0. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to compare the properties of negative concord (NC) in various French-related dialects to analyze better the factors that condition and limit observed micro-parametric variations. We examine both synchronic and diachronic Standard French (SF) in relation to Quebec French (QF) and French-based Creoles (FBC). The French dialects in example (1) make use of apparently identical negative expressions (N-words, Laka 1991) and yet manifest strikingly different NC properties:

(1) a. Je (n’) ai vu personne. Standard French (synchronic and diachronic)
    b. J’ai pas vu personne. Quebec French
    c. Mwen pa wè pèsonn. Haitian Creole

For instance, the copresence of sentential negation with N-words is obligatory in FBC, fairly standard in QF, possible in diachronic SF, but excluded in contemporary SF. Furthermore, there is comparable diversity for other properties of NC, such as double negation, licensing in NPI contexts, locality, and modification possibilities. Following Jespersen (1917), it has been repeatedly claimed in the literature that observed cross-linguistic differences in NC could be attributed to the differing properties of sentential negation (Zanuttini 1997). In contrast, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate, following Déprez (2000), that the key to NC variation resides in the syntactic/semantic properties of the concord expressions themselves, that is, the N-words, and more specifically in their internal structure. The central theses that this work supports are as follows:

* This research has been partly funded by a SHHRC grant (No. 410-2001-0119). Authors’ names are listed alphabetically. We would like to thank LSRL participants for comments and suggestions. Many thanks also to our research assistant Mélanie Lamarche for help collecting the data.
• The properties of concord are determined by the properties of N-words, not by the properties of sentential negation;
• There is a syntax-semantic interface internal to N-expressions; and
• Micro-parametric variation is governed by this interface.

Evidence for these points comes from a variety of converging sources. Our empirical comparison reveals that distinctions in the semantic properties of N-words go along with distinctions in their internal syntax. Déprez (2000) argued that SF N-words manifest characteristic properties of determiners and are located in the upper layers of DP structure and that, in contrast, Haitian Creole N-words manifest properties that most resemble those of bare NPs and are located in the lowest layer of nominal structure. This chapter provides further confirmation for such a syntactic distinction among N-words based on diachronic and synchronic studies. As is well known, French N-words started out as indefinite positive expressions that gradually acquired a negative value. Our careful study of a number of French diachronic corpora\(^1\) demonstrates that this change goes hand in hand with changes in syntactic properties. This study provides evidence that French N-words have undergone a syntactic change that affected their positions in the hierarchical DP structure and argue that this evolution, rather than the changes affecting sentential negation, is at the basis of the changing semantic properties of French NC. Similarly, Quebec French NC is shown to manifest properties that are intermediate between those of SF and those of FBC, providing a synchronic instantiation of what was presumably a diachronic stage of SF. The synchronic and diachronic comparative evidence provided here questions traditional views of NC as being governed by the nature of sentential negation (Jespersen 1917; Zanuttini 1997) or as a mere lexical ambiguity between positive and negative N-words (Longobardi 1991; Herburger 2002). It shows instead that the key to NC variation is the internal syntax of N-words.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, arguments supporting the central thesis of Déprez (2000) are summarized, based on an empirical comparison of two extremely diverging cases of NC, Standard French and Martinique Creole. Although using virtually identical N-words, the two languages have strikingly distinct NC properties. Following Déprez (1999, 2000), these NC properties can be explained by the distinct structural nature of their N-words. Second, the proposed structural distinction is further put to the test with the study of Modern Quebec French NC, which presents mixed properties with respect to

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\(^1\) Our sources are listed at the end of the chapter.
the first two cases. The final test offered is that of time, with a study of the diachronic evolution of *aucun*.

1. **Spelling out the background: Two extreme cases**

1.1 *N*-words in Standard French

This section reviews the properties of French *N*-words that form the core of our comparison.² Perhaps the most salient property of expressions like *rien* and *personne* is their apparent ambiguity. They seem, on the one hand, to have an intrinsic negative value (2a) and, on the other hand, to behave like positive dependent elements, that is, indefinite expressions in the scope of negation (2b):

\[(2)\]
\[\text{a. } \text{Qui as-tu rencontré ici? Personne.} \]
\[\text{“Who did you meet here? No one.”} \]
\[\text{b. } \text{Je n’ai jamais rencontré personne ici.} \]
\[\text{“I have never met anyone here.”} \]

