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Department of French Studies
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Negation, Polarity, Negative Concord in Romance languages

“Who does(n't) understand nothing/anything?”

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Overview

Plan of the talk

1. **Introduction**
2. Starting Point
3. Broad Perspective on Neg & Polarity
4. Historical Perspective
5. Accounting for Neg. Concord systems
6. Further Variations
7. Extending the issue

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2. The starting point: French vs regional languages
3. Broad Perspective on Negation & Polarity
4. Historical perspective
5. Accounting for variation in Negative Concord systems
6. Further variations: intralinguistic (un)stability
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Introduction

Why Negation? Why regional Languages?

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- ▶ **Topic:** negation & polarity across Romance languages, with a specific focus on French and French-related languages (creoles, other regional/minority languages)
- ▶ *Part of joint work with PhD student Samantha Becerra Zita (PhD defended in 2021)*
- ▶ *Member of two projects:*
 - ▶ *ANR project SyMiLa [2013-2017] related to ALF (Atlas des Langues de France)*
 - ▶ *ERC project AThEME on multilingualism (specific focus on regional languages)*
- ▶ *Regional and/or minority languages, as a logical basis for the study of microvariation*
- ▶ *the case of Louisiana: Cajun/Louisiana French (related to Acadian), Louisiana Creole (related to African languages)*

Starting Point of the Study

Standard French vs Gallo language...

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- ▶ Gallo, one of the French « patois », regional language
 - *regional Romance language spoken in Brittany (oïl language)*
 - *as a window on the history and diversity of French and French-related languages*



Starting Point of the Study

Standard French vs Gallo language...

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► The initial contrast and puzzle...

► **French:** *Tu (n')as pas vu personne.*
 You NE-have not seen nobody
 Reading: "You saw somebody."

► **Gallo:** *Y a pas ren à li dire.*
 there is not nothing to IND.OBJ.CL.3SG say
 "There is nothing to tell him."

Il n'y ut pas personne à venir.
 EXPL NE-there had not nobody to come
 "There was nobody to come."

► Surprising when considering similarity between the two languages:

	Standard French	Gallo
Sent. Neg.	<i>(ne)...pas/point</i>	<i>(ne)...pâs/pouint</i>
N-words	<i>aucun, personne, rien, jamais...</i> "no, nobody, nothing, never..."	<i>aoqhun, person.n, ren, jamin...</i> "no, nobody, nothing, never..."

Starting Point of the Study

...and other French-related languages

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► Many other regional languages and creoles share that feature:

► *Picard:* *n'a point parsonne qui me croye.*
NE-has not nobody who DO.CL.1SG believed
"Nobody believed in me."

► *Occitan:* *Oul o pas vi ningun.*
SUBJ.3SG.MASC has not seen nobody
"He didn't see anybody/He saw nobody."

► *Haitian Creole:* *Pèsonn pa vini.*
nobody not came
"Nobody came."

► *Montreal Fr.:* *J'peux pas avoir rien.*
I-can not have nothing
"I can't have anything/I can have nothing."

► *Lousiana French / Louisiana Creole (Klingler (2003))?*



Starting Point of the Study

On what deserves an explanation

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- ▶ **Main issue of the talk:** *how do we account for subtle differences in Negative Concord?*
 - ▶ *Historical explanations*
 - ▶ *Theoretical explanations*
- ▶ **Prerequisites:** *a broader perspective on Negation*
 - ▶ *Negative Concord (NC) versus Double Negation (DN)*
 - ▶ *Negative Polarity Items (NPI)*
 - ▶ *Propositional versus Enunciative Negation*
 - ▶ *Typological perspective on NC in Romance Languages*

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Perspective on Neg & Polarity

Double Negation vs Negative Concord

- ▶ **Negative Concord (NC):** when 2 morpho-semantic negations lead to one semantic negation, hence a negative statement
- ▶ **Double Negation (DN):** when 2 morpho-semantic negations cancel each other to give rise to a positive statement ($- + - = +$)
- ▶ Even Standard French has some NC...(Corblin et al (2004))

Personne n'a rien dit

Nobody NE-has nothing said

NC reading: "Nobody said anything."

DN reading: "Everybody said something."

