The syntax of Latin negation

Chiara Gianollo - Universität zu Köln - chiara.gianollo@uni-koeln.de

(i) Latin negation in light of Romance Despite the considerable cross-linguistic variation displayed within Romance in the syntax of negation, formal research could establish some firm points. In particular, a generalization of relevant diachronic import has emerged: the continuations of Latin nōn, present in all standard Romance languages (e.g. It. non, Sp. and Cat. no, Fr. ne, Rom. nu), are located before the projection in the TP-area where the inflected verb lands (InfI), and after the subject, where also pronominal clitics attach (Zanuttini 1997, Rowlett 1998, Ledgeway 2012, Poletto 2014). Post-verbal negative markers are innovations resulting from Jespersen's Cycle and taking place independently in the different languages. Also indefinites interacting with negation (n-words and negative polarity items) are subject to extensive and often language-specific lexical renewal (Martins 2000).

Here I address the following question: is it possible to trace back this pre-InfI position for the negative marker to Latin, and thus treat it as a common inherited feature in Romance? I show that the position of Classical Latin nōn can indeed be analyzed as pre-InfI, like that of its Romance continuations. However, I also argue that the Classical Latin negative marker is best analyzed as sitting in a specifier position, and that only later, in Late Latin, it becomes the head of a NegP projection. This change is connected to the general diachronic process leading from a Double Negation language to the Negative Concord systems of Early Romance, and also correlates in interesting ways with the shift from OV to VO.

(ii) In Classical Latin (CL) there is a one-to-one correspondence between overt expression of negation and presence of a semantic negation operator. Negation is either marked by the negative marker (NM) or by a negative indefinite (NI) (1a) (nemo ‘no one’, nihil ‘nothing’, nullus adj. ‘no’). With multiple negatively marked elements a Double Negation (DN) reading results (1b) (colloquial varieties sporadically show emphatic readings, Molinelli 1988).

(1) a. neminem reperies qui neget
   noone:ACC find:2SG who:NOM deny:3SG
   ‘you will not find anyone who would deny it’ (Cic. Verr. 2.2.152)
   b. aperte enim adulantem nemo non videt
   blatantly in fact flattering:ACC noone:NOM not see:3SG
   ‘no one does not recognize someone who is blatantly flattering’ (Cic. Lael. 99)

I adopt Zeijlstra's (2011) analysis for NIs, according to which the lexical entry of NIs is syntactically complex and can be decomposed into two elements: a negative operator and an indefinite, spelled out as a single unit but able to take scope independently. In Negative Concord (NC) languages, instead, n-words (e.g. It. nessuno, Sp. nadie, Fr. personne, Rom. nimeni) do not introduce a negative operator: they carry a [uNeg] feature which has to enter an Agree relation with the [iNeg] negative marker in NegP, if c-commanded by it (Zeijlstra 2004). Latin NIs always result in the insertion of a negative operator, independently of position; as a fact, they mostly end up preceding the finite verb, above negation.

(iii) As for the negative marker, nōn regularly precedes the finite verb, i.e. in analytical forms (2a) it appears immediately before the auxiliary, not before the participle (cf. Kühner-Stegmann I.1.818). Devine & Stephens (2006: 183), Danckaert (2012a: 23), (2012b) locate the position of Latin nōn above Inflection, Latin being an InfL-final language (2b).

(2) a. Romanus equitatus ipsum quidem regem Elatiae
   Roman:NOM cavalry:NOM himself:ACC then king:ACC Elatea:GEN
I follow Danckaert's (2012a: 310-313, 2012b) analysis for the Infl-final surface order of Latin: according to Danckaert, CL satisfies the EPP requirement of TP by moving the (remnant) v/VP to a specifier of a projection in the split-TP that has to be higher than NegP. In turn, NegP is argued to be higher than the Infl part of TP. This yields Infl-final word orders, assuming independent V-to-Infl in synthetic forms, and derives the position of the NM between the lexical verb and the auxiliary in Infl in analytic forms.

(3) (Danckaert 2012a: 313): [Subj{EPP} [VP S O V ] [Sub]0 [NegP Neg0 [TP T0 tVP ] ] ]

However, unlike Danckaert (2012a,b), who treats nōn as the head of a NegP, I argue that nōn sits in a specifier attached to a projection in the TP-area, above the landing site for the inflected verb. This safeguard was Zeijlstra's 2004, 2011 generalization, according to which negative Xs are predicted not to be available in non-NC languages, and is diachronically more plausible than a post-Infl analysis, given FOFC (Biberauer, Holmberg, Roberts 2014).

A specifier status is diachronically expected for the product of a recent Jespersen's Cycle: nōn < nē + *oinom = īōnum ‘not (even) one’ (cf. Fruyt 2011: 708-723). Moreover, nōn is not a clitic: it counts as ‘full word’ for second-position phenomena (Spevak 2010: 16), and is not necessarily adjacent to the finite verb. It can also adjoin to other phrasal elements in elliptical constructions (vel adest vel non ‘either he comes or he does not’ Plaut. Miles 1019), but this test may be inconclusive, since nōn can also serve as answer to a question (Merchant 2006). Tests related to verb movement are also difficult to apply, since in prohibitions, i.e. the clearest potential case of V-to-C, a different modality-sensitive negator né appears.

(iii) Late Latin In LL the NM nōn stays in the same pre-Infl position in the TP-area; however, it is reanalyzed as a head, following the structure-minimizing tendency known as Spec-to-Head principle (van Gelderen 2004). In a simple negation reading, the [iNeg] Neg0 becomes incompatible with NIs in its c-command domain, since they bring about a negative operator of their own. It can only license NPIs, and this situation prompts the grammaticalization of new [uNeg] n-words. This reconstruction is supported by the fact that ‘old’ NIs become rarer and, despite the general drift towards VO (Ledgeway 2012), object NIs consistently surface pre-Infl, in order not to conflict with the new [iNeg] head.