In their indefinite value, *N*-words closely resemble NPI expressions like *qui que ce soit* “whoever” and *le moindre* “the least,” a similarity at the basis of their common analysis in much of the recent literature on NC. Many authors (Ladusaw 1992; Giannakidou 1998, among others) analyze NC as a special case of NPI licensing. These analyses, however, have neglected important differences that clearly distinguish these two types of expressions in SF. Example (3) shows that French *N*-words strongly contrast with NPI in being largely incompatible with sentential negation. More precisely, when co-occurring with sentential negation, French *N*-words have only a double-negation interpretation, not a concord one, so that example (3), as logic dictates, only has a positive interpretation:

\[(3)\]
\[\text{Il n’a pas rencontré personne.} \]
\[\text{“He did not meet no one.”} \]

Example (3) clearly shows that SF *N*-words, in contrast with NPIs and Italian/Spanish *N*-words, cannot take scope under sentential negation. Sequences of *N*-words like those in (4a) also clearly differ from sequences involving an NPI. In addition to a concord reading, paraphrased in (4b), (4a) can have a double negative reading, paraphrased in (4c):

\[\text{2 Deletion of *ne* in Modern French depends on social contexts. In Standard French, *ne* is still retained while in vernacular French, it is often deleted (Ashby 2001).} \]

\[(4)\]
\[\text{a. } \text{Il n’a pas rencontré personne ici.} \]
\[\text{“He did not meet no one here.”} \]
\[\text{b. } \text{Je n’ai jamais rencontré personne ici.} \]
\[\text{“I have never met anyone here.”} \]
\[\text{c. } \text{Je ne n’ai jamais rencontré personne ici.} \]
\[\text{“I have never met no one here.”} \]
(4) a. *Personne ne commet aucune erreur.
   “No one makes no error.”
   b. *Personne ne commet la moindre erreur.
   “No one makes any error/ the slightest error.”
   c. Tout le monde commet au moins une erreur.
   “Every one makes at least one error.”

A double-negative reading is never available for sequences containing an NPI (4b). There are yet further differences. For instance, (5a) shows that N-words can be modified by adverbs like absolument and presque, frequently (but wrongly) assumed to modify only universal quantifiers. Example (5b) shows that French NPIs, in contrast, do not support modifications of this kind:

(5) a. Je n’ai vu absolument/presque personne.
   “I have seen absolutely/ almost no one.”
   b. *Je n’ai pas vu absolument/presque qui que ce soit.
   “I have not seen absolutely/ almost anyone.”

In standard NPI licensing contexts, while NPIs have a positive indefinite interpretation, SF N-words maintain a context-independent negative interpretation, as shown in (6).

(6) a. Si tu vois qui que ce soit/ personne, dis-le-moi.
   “If you see anyone/ no one, tell me.”

Example (7) shows that the locality conditions governing concord readings in N-word sequences are far more restricted than those governing the dependency between an NPI and its licenser. The former are limited to a single proposition, whereas the latter span over a wider context, typical of long-distance dependencies. That is, as (7a) shows, the relationship [ne …. N-word] and concord readings must be established within the boundary of a single clause. For NPI, however, if c-command is respected, NPIs and licensors may occur in distinct clausal domains.