- ▶ Restricted to N-words (semi-negations) such as « rien, jamais... » in Standard French

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Perspective on Neg & Polarity

NC and Negative Polarity Items (NPI)

- ▶ **Negative Polarity Items (NPI):** grammatical items that are restricted to polar (non-veridical) contexts such as negation, yes-no questions, conditionals, under the preposition « sans » -without... (Ladusaw (1979))

a. *Je n'ai pas vu la **moindre** personne/**qui que ce soit**.*

I NE-have not seen the MOINDRE person/anyone

b. *As-tu vu la **moindre** personne/**qui que ce soit** ?*

have-you seen the MOINDRE person/anyone

c. *Si tu vois la **moindre** personne/**qui que ce soit**, préviens-moi.*

If you see the MOINDRE person/anyone warn-me

d. **J'ai vu la **moindre** personne/**qui que ce soit**.*

- ▶ **Negative Concord (NC)** is clearly linked to the use of NPIs:

Personne n'a rien dit = Personne n'a dit quoi que ce soit

nobody NE-has nothing said

nobody NE-has said anything

NC reading: "Nobody said anything."

Perspective on Neg & Polarity

Propositional vs Enunciative Negation

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- ▶ *Another concern: two distinct uses of Negation... (Ducrot (1973))*
- ▶ **Propositional negation:** *assertion of a negative content*
- ▶ **Enunciative negation:** *denial of a previous assertion/presupposition*

*Hippolyte n'aime **pas** les frites.*

⇒ It is a fact/It is true that Hippolyte doesn't like fries.

⇒ It is false/It is **not** true that Hippolyte likes fries.

- ▶ *Double Negation (DN) is clearly linked to enunciative negation:*

A: Est-ce que quelqu'un n'a (encore) rien dit?

"Is there someone who said nothing (yet)?"

B : Non, PERSONNE n'a rien dit.

"No, NOBODY said nothing." → "Everybody said something." (DN)

Perspective on Neg & Polarity

Typological classification of NC in Romance

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- ▶ **Strict NC languages:** sent. negation co-occurs with N-words in all positions

a. *Nimeni nu a venit.* (Romanian)

nobody NEG has come

b. *Nu a venit nimeni*

NEG has come nobody

"Nobody has come."

→ Romanian, Creoles, Occitan, Picard?...

- ▶ **Non-strict NC languages:** sent. negation co-occurs in postverbal positions

a. *Nadie ha venido.* (Spanish)

nobody has come

"Nobody has come."

b. *No he visto nadie.*

NEG have.1SG seen nobody

"I saw nobody."

→ Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Gallo?...

- ▶ **Negative Spread languages:** NC only occurs between N-words, not with sentential negation (French, English)

Historical perspective

Evolution of the (French) Negation System

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- ▶ *Labelle & Espinal (2014)'s work sheds light on the diversity of NC systems related to French*
- ▶ *Evolution/emergence of sentential negation: Jespersen cycle*

Jespersen cycle in French.

	Classical Latin	Old and Middle French	17th c.	19th c. spoken French	20–21th c. spoken French
Negative marker	<i>non</i>	<i>ne... (pas)</i>	<i>ne... pas</i>	<i>(ne)... pas</i>	<i>pas</i>

- *« non » loses negative strength when becoming « ne »*
- *reinforcement through minimizers (expressing minimal quantities)*

Je ne mange mie | Je n'écris point | Je ne dis mot | Je ne marche pas
I NEG eat crumb I NEG-write dot I NEG say word I NEG walk step

- *the winner « pas » takes all in standard French (end of 17th century)*

Historical perspective

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► Evolution/emergence of N-words/semi-negations

From Latin to Modern French.

	Classical Latin	Old French	Modern French
Negative expressions	<i>nullus</i> <i>nemo</i> <i>nihil</i>	<i>nul</i> <i>nient</i> <i>nuns</i> <i>negun</i> <i>nesun</i> <i>nului</i>	<i>nul</i> <i>personne</i> <i>rien</i> <i>aucun</i>

► Original Latin and Old French N-words (NEG + minimal quantity) ...

Nient ⇔ *ne + gente* OR *ente(m)*

NEG + people (« gens ») OR entity (« entité »)

Nuns/negun ⇔ *nec + ūnu*

NEG + one (« un »)

► ...competing with emerging minimizers becoming negative

Pour savoir se g y trouveroie personne qui volsist servir ma femme (Old Fr., 1374)

"To know if I would find there someone who would like to serve my wife"

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Historical perspective

On the history of French-related languages

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- ▶ *Correlating space & time: the origins of local variations of French...*
- ▶ *Oil varieties (Picard, Gallo, Poitevin-Saintongeais)*
 - ▶ *competition on sentential negation (pas, point, mie, goutte)*

Pèrson-ne i n'voreu **mie** d'élle pour és mèrieu. (Picard)

"Nobody will (NEG) want her to marry."

