

Negation in Gallo-Romance dialects: contact with differential development

The history of negation in (Standard) French is well known as an example of what is called Jespersen's cycle, by which a language originally marking negation with a preverbal particle comes to acquire a postverbal marker that ends up being the sole marker of negation (see Mosegaard Hansen 2013 for an overview in French). By the Old French period in the 11–12th centuries, Latin preverbal *non* has already reduced in most context to *ne(n)*, and postverbal markers such as *pas*, *mie* and *point* are already firmly established and grammaticalized, though still optional. During this stage, *ne* used alone increasingly becomes a marker of discourse new information. Use of postverbal markers increases through the Middle French period, and by the 17th century *ne...pas* is the rule for standard negation. Attestations of *ne* deletion are at best sporadic before the 19th century, after which they increase to become the spoken norm nowadays.

In comparison, Old Occitan presented a preverbal negation *no(n)*. From the 11th century, *no(n)* was sporadically accompanied by a postverbal reinforcer *ges*, usage of which rises to 10% of cases by the 14th century (Paoli & Bach 2020). During the Old Occitan period, *pas* is only attested sporadically. A strikingly different pattern emerges in the 15th century, where *ges* all but disappears in favour of a postverbal negator *pas* in about 19% of cases, in addition to some instances of *punt/ponch*. The idea of Occitan developing these markers through contact is mentioned in Posner (1985:175-176).

It is difficult to ascertain the role of contact in such a case because of the close genetic relationship between the two languages, and the scant attestations of most of their dialects through the medieval and early modern period, data becoming available only in 19th and 20th century linguistic atlases (ALF). The presence of French speakers in Occitan speaking areas is rare before the 13th century, and only increases in line with the greater control of the King of France over these territories in the 15th century. The extant documentation shows that knowledge of French is rare at best before the 15th century, for example in Montpellier (Bach & Bernard 2019), but increases dramatically towards the end of that century and the start of the 16th century.

Attestations of Jespersen's cycle abound throughout Europe with a variety of postverbal markers (English, Welsh, Breton, some Italian varieties... see Willis et al. 2013), and a parallel development could be envisaged. Two elements may argue in favour of contact: the increased contact of Occitan varieties with Standard French in the 15th and mostly the 16th century (which witnesses the categorical replacement of Occitan by French in all administrative contexts), and the fact that the borrowed forms are identical. Instead of *pas* and *ponch*, the language could have generalised the use of *ges*, but instead makes use of two forms related to the principal French markers, in the same proportions. There is no doubt that increased contact in the 16th century played a major role in the development of postverbal *pas* in Occitan.

An interesting point is that the process of grammaticalization was quicker and went further in (some varieties of) Occitan than in French. I present a corpus study of Early Modern and Modern texts in central Occitan varieties, showing that by the early 17th century, a postverbal negator is already the norm in the language, but that the deletion of the preverbal negator occurs earlier and quicker than in French. Evidence from the ALF shows that in Gallo-Romance there are two non-contiguous areas of preverbal negator deletion, one centred around Paris, the other one in the south of France. Further evidence is adduced by an analysis of the negative concord cycle of Occitan, where, in central varieties, negative concord is attested with the postverbal marker, a development that did not occur in French: central Occitan is more advanced in the cycle than French.

The study uses historical data together with textual analysis to trace the role of contact in the intricate development of negation in Gallo-Romance varieties: Occitan and French initially develop in parallel, with French exerting influence as to which forms are selected and gain ground, after which further, separate development occurs.

ALF= Gilliéron, Jules & Edmont, Edmond. 1902-1910. *Atlas linguistique de la France*. Online digital version: Cartodialect 5.4.6. <http://lig-tdcge.imag.fr/cartodialect5/#/> last accessed 07/12/2021.

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