(7) a. *Je ne veux que tu fasses rien.
   “I (ne) want that you do nothing.”
   b. Je ne veux pas que tu fasses quoi que ce soit.
   “I don’t want that you do anything.”
Déprez (1997, 1999, 2000) proposed an analysis of NC that accounts for the properties in (2)-(7) and, specifically, for the double-negative readings that cannot be explained through NPI-type analysis. SF N-words are analyzed as cardinal negative quantifiers and argued to be similar in their properties to numerals like zero: Both have intrinsic quantificational and anti-additive properties. This analysis covers (3)-(6) immediately. Since N-words are intrinsically anti-additive (negative) (i.e., similar to standard English negative quantifiers nothing, nobody), double-negative readings are expected for both sequences of N-words and N-words co-occurring with sentential negation. Surprising from this point of view is the concord interpretation of (2b). To account for this reading, Déprez extends May’s (1989) analysis of resumptive quantification. For May, any sequence of quantifiers \[Q_1 \ldots Q_n\] of similar nature can have two interpretations: (a) a sequential interpretation, in which quantifiers have scope over one another \[Q_1 > \ldots Q_n\], and (b) a resumptive interpretation obtained through the formation of a single polyadic quantifier that binds several variable at once \[Q_1\ldots n (x_1\ldots x_n)\]. For negative quantifiers, the two interpretations derive two very distinct readings. The sequential interpretation derives a multiple-negation reading since the negative value of each quantifier is computed independently. The resumptive interpretation, in contrast, derives a concord reading because, in a single polyadic quantifier, the negative value is computed only once. Déprez’ resumptive quantification analysis of French NC has a number of advantages over an NPI analysis. As May argues, only quantifiers sufficiently similar in nature can form a complex polyadic quantifier. Since sentential negation and N-words are clearly distinct elements—the former is a propositional operator, the latter a variable-binding quantifier—their association fails to support the formation of a polyadic quantifier. This correctly predicts that a sequence containing negation will always have a double-negative (sequential) interpretation, never a concord (i.e., polyadic) interpretation. The analysis further predicts that, if some operation could impose a scope structure on an N-word sequence, the double-negative reading would prevail, the resumptive reading being by definition scopeless with respect to a sequence. This prediction is verified. As Corblin (1994), Déprez (1997, 2000), and Vinet (1998) have observed, various stress/focus conditions on N-word sequences clearly favor a double-negation
reading. Because of May’s ‘similarity condition,’ the analysis also predicts that the more similar the members of a sequence, the easier it should be to form a polyadic quantifier. In other words, in a sequence of N-words, similarity favors the concord reading and differences favor double negation. In conformity with this prediction, Déprez (2000) observes that in SF, the concord reading is most salient when participating N-words are all bare quantifiers (8a), and clearly harder in less parallel cases (8b):

(8) a. *Personne n’a rien dit à personne.*
“No one said anything to anyone.”

b. *Personne ne commet aucune erreur.*
“No one makes any /no mistake.”

Finally, under the resumptive analysis, locality conditions are reduced to scope constraints. It is proposed that ‘resumption’ only succeeds among quantifiers with the same scope domain. Only quantifiers that are members of the same proposition can form a single polyadic quantifier, which correctly predicts that concord readings are bounded.

1.2 N-words in Martinique Creole

This section discusses the properties of N-words in Martinique Creole (MC) in comparison with those of SF. Quite strikingly, the MC N-words *personn*, *anyen*, and so on look, so to speak, lexically identical to those of SF and share the ability to have a negative value in isolation as an elliptical answer to a question (9):

(9) *Kimoun ou wè an fet tala? Personn.*
“Who did you see at this party? No one.”

Important differences emerge, however, with N-words in sequences. As (10) shows, sequences of an N-word with the negation *pa* only have a concord reading, never a double-negation one.

(10) *Man pa wè anyen.*
“I did not see anything.”

In declarative sentences, *pa* must in fact be present with N-words in all syntactic positions. Clearly, MC N-words manifest a strong dependency on negation, just like NPI.
Similarly, sequences of multiple N-words only have a concord reading in MC, never a double-negation reading. Furthermore, in typical NPI-licensing contexts like (12), MC N-words have a positive indefinite meaning, not a negative one:

(12) a. Yes/no question:

Es u we **personn** bon maten an?

“Did you see anyone this morning?”

Together, these facts suggest that MC N-words do not have an intrinsic negative meaning, but rather a context-dependent one. They always scope under negation and other licensors, appearing much closer to standard NPs than to true negative quantifiers. Also similar to NPs, MC N-words do not support adverbial modification by *almost* or *absolutely*, and they can be licensed in nonlocal contexts by a distant negation. Table 1 summarizes their properties as compared to SF.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Standard French</th>
<th>Martinique Creole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative value</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double negation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modification</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locality</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPI contexts</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negation compatibility</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Standard French and Martinique Creole properties

Table 1 shows that, apart from the negative value of (9), CM N-words and SF N-words have opposite properties. For the largely identical case of Haitian Creole N-words, Déprez (1999) argues that the different NC properties stem from the distinct internal structure of the nominal expressions in these languages. Bare nouns without determiners are excluded in French argument positions (*J’ai mangé pommes “I ate apples”) but are extremely common in FBC. Although N-words such as *rien* and *personne* seemingly take the form of bare nouns in both languages, Déprez shows that they have in fact opposite internal structures. French N-words are determiner-like in nature and occupy a high position in the functional structure of nominal expressions (13a). Creole

3 For a discussion of comparable facts in Haitian Creole, see Déprez (1992, 1999). See also DeGraff (1993) for a different analysis of NC in HC.
N-words behave more like bare nouns, with a low position in the nominal structure and a null determiner (13b):

\[
\begin{align*}
(13) \ a. \ [\text{DP} \ \text{personne} \ [\text{NP} \ \emptyset]] & \quad \text{French N-words} \\
 b. \ [\text{DP} \ \emptyset \ [\text{NP} \ \text{personn}]] & \quad \text{MC N-words}^4
\end{align*}
\]

