

From *nec* to *né*: the interaction of focus and negation

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I. In this talk we analyze the syntactic and semantic-pragmatic properties of the particle *nec* / *neque* ‘neither, not even’ in Latin, comparing it with the behavior of *né*, which continues it in Medieval Italo-Romance varieties. We will show how on the one hand this particle displays diachronic stability, as it has the same multifunctional nature both in Latin and in Old Italo-Romance, on the other hand it starts as intrinsically negative, but later develops NPI-properties. Our account supports the idea that the source of linguistic variation is lexical, whereby lexical items have a complex internal structure, which can be totally or partially subject to reanalysis. According to our proposal, in the case at hand reanalysis targets a subpart of the particle’s structure, preserving the outmost layer, which is the one responsible for the diachronic stability of its function.

II. The Latin particle *nec* (the reduced form of *ne-que* < NOT.AND) was a multifunctional item occurring in three contexts at all diachronic stages of the language: (i) it could introduce a clause as a discourse connector; (ii) it could correlate negated constituents of various sizes; (iii) it could attach to a constituent expressing, at the same time, negation and focus (the latter with additive, and later also scalar, interpretation). This behavior is largely paralleled by the situation in Old Italian, where all functions encountered in Latin are attested as well. Here we concentrate on the correlative function (ii) and on the focus-particle use (iii), shown respectively in (1) and (2) for Latin and Old Italian. These are the functions productively continued also in Modern Italian (whereas the discourse-structuring function (i) has become restricted to very formal registers and is subject to substantially different conditions).

- (1) a. *nec* veri simile loquere *nec* verum
and.not true:GEN similar:ACC tell:2SG and.not true:ACC
‘You aren’t telling a true or a likely story’ (Latin, Plaut. Most. 13)
- b. *non* mutò aspetto, *né* mosse collo, *né* piegò sua costa
not change:3SG glance and.not move:3SG neck and.not bend:3SG his chest
‘He did not look away, nor did he move his neck, nor did he bend over’
(Old Italian, Dante, Inf. X.74-75)
- (2) a. *nec* ipse eruptionem cohortium sustinuit
and.not he.himself:NOM sortie:ACC cohort:GEN sustain:3SG
‘(also / even) he did not sustain the cohorts’ sortie’ (Latin, Liv. 23.18.4)
- b. *Anche né* loro non potrebe nuocere
even and.not to.them not could:3SG harm:INF
‘Even they could not be harmed (by that)’ (Old Italian, De Amore volg. 1.18)

According to our analysis, in all its uses, and in both Latin and Old Italian, the particle makes a double contribution: it signals the focused nature of the constituent it associates with and it marks negation. However the actual relation to the logical operator of negation is different in Latin and Old Italian, and represents the crucial innovation undergone by the particle.

III. In Latin *neque* is intrinsically negative; there is a non-mediated relation between the morpho-syntactic expression of negation and the logical operator of negation. In other words, the particle directly realizes the negative operator. In Old Italo-Romance varieties *né* cannot express sentential negation by itself, even when it is found in the pre-T space, unless it is a correlative *né* introducing a CP and licensed by a higher negation (as in 1b). In all the other cases it is combined with the preverbal negator *no(n)* or with a negative adverb like *mai* ‘never’ before the inflected verb, as in (3), a case of correlative *né* in subject position:

- (3) in quello tempo la divina religione *né* umano officio *non* erano avuti in reverenzia
in that time the divine religion and.not human duty not were kept in regard
‘At that time both religion and duties were not respected’ (Old Italian, B. Latini, Rett.)

A survey of all the instances of *né* in Florentine texts of the XIII century in the OVI corpus has shown that when it is used in correlative structures combining two negative clauses, in the 70% of the cases it does not combine with another negative element. However, when it is a discourse connector (i.e. the previous clause is not negative), it is always combined with *non* or another negation. In (4) we provide two examples illustrating these patterns.

- (4) a. sì che **non** vuole **né** agrada lui d'intendere le nostre parole
 so that not want:3SG and not please:3SG him of understand:INF our words
 'So that he does not want nor does he like to understand our words' (B. Latini, Rett.)
 b. perciò in mezzo della via l'uccise; **né** Catone **non** avea podere di difenderlo
 so in middle of the way him=kill:3SG and not C. not have:3SG power of protect=him
 'Therefore he killed him during the journey; and Cato could not protect him'
 (B. Latini, Rett.)

Furthermore, Old Italian and also other varieties display many cases where *né* is used as a simple disjunction in other types of non-veridical contexts (conditionals, subordinate yes/no questions, *before*-clauses). In (5) we provide some examples of this type of *né* in different varieties:

- (5) a. Doma(n)dà se B(er)tuçi dis **né** fe' nient, dis "no"
 asked if B. say:3SG **né** do:3SG nothing say:3SG no
 'Asked whether Bertucci said or did anything, he said "no"
 (Old Venetian, Lio Mazor 22)
 b. si nos aviam sen **né** rason, o poiriam ben saver e veer
 if we have:1PL wits **né** reason him=can:1PL well know:INF and see:INF
 'If we have wits or sense we can see and know him well' (Old Piedmontese, SermSb. 1)
 c. Se vu senti **né** vei che abia a far altro, mandemelo a dir
 if you hear:2PL **né** see:2PL that have:1SG to do:INF other send=to.me=it to say:INF
 'If you hear or see that I should do something else, let me know'
 (Old Mantuan, Boccalata de Bovi, letter)

IV. We analyze data like those in (5) as evidence that *né* behaves like other n-words, that is it is a special type of NPI, and it is subject to Negative Concord. Adopting the view that n-words are only partially negative (Muller 1991; Ladusaw 1992) and that Negative Concord is a type of syntactic agreement (Zeijlstra 2004; 2008), we assume that *né* carries some uninterpretable negative feature that has to be checked against another negative element that carries an interpretable formal negative feature. Under this view we propose the analysis in (6) for the diachronic change from *neque* to *né*.

- (6) a. [&P -que [Op-P ne- [XP]]]
 [Neg]
 b. [&P *né* [Op-P *né* [XP]]]
 [uNeg]

In Latin (a double negation language) the *ne-* morpheme in *neque/nec* is intrinsically negative and only moves over *-que* at PF for prosodic reasons (*-que* is an enclitic). In Old Italo-Romance the phonologically reduced *né* is re-analysed as the lexicalization of the higher additive/focus component of the particle (Roberts and Roussou 2003), and this also corresponds to the change from [Neg] to [uNeg]. However, since the higher portion of the structure is preserved, the particle keeps its relation with focus. This analysis also sheds some light on the diachronic development of other n-words (like *nessuno* 'nobody', or *niente* 'nothing') which are all formed through the grammaticalization of *neque/nec* plus a restrictor, that is a focalized DP structure.

Selected References

- Muller, C. 1991. *La Négation en français*. Geneva, Droz.
 Zeijlstra, H. 2004. *Sentential Negation and Negative Concord*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Amsterdam.
 OVI database consulted at gattoweb.ovi.cnr.it