Parsonne n'a **poé** foait attention à li.

"Nobody (NEG) cared about him."

- ▶ *Occitan varieties (Gascon, Languedocien, Vivaro-Alpin)*
 - ▶ *more traces of original (Latin and Old French) N-words: degun, res*

Caliá que degun bogès (pas).

must that nobody moves (not)

"Nobody had to move."

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Historical perspective

On the history of French-related languages

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▶ *Haitian Creole*

- ▶ *“The evolution of French into Haitian Creole seems to have favored Gungbe substrate influence on the morphosyntax [as an isolating language].” (Aboh (2006)) + preverbal NEG marker “má”*

▶ *Canadian, Montreal, Québécois, Acadian French*

- ▶ *originating mainly from Poitou in the 17th century*

▶ *Predictions for Louisiana French?*

- ▶ *“several waves of Acadian immigrants after their expulsion from Nova Scotia by the British in 1755” (Klingler (2003))*

▶ *Predictions for Louisiana Creole?*

- ▶ *“contact between speakers of French and enslaved people who spoke a variety of African languages. LC bears great affinity to the French-lexifier creoles of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean, and it appears to resemble Haitian Creole most closely of all” (Klingler (2003))*

Accounting for NC patterns

From the status of Semi-negations/N-words...

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- ▶ *A common view, related to diachronic/historical changes: semi-negations (N-words) relate to indefinites (minimal quantities), NPIs, and negative quantification*

Negative Quantifiers ----- NPIs ----- Indefinites

- ▶ *Negative Quantifiers are intrinsically negative*
 - ▶ *NPIs are dependent on negation*
 - ▶ *Indefinites are independent from negation*
- ▶ *Unsurprisingly, two traditional accounts of NC with N-words:*
 - ▶ *Semi-negations (N-words) as NPIs, dependent on NEG*
 - ▶ *Semi-negations (N-words) as Negative Quantifiers, bearing NEG*
 - ▶ *The two accounts are problematic to account for NC variation...*

Accounting for NC patterns

From the status of Semi-negations...

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- ▶ *View #1: Semi-negations are just like NPIs (Laka (1990), Ladusaw (1992), Giannakidou (1997, 2001), Déprez (2003), Zeijlstra (2004, 2009))*

- ▶ *Looks nice for Gallo and other NC languages*

Com il avë pouin_[NEG] aoqhun-n_[NPI] amin, i vivë tout seû

As he had not no friend he lived all alone

"As he had no friends, he lived alone."

- ▶ **Main problem:** *what about other NPI contexts...?*

**Eyt-i venu persone ?*

Is-it come n-body

**I a aoqhun qui sont venu ?*

there has n-one who are come

"Did anyone come?"

Accounting for NC patterns

From the status of Semi-negations...

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- ▶ *View #2: Semi-negations express quantification over variables, or over pairs of variables (de Swart & Sag (2002))*

- ▶ *Comparing Negation and Questions*

Qui fait quoi ?

"Who is doing what?"

Gloss: **what** are the pairs $\langle x,y \rangle$, x a person, y a thing, such that x is doing y .

- ▶ *Looks nice for French...*

Personne n'a rien dit.

NC reading: "Nobody said anything."

Gloss: there are **no/zero** pairs $\langle x,y \rangle$, x a person, y a thing, such that x said y

- ▶ **Main concern:** *how can we extend the account to Gallo and other NC languages?*
 - ⇒ *Sentential negation « pas/pouint » does not quantify over variables...*

Accounting for NC patterns ...to the status of Sentential Negation

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- ▶ *Alternative account of NC: NC vs DN is just a matter of scope (building on Muller (2010))*

- ▶ *NC: the two negations have/share the same propositional scope*

$[_{NEG\ Scope} \overbrace{NEG_{floating} + NPI_{Indef} \dots NEG_{floating} + NPI_{Indef}}]$

$[_{NEG\ Scope} \overbrace{Personne\ n'a\ rien\ dit.}]$
NC reading: "Nobody said anything."