French N-words are autonomous quantificational determiners or bare quantifiers, while Creole N-words are context-dependent expressions for their licensing and interpretation, the null determiner being a variable that requires appropriate binding. Accordingly, there are two distinct types of NC: (a) a quantificational type that arises between autonomous negative quantifiers when a single polyadic quantifier is formed and (b) a dependent type that spells out a variable-binding relation semantically close to that of NPI licensing. These two types of negative concord illustrate the two extreme structures that N-words may take and form the two extreme poles of negative relations, but variation between the two poles may occur as determined by the inner syntax of N-words and a corresponding changing semantic interpretation. The higher an N-word is in the functional DP structure, the closer it will be to negative quantifiers, and vice versa. Within this perspective, a change from a positive interpretation (MC) to a negative one (SF) can be understood as a change in the internal structure of N-words that arises from the movement of the N-word up the functional DP structure.

2. *Extending the results*

2.1 *Quebec French N-words: An intermediate case*

N-words in Quebec French are lexically identical to those of SF. Moreover, like them, they can have a negative value in both interrogative and declarative contexts, as in (14):

\[
\begin{align*}
(14) \ a. \ \text{As-tu vu quelqu’un ici hier soir? Personne.} & \quad \text{“Did you see anyone here yesterday night?”} \\
 b. \ \text{Il a aucun droit.} & \quad \text{“He has no rights.”}
\end{align*}
\]

Contrasted with SF, however, QF N-words are compatible with the sentential negation *pas*, as in (15).^5

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^4 The DP structure in these schemas is simplified for expository reasons. In general, D positions in this chapter should be understood as referring to various functional non-N positions, such as NumP.

^5
The copresence of *pas* with a QF N-word induces a concord reading, not a double-negative one. Yet the presence of the negation is optional in QF, not obligatory. There is an interesting asymmetry in the distribution of negation, similar to the distributional asymmetry observed in Italian (Zanuttini 1997). *Pas* can co-occur with an N-word in postverbal position (16), but not with one that precedes the verb (16) (see also Di Sciullo & Tremblay 1996).

(16) a. **Rien (ne) m’arrive pas.**
   “Nothing happens to me.”

In QF, sequences of N-words like the ones found in example (17) can optionally include the sentential negation *pas*, but do not generally allow for a double-negative reading (18b):

(17) a. **Personne (n’) a (pas) pu rien nous dire.**
   “No one could tell us anything.”

   b. **Aucun n’*enfant* (n’) a (pas) rien mangé.** (no double negation)
   “No child has eaten anything.”

Moreover, in characteristic NPI contexts, N-words can still have a positive reading in QF, as in (18):

(18) a. **Yes/no question:**
   *T’as-tu vu aucun chien dans les parages?*
   “Did you see any dog in the neighborhood?”

   b. **Conditional:**
   *Si tu vois aucun étudiant, appelle-nous.*
   “If you see any student, call us.”

   c. **Negative predicates:**
   *Elle refuse de dire aucun mot à la police.*
   “She refuses to say anything to the police.”

---

5 In Modern QF, deletion of *ne* is rather systematic (Sankoff & Vincent 1977).
d. Temporal adverbs:

Avant de faire aucune chose de final, tu ferais bien mieux de réfléchir.

“Before doing anything final, you’d better think about it.”

Regarding modification possibilities and locality constraints, QF seems to present a mixed picture. When N-words occur alone, without pas, they seem to have an intrinsic negative value and, accordingly, can be modified by almost or absolutely (19a). This modification, however, is unacceptable in the copresence of an N-word and the sentential negation pas (19b):

(19) a. Je (n’) ai rencontré presque aucun chum.
    “I met almost no friend.”

b. *Je (n’) ai pas rencontré presque aucun chum.
    “I did not meet almost any friend.”

Similarly for locality conditions, the dependent N-word can occur a long distance from pas if it is present, that is, in a lower proposition (20a). However, if only ne is present, the distance from a related N-word is restricted to a single propositional domain (20b).

(20) a. Il (ne) faut pas [que je prenne aucun coup ce soir].
    “It must not be that I take any hit tonight.”

b. *Il ne faut [que je prenne aucun coup ce soir].

