

A Tale of Two Negations in Picard: A Dilemma for the Formal Analysis of Negative Concord

This paper presents novel dialectal data that, we argue, raise a dilemma for current theories of the syntax and semantics of negative concord. Unlike Standard French and other Gallo-Romance dialects, Picard, an Oïl variety spoken in Northern France, has two productive sentential negations: *point* and *mie*. Both of these expressions developed from Old French minimizers (meaning 'dot' and 'crumb' respectively), and they can both appear with the scope-marker *ne* (Auger & Villeneuve (2008)). Furthermore, (unlike *ne*) they can both appear bare and negate an atomic statement, as shown in (1).

- (1) a. pi j'sauros **mie** où aller. (Gustave Devraine : Picartext)
‘And I would not know where to go’
b. j'aveus **pont** fait mes d'voirs. (André Accart: Picartext)
‘I had not made my homework’

Picard also has a class of negative indefinites that includes *parsonne* 'no one', *rien* 'nothing', *jamoais* 'never', and *pu* 'no longer', which show the distribution and interpretative pattern characteristic of **n-words** (Laka, 1990): in a sentence fragment (2), they contribute a semantic negation to the expression; however, when they appear within the scope of another n-word, the resulting sentence has a single negation (a.k.a *negative concord*) interpretation, cf. (3).

- (2) Quoè qu'i foait ? **Rien**. I jue à cartes [...] (Gaston Vasseur)

‘What does he do ? Nothing. He plays cards’

- (3) et pi **parsonne** èn' dit **rien** ! (Gaston Vasseur: Picartext)
‘And nobody says anything!’

Despite their similarities, *point* and *mie* do not pattern alike in sentences with n-words: while *mie* can co-occur with the entire class of (preverbal or postverbal) n-words, and give rise to negative concord interpretations (4), *point* can only do so with *rien*, and *parsonne* (5), as a quantitative study in the Picartext corpus confirms.

- (4) a. **Pèrson-ne** i n'vereu **mie** d'élle pour és mèrieu. (A. Depoilly)

‘Nobody will want to marry her’

- b. o n'a **mie jamoais** vu un calémichon invaleu un hérichon ! (VASSEUR)
‘one has never seen a slug swallow a hedgehog’

- (5) a. **Parsonne** n'a **poé** foait attention à li. (Gaston Vasseur)

‘Nobody payed attention to him.’

- d. *o n'a **point jamoais** vu un calémichon invaleu un hérichon !
‘one has never seen a slug swallow a hedgehog’

We argue that the differences in the distributions of *mie* and *point* raise challenges for most formal syntactic and semantic analyses of Romance negative concord. Following de Swart (2010), we distinguish between two main theoretical approaches in the literature: **grammatical** vs **lexical** analyses. Grammatical analyses propose that negative concord interpretations with sentential negation are the result of general grammatical processes such as agreement (Zeilstra, 2004) or special semantic compositional rules (Corblin, 1996; de Swart & Sag, 2002, a.o.). Such analyses predict the uniform pattern displayed by *mie*, under the assumption that Picard has a negative concord agreement or compositional rule; however, within this approach it is unclear why this rule should be lexically restricted to only *rien* and *parsonne* when the sentential negation is realized as *point*. On the other hand, within lexical analyses, negative concord interpretations with sentential negation are determined by the quantificational and polarity properties of individual n-words (Herburger, 2001; Déprez, 2003, a.o.). Within this class of analyses, the pattern displayed by *point* is expected, under the assumption that the semantic denotations of *rien* and *parsonne* differ from those of *jamais* and *pu* in a way that makes concord with sentential negation impossible for the latter elements. What is puzzling for these approaches, then, is why *jamais* and *pu* can appear within the scope of *mie* with a concord interpretations. The paper concludes by outlining future investigations into the differences between *point* and *mie* that will be undertaken within the context of the French ANR funded project: *SyMiLa* (Syntactic Microvariation in the Romance languages of France) with the aim of resolving this dilemma.

References: Auger,J. & A.J. Villeneuve (2008). Ne deletion in Picard and in regional French : Evidence for distinct grammars, in M. Meyerhoff & N. Nagy (eds), *Social Lives in Language*. Amsterdam, Benjamins, 223-247.
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