- ▶ *DN: the two negations have a different scope*

$[_{NEG\ Scope1} \dots [_{NEG\ Scope2} \overbrace{NEG_{floating} + NPI_{Indef} \dots NEG_{floating} + NPI_{Indef}}]]]$

$[_{NEG\ Scope1} [_{NEG\ Scope2} \overbrace{Personne\ n'a\ rien\ dit.}]]]$
DN reading: "Everybody said something."

- ▶ *Scope 1: enunciative negation*

- ▶ *Scope 2: propositional scope*

- ⇒ *NC can only occur with semi-negations, items that can share their NEG feature.*

Accounting for NC patterns ...to the status of Sentential Negation

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- ▶ Including sentential negation to the variation system...
- ▶ Sentential negation in Gallo still has some properties of semi-negations (N-words)!

- ▶ Non-negative uses of « pa(s) »

Qhi q'arae pû m'fere ene espliqe [...] sans pa ecandae ?

who that-have could me-do an explanation without NEG spread-the-news

“Who could have provided an explanation to me without spreading the news?”

- ▶ Similar to what is found in Haitian Creole (Homer (2013))

Li pati san li pa di orevwa

he leave without he NEG say goodbye

“He left without saying goodbye.”

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Further Variations

Who doesn't understand no more/anymore?

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- ▶ *Not the end of the story: much more variation of NC patterns in natural languages, especially when considering regional languages*
- ▶ *The typological classification of NC system is not so helpful...*
- ▶ *Intralinguistic variation goes well beyond such classification*

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Further Variations

Interlinguistic variation: on typology

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- ▶ *How accurate is the traditional typology on NC patterns?*
 - ▶ *Non-strict NC languages*
 - ▶ *Strict NC languages*
 - ▶ *Negative Spread languages*
- ▶ *Regional languages do not fit that typology...*
 - ▶ **Main problem:** *optionality of sentential negation*
- ▶ *Even English does not fit that typology (Blanchette (2017))...*
 - ▶ *From Whitney plantation: « I wasn't doin' nothin' but totin' the water. »*

Further Variations

Intralinguistic variation: unstable grammars

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- *Is sentential negation obligatory or optional? Dialectal variation in Occitan, Catalan, Québécois French, Gallo...*

Caliá que degun bogès (pas). (Occitan)
must that nobody moves (not)
"Nobody had to move."

No ha vist ningú. (Catalan)
NEG has seen nobody
"She hasn't seen anybody."

Jo he vist ningú. (Dialectal Catalan)
I have seen nobody
"I haven't seen anybody."

Je ne peux (pas) avoir rien. (Québécois)
"I can't have anything."
Je n'ai (pas) aucune ouvrage payante. (Québécois)
"I don't have any chargeable publication."

Jan ne vaít (pas) personne. (Gallo)
"Jean doesn't see anyone."
Persone n'ont (pouint) ren veuz. (Gallo)
"Nobody saw anything."

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Further Variations

Intralinguistic variation: unstable grammars

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- ▶ *Do all N-words (semi-negations) have the same constraints?
Intraspeaker variation, from one semi-negation to another...*

Ca q tu frë ? (??pouin) rin. (SyMiLa1)

"What would you do? Nothing."

Â tu deja tË libr ? ??(pouin) jamin (SyMiLa1)

"Have you ever been free? Never"

Qhi qe c'ët q'ët vnu ? Persone (IR6)

"Who is it that came? Nobody."

*Qhi qe c'ët q'ët venu ? *(Pas) aoqhun (IR6)*

"Who is it that came? Noone."

- ▶ *Comparable to « jamais » in French*

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Further Variations

Intralinguistic variation: unstable grammars

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- ▶ *So many NC patterns just for Gallo*
- ▶ *Main pattern #1: sentential negation does not participate in NC*
 - ▶ *French-like pattern*
 - ▶ *but still a passive knowledge of NC with sentential negation...*
- ▶ *Main pattern #2: sentential negation participates in NC*
 - ▶ *as a non-strict NC language: no speaker uses « pas/point » with subject n-words*

*La ptitt filh, rin lâ decouraijè (*pâ/pouin), è li caozi. (Gallo, speaker 9, SyMiLa)*

(Lit.) "The little girl, nothing discouraged her, she talked to him."

S'é q n'a pouin rin ni pouin pèrson.n qhi m plé. (Gallo, speaker 9, SyMiLa)

it-is that has not nothing nor not nobody who me pleases

(lit.) "It's just that nothing and nobody really pleases me."