These facts suggest that QF N-words are ambiguous. In some cases, they function like independent negative quantifiers, as in the simple declarative context in (14b). In other cases, as in NPI contexts, they function as dependent elements similar to standard NPI. QF N-words thus seem to have properties that are intermediate between those of SF and those of MC. Table 2 highlights this situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>SF</th>
<th>MC</th>
<th>QF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative value</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double negation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modification</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locality</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPI contexts</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentential negation compatibility</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes but not obligatory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Standard French, Martinique Creole, and Quebec French properties
The distribution in Table 2 would follow if QF N-words had an ambiguous structure, occurring either in a determiner-like position as in (13a) or dominated by a null determiner as in (13b). This structural ambiguity is expected if, as hypothesized by Dépr ez (2000), N-words can move up the DP structure. Movement to D would be obligatory in SF, impossible in MC, and optional in QF, deriving the observed differences. From this point of view, the existence of an intermediate case like QF, where an internal movement of N-words is possible but not obligatory, brings further evidence to the proposed structural distinction. However, recent syntactic models have suggested that movement is never optional. A closer look shows that the QF NC data may in fact confirm this view. Note that if QF N-words could freely have either structure (13a) or (13b), they should have the properties of SF and MC combined. But this is not exactly the case. As noted earlier, sequences of N-words in QF do not seem to allow a double-negation reading. This apparent anomaly suggests that structure (13b) is obligatory whenever an N-word is c-commanded by another negative element, so that the distribution of (13a) and (13b) is governed by the principle in (21):

(21) When null D is licensed, N-word movement to D does not occur, otherwise it is obligatory.

In other words, N-word movement is a last-resort strategy that eliminates (13b) wherever null D fails to be licensed. On this view, movement is obligatory when it is necessary, and impossible otherwise, as expected from a Minimalist Program perspective. This approach makes an interesting prediction. Within a sequence, an N-word c-commanding another should have the structure (13a), and the second one the structure (13b). Recall the aforementioned asymmetry in the co-occurrence of QF N-words with sentential negation. This asymmetry can now be explained in the following way: An N-word in a subject position c-commands negation but is not c-commanded by it, and therefore cannot be licensed by it. Such an N-word must then have the structure in (13a), which predicts that it will function like a SF N-word, expectedly disallowing the copresence of negation. On the other hand, as N-words in complement position are c-commanded by negation, they can have the structure (13b). Their null D is licensed so that co-occurrence with negation is expected. (The reader is invited to verify that the proposal accounts for the remaining observed properties of QF negative concord, as space limitations do not permit us to do so here.)
2.2 Time will tell

Perhaps the best-known feature of the evolution of French N-words is their semantic change from positive to negative terms. *Pas* started out as the positive noun “step,” *rien* as “thing,” *personne* as “people,” and so on, but they all ended up negative, meaning respectively “no,” “nothing,” and “no one.” While carefully retracing the diachrony of these terms, we have observed that this well-known semantic change goes hand in hand with much less discussed morphosyntactic changes. Since space constraints prevent a detailed exposition, this chapter presents a main outline of this co-evolution, focusing more particularly on the N-word *aucun* (see Martineau & Déprez in press, for *rien*). In unpublished work, Schnedecker and Prévost (2002) also studied the evolution of *aucun*, focusing solely on its morphosyntactic properties. Their thorough data complemented ours. The main empirical results of our study and the analysis suggested for these results are respectively displayed in Tables 3 and 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OF-MF</th>
<th>1. <em>aucun</em> ➔ Sing/Pl &amp; Mod/Pro</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16th, 17th, 19th c.</td>
<td>2. <em>aucun</em> ➔ Decrease in Pl &amp; Pro</td>
<td>Indeterminate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th-20th c.</td>
<td>3. <em>aucun</em> ➔ Reduction to Sing Det</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Main results; the change in semantic value correlates with a morphosyntactic change in N-words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>There is a cycle</th>
<th><em>aucun</em>: D0/Spec DP +Q Positive</th>
<th>Positive polarity item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>aucun</em></td>
<td>Adjectival - Q</td>
<td>Negative polarity item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>aucun</em></td>
<td>D +Q Negative</td>
<td>Negative quantifier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Suggested analysis

