that behind empirical evidence, there could be abstract principles at play. One should then wonder however if this does not amount to a claim subsuming all syntactic relations into a single one, a possible view of course but one that could be taking the risk of missing crucial distinctions of interest. For creole languages, the facts remain that if negative concord were subsumed under agreement, the meat of the question would then have to be, why is the former so prominently overt in the creole languages while the latter so clearly is not. And until an interesting answer could be provided to this puzzle these two relations may perhaps best be kept apart.

#### **4. Conclusions and questions**

At the outset of our survey of negative concord in creole languages in the perspective of Bickerton's legacy, although we have mostly been able to support his conjectures, we turn out to be faced with perhaps more questions than actual answers. We started out by confirming the absence of relation between the position of negation and the occurrence of negative concord seen also cross-linguistically, as well as the frequency of negative concord in the creoles of the Apic Atlas. On both of these aspects, creoles were found to align with a majority of other languages in the WALS Atlas. In this sense, it is evident that in the make-up of their negative syntax and negative concord, creoles languages are not unique. It turns out, however, that in the course of our assessment, criteria for the distinctiveness of negative concord as a potential classificatory language feature have become eroded and blurred. As noted above, to be able to raise questions of frequency for this type of dependency, we have needed to rely on the rather superficial morphological criterion of negative morphology without being able to always answer the important question of its corresponding interpretative correlate. Reliance on this criterion, however may force arbitrary classificatory choices of what is or is not an NC language, since NCI terms observed to behave in the same way can in fact differ on this criterion, language internally and cross-linguistically. And clearly without evidence of actual negative interpretation for the terms involved in a negative relation, the very notion of negative 'concord' could turn out to be essentially moot. Furthermore, when investigating the diversity in the negative concord relations of the French based creoles, the often assumed neat divide between strict and non-strict NC languages could in the end not be upheld as this pattern of diversity was also found to characterize distinct NCI terms language internally, and not just cross-linguistic

distinctions. This calls into question the idea that strict vs non-strict NC could distinguish language types rather than constructions types within and across languages. Other patterns of diversity concerning the licensing of NCIs in non-negative contexts as well as their locality conditions have revealed strong similarities between NCI dependencies and the observed crosslinguistic behavior of NPIs. Such similarities lead us to question the wisdom of considering negative concord as a potential classificatory feature for languages, given in contrast that NPI dependencies have never been assumed to form classificatory distinctions among language types. Our survey also turns out to question whether it could actually be possible that focused attention to NC rather than NPI relations in creole languages are more a product of an Indo-European lens than an actual characteristic of creole languages. The majority of creoles assumed to display NC appear to do so because they make use of indefinite terms inherited from their lexifiers that in turn tend to display NC relations. So could focus on NC relation in creole be essentially an artefact of focusing on the characteristics of a restricted set of indefinite expressions language internally, mostly assumed to have inherited their negative import from their lexifiers? An answer to this question, surely calls for further investigation of this phenomenon, deepened by a more detailed conjoined look at both of its facets , the morpho-syntax and the semantic aspects of its realizations. If it turned out that the diversity found is in many respects close to the one otherwise observed for NPI dependencies, then the idea that negative concord could be a crosslinguistic classificatory feature could make no more sense than the constation that NPI arise in most languages in a great diversity of types. But even if negative concord could no longer be considered a language classificatory feature, but rather a mere construction type that characterizes the behavior of certain class of indefinite expressions, this would of course not mean that its study is fruitless. As one type of negative dependencies its detailed study undoubtedly reveals the subtle properties of the working of negation and the multiple interactions it displays between its sentential manifestations and its incarnation in the argumental or dependent domain. So while classificatory considerations may turn out to be artificial, the properties of NC relations and their potential diversity certainly are not. Further research will gain in emphasizing the rich comparative terrain that creole languages provide when research encompasses their subtle diversity rather than focusing centrally on their presumed common features.

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