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Further Variations

Intralinguistic variation: unstable grammars

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- ▶ *Sub-pattern #2.1: sentential negation is mandatory*

*Com il avë *(pouin) aoghun-n amín, i vivë tout seû*

"As he had no friends, he lived alone."

- ▶ *Sub-pattern #2.2: sentential negation is optional*

Jan ne vait (pas) personne. (Gallo)

"Jean doesn't see anyone."

Persone n'ont (pouint) ren veuz. (Gallo)

"Nobody saw anything."

- ▶ **Our take:** at least for Gallo, sentential negation is optional, but a general preference for its use as it is clearly distinct from French (linguistic identity)

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Further Variations

Towards novel explanations

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- ▶ *A morphosyntactic explanation: on the status and scope of negation*
 - ▶ *Sentential negation as a purely grammatical head/morpheme, or as syntactic constituent/phrase*
 - ▶ *Preverbal vs postverbal negation*
- ▶ *A semantic explanation: on the status of N-words*
 - ▶ *A semantic scale for NPIs (Zwarts (1998)), that can be extended to semi-negations*
 - ▶ *Superstrong NPIs, in the more restrictive contexts (sentential negation, and under the preposition « sans » -without-)*
 - ▶ *Strong NPIs, in more restrictive contexts (including the scope of N-words)*
 - ▶ *Weak NPIs, in all non-assertive contexts (including questions, conditionals)*

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Extending the issue

Expressing denial (polarity reversal) #1

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► How to express denial (DN) in NC languages? Testing Gallo...

La Fillette : Franchement, est-ce que tu connais quiconque/qui que ce soit qui n'aime rien?

En vra, tu cné tí qhequn qhi' em pouint rin ?

The little girl: "Frankly; do you anyone who likes nothing?"

L'Âne: Non, bien sûr. PERSONNE n'aime rien. A part moi peut-être.

Dam nouna, parr le fètt. N'a pouin pèrsonn qhi' em pouin rin. A part ma, vantié.

The donkey: "No, of course, NOBODY likes nothing. Except me, maybe."

La Fillette : Toi, tu n'aimes pas rien puisque tu t'aimes.

S'é pâ vra q t'em pâ rin, vu q tu t'em.

??T'em pouin "pouin rin", vu q tu t'em.

The little girl: "You don't like nothing, as you likes yourself."

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Extending the issue

Expressing denial (polarity reversal) #2

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- ▶ *Answering particles to yes-no questions...which can be negative!*
- ▶ *In French, three types of polar answers: « oui, non, si »*
- ▶ *« Non » and « si » as potential reversal particles*
 - ▶ *Est-ce qu'Hippolyte a mangé des frites? **Non***
"Has Hippolyte eaten fries? No"
 - ▶ *Est-ce qu'Hippolyte n'a pas mangé de frites? **Si***
"Hasn't Hippolyte eaten fries? Yes, he has."
- ▶ *« Non » reverses positive questions, and « Si » reverses negative questions...?*
- ▶ *More complex...*

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Extending the issue

Expressing denial (polarity reversal) #2

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- ▶ *Some negative questions can be reversed by « non »!*
- ▶ *Scope of negation (propositional vs enunciative) and the use of answering particles (Pasquereau (2020))*

- ▶ *Higher Negation:*

A: Est- ce qu' ils n' ont pas encore été reçus ?

is it that they NEG have NEG yet been received

'Have they not been received yet?'

B: Je crois que non. = agreement / *reversal

I believe that no

'I believe that they have not.'

- ▶ *Lower Negation:*

A: Est- ce que quelqu'un n' a pas encore été reçu ?

is it that someone NEG has NEG yet been received

'Has someone not been received yet?'

B: Je crois que non. = *agreement / reversal

I believe that no

'I believe that everyone has been received.'

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3. Broad Perspective on Neg & Polarity
4. Historical Perspective
5. Accounting for Neg. Concord systems
6. Further Variations
7. **Extending the issue**

- ▶ *Negative Concord in natural languages is clearly not surprising, and not problematic*
 - ▶ *As a syntactic redundancy (semi-negations sharing the same scope)*
 - ▶ *Through a semantic mechanism (quantification over pairs)*
- ▶ *Issue: how Double Negation is expressed in such NC languages*
- ▶ *Further issues:*
 - ▶ *On the influence of standardization*
 - ▶ *On the limits between microvariation and idiolect (invididual variation) ...*

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