Table 3 shows that *aucun* had a positive meaning in Old French (OF) and Middle French (MF) that seems linked to an increased use of its plural and pronominal forms, adding up to almost half of its total uses by the MF period. That is, *aucun* in MF occurred almost as often as a pronoun as it did as a noun modifier and as much in the plural as in the singular. In Table 4, *aucun*, in this initial phase, occupied a determiner position in the nominal structure, and is a positive independent existential pronominal/determiner quantifier, similar to the current *quelqu’un* “someone,” itself a positive polarity item. In a subsequent phase, we observe that the plural and the pronominal forms start to decrease, while the meaning of *aucun* changes to become indeterminate and context dependent (NPI). *Aucun* becomes a dependent element with no

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6 If not specifically mentioned, the data are from our own corpora; otherwise, we indicated Schnedecker and Prévost (2002). Sometimes, as we indicated, we present their data following our own format (e.g., Table 6).
intrinsic quantificational force. During this phase, aucun occupies a low adjectival position in the nominal structure, leaving the D° position empty. Characteristically during this period, constructions like (22) are common where aucun is used in opposition to autre (see Schnedecker & Prévost for the data), analyzed as an adjectival element in Eguren and Sanchez (2003):

(22) Les aulcuns... les autres...

In its final phase, aucun is almost exclusively singular and a determiner, having essentially lost the capacity to be pluralized and be used as a pronoun. Aucun becomes independent again and negative on its own, taking on the intrinsic quantificational properties that characterize current French N-words. In this last phase, aucun climbed back up the functional structure of its nominal constituent, becoming invariable and strongly quantificational, similar morphosyntactically to the universal quantifier chacun. The evolution of aucun corresponds to a cycle during which it changes position inside the nominal structure. The study proposes that aucun begins its life as a positive specifier of DP with an intrinsic quantificational force and shows that aucun at this time could take scope over negation, like a typical positive polarity item. Later on, aucun moves down the nominal structure, taking on the value of an adjective without quantificational force. This downward move correlates with the decrease of its pronominal use. Adjectival aucun plausibly has a null determiner as in (14b), which accounts for its context-dependent interpretation, positive in NPI contexts, negative under the scope of negation. Finally, aucun moves back up the DP, this time perhaps to a D/Num head position, taking on a negative meaning that seems linked in part to its incapacity to be pluralized, while having a distributive meaning and full quantificational force. This move back up the nominal structure could be prompted by the gradual loss of null determiners in French.

This is obviously a schematized and simplified approach to the evolution of aucun. Often, the different stages of this evolution are not as clear as the analysis predicts. However, this proposal has the merit of linking syntactic changes with semantic changes in a way that accounts for differences observed elsewhere and is compatible with the diachronic facts, to which we now turn.

In OF and MF, aucun is positive with a meaning comparable to that of some, and is rarely used in polarity or negative contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Positive C.</th>
<th>Polarity C.</th>
<th>Negative C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OF and MF</td>
<td>73.4% (463/630)</td>
<td>14.8% (100/630)</td>
<td>10.6% (67/630)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Frequency of aucun in positive, polarity, and negative contexts in OF and MF
**Aucun** is mostly used without *ne* (23a) and, when it occurs in a negative context it can maintain a positive meaning. Notably, in (23b) **aucun** has scope over negation, behaving like a positive polarity item.

(23) a. *Mais* **alcuns** *quis* *vit* esbuschier  
_*Le curut al rei acuinter* (Brut, 9075-76) (Buridant 2000:179)  
“But some who saw them hide ran to announce it to the king”

b. *Or ne porront* **pas** *dire* **aucuns** *ke j'ai antes*  
_*Ke d'aler a Paris soie por nient vantés*_ (Feuillée, 5-6) (Buridant 2000:179)  
“Some of those I have known could not say that I boasted in vain of having gone to Paris.”

In OF and MF **aucun** can be a determiner or a pronoun and can be singular or plural. While the singular determiner form dominates in OF, there is a gradual increase of the pronominal and plural forms so that in MF, the distribution of all these distinct forms becomes even (Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Sing</th>
<th>Pl</th>
<th>Det</th>
<th>Pro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OF</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MF</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Frequency of **aucun** as a singular/plural term and as a determinant/pronoun in OF and MF (adapted from Schnedecker & Prévost 2002)

**Aucun**, be it a noun modifier (24a) or a pronoun (24b), occasionally appears with a preceding determiner.

(24) a. *Premièrement, les aucuns espreviers* *se perchent* tout droit et sont *moult esveilliez* (Le Mesnagier de Paris, 1394. p 150; in Schnedecker and Prévost)  
“First, some sparrow hawks perch straight up and are very awake.”

b. *Nus ne se doit merveiller se les aucunes* *se departent* de leur maris  
(Coust. Beauv. Moignet 1984, 176)  
“No one must be surprised if some get rid of their husbands.”

Occasionally, **aucun** occurs postnominally as a noun modifier. This post-nominal construction undergoes a sharp increase during the 16th century (see Table 11), a fact we believe to be significant, and which we return to later.
(25) *Mais il n’y a occasion aucune entre nous deux* (Navarre, La Coche, p. 186)
“But there isn’t occasion any between both of us.”

It is clear that in constructions such as (24a) and (24b), *aucun* does not occupy a determiner position, the D position being respectively occupied by an overt determiner in (24a) and presumably empty in (25). *Aucun* must then occupy a lower position in the DP structure as a modifier of some sort. The increasing frequency of such constructions marks the start of a structural change in the position of *aucun* within DP, beginning a descent from a positive SpecD to a lower adjectival-like position.

In correlation with this structural change, the 16th and 17th centuries manifest a change in the interpretation of *aucun*. There is a steady increase in the indeterminate interpretation, as *aucun* now appears more and more frequently in negative and polarity contexts and much less as a positive element. Table 7 provides an interesting contrast with Table 5. Even in a limited corpora, data in Table 7 (and Tables 8 to 11) show clearly the tendency for these periods. Notice that, from the 16th century, the positive interpretation of *aucun* is no longer primary, and that by the 17th century, it has dwindled to an almost insignificant proportion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Positive C.</th>
<th>Polarity C.</th>
<th>Negative C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16th c.</td>
<td>21.3% (25/117)</td>
<td>30% (35/117)</td>
<td>48.7% (57/117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th c.</td>
<td>3.5% (7/200)</td>
<td>27.5% (55/200)</td>
<td>69% (138/200)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Frequency of *aucun* in positive, polarity, and negative contexts, 16th and 17th c.

Some of the most commonly found polarity contexts are illustrated in (26) (cf. also Fournier 1998):

(26) a. *Yes-no question:*

*Penses-tu qu’aucun d’eux songe à nous faire mal?*

b. *Conditional:*

*s’il est aucun respect ni pouvoir qui m’arrête…*

c. *Factive predicates:*

*J’aurai regret d’en épargner aucune*

d. *Negative predicates:*

*Vous n’avez pas lieu d’en prendre aucun soupçon*

*Dieu ne vous a pas mise en ce monde pour aucun besoin*
e. Consecutive:
*Ma fille est d'une race trop pleine de vertus pour se porter jamais à faire aucune chose*

The 16th and 17th centuries are characterized by a growing systemization of the correlation between the morphosyntactic forms of *aucun* with its interpretations. On the morphosyntactic front, Table 8 shows that, while the proportion of singular forms of *aucun* steadily increases, the plural forms begin to recede. Simultaneously, the noun-modifier use increases and the pronominal use decreases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Sing</th>
<th>Pl</th>
<th>Mod</th>
<th>Pro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16th c.</td>
<td>71.8% (84)</td>
<td>28.2% (33)</td>
<td>65% (76)</td>
<td>35% (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th c.</td>
<td>93.5% (187)</td>
<td>6.5% (13)</td>
<td>86% (172)</td>
<td>14% (14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Frequency of *aucun* as singular/plural term, noun modifier/pronoun, 16th and 17th c.

If pronouns are in D°, the observed decrease of this form supports the hypothesis that *aucun* is slowly moving away from a D position to take on a modifier role within DP. It is then particularly interesting to note that the changes in the interpretation of *aucun* observed in Table 7 correlate with the changes of forms observed in Table 8. Table 9 shows that the increasing singular noun-modifier form is more frequently used in negative and polarity contexts, and very rarely in positive contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Positive C.</th>
<th>Polarity C.</th>
<th>Negative C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16th c.</td>
<td>Sing</td>
<td>0% (--</td>
<td>21.1% (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pl</td>
<td>10.5% (8)</td>
<td>5.3% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th c.</td>
<td>Sing</td>
<td>0% (--</td>
<td>28.5% (49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pl</td>
<td>2.3% (4)</td>
<td>1.2% (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Frequency of *aucun* as a noun-modifying form in positive, polarity, and negative contexts, 16th and 17th c.

Table 10 shows that the decreasing pronouns are more frequently plural in positive readings, and singular in polarity and negative contexts. A correlation is clearly emerging between the noun-modifier and singular uses of *aucun* and its negative and polarity readings. Positive readings in contrast become confined to the decreasing plural and pronominal forms.
Table 10: Frequency of aucun as pronoun in positive, polarity, and negative contexts, 16th and 17th c.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Positive C.</th>
<th>Polarity C.</th>
<th>Negative C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16th c.</td>
<td>Sing</td>
<td>2.5% (1)</td>
<td>34.2% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pl</td>
<td>39% (16)</td>
<td>2.4% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th c.</td>
<td>Sing</td>
<td>0% (--,--)</td>
<td>14.3% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pl</td>
<td>10.7% (3)</td>
<td>0% (--,--)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Raw numbers of aucun in pre-and postnominal positions in 16th c.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>16th c.</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Polarity C.</th>
<th>Negative C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aucun N</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N aucun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(27) Aucuns disoient que c’etoient des pretres (La Fontaine)
“Some say that these were priests.”

Further interesting evidence of a correlation between morphosyntax and interpretation emerges when the noun-modifier aucun is focused on. As noted earlier, there is a significant increase in the postnominal position of aucun in the 16th century. Even more interesting is the fact that, as Table 11 shows, this postnominal position occurs more frequently in a negative or polarity context than in a positive one.

In positive contexts, the prenominal position is clearly favored, while in negative and polarity contexts, slightly more than half of the occurrences of aucun are in postnominal position. This tendency to correlate the postnominal position with the polarity/negative interpretation strongly supports the idea that aucun acquires an indeterminate context-dependent interpretation when it is adjectival, the postnominal position being, indeed, unambiguously adjectival. With adjectival aucun, DP plausibly contains a null determiner, as in the structure (13b), which predicts a context-dependent interpretation, if null determiners are binding-requiring variables.

The 19th and 20th centuries are most clearly characterized by the disappearance of both the plural and the pronominal forms. In other words, the singular noun-modifier use that started to increase in the 16th century now becomes fully dominant (cf. Table 12).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Sing</th>
<th>Pl</th>
<th>Det/Adj (masc)</th>
<th>Pro (masc)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19th-20th c.</td>
<td>99.9% (23,574)</td>
<td>0.1% (189)</td>
<td>84% (1,274)</td>
<td>16% (244)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Frequency of aucun as a singular/plural term; as a determiner/adjective/pronoun in 19th and 20th c. (adapted from Schnedecker & Prévost 2002)
The plural use has almost entirely disappeared. Interestingly, 20th-century *aucun* is not strictly singular because it occurs with mass nouns: It appears underspecified for number, as in (28):

(28) a. *Il n’a aucun argent.*
    “He has no money.”

Table 13 shows (compare with Table 7) that the positive uses of *aucun* have all but disappeared. Our corpus contains no occurrence of it, yet for most current speakers a late-developing and particularly interesting positive form of *aucun* is still available, and it must be preceded by the marker *d’*, as in (29).

(29) *D’aucuns pensent que l’on devrait toujours éviter la guerre.*
    “Some think that war should always be avoided.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods</th>
<th>Positive C.</th>
<th>Polarity C.</th>
<th>Negative C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18th c.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20.4% (98)</td>
<td>79.6% (479)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th c.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17.1% (81)</td>
<td>82.9% (390)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th c.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>15.8% (38)</td>
<td>84.2% (201)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 13:** Frequency of *aucun* in positive, polarity, and negative contexts, 18th, 19th, and 20th c.

The form in example (29) is quite interesting as it shows that the only modern positive form of *aucun* is one in which the determiner position is occupied. The only modern positive form of *aucun* is one in which the determiner position is occupied. 7 *Aucun* may be in a low DP position but, as *D* is occupied, the interpretation is fixed, not context dependent.

Table 13 also shows that the use of *aucun* in polarity contexts is decreasing. A closer look at the data reveals that, for the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, the main polarity context used is with the preposition *sans*. When this context is excluded (it was analyzed as a possible resumptive structure in de Swart & Sag 2002), the frequency of *aucun* in polarity contexts nears 0% in the 20th century.

In the 17th century, *aucun* was still used as a polarity item, but in the 18th century this use decreased, while the use of purely negative meaning was increasing. As shown in Martineau and Mougeon (2003), deletion of *ne* became prevalent only during the 19th century. In other words, *ne* deletion seems to have followed the meaning change in *aucun*, not to have caused it. (See also Martineau & Vinet 2003 for an analysis of presence/absence of *ne* in interrogative and exclamative contexts.) It thus seems that the rise of the

7 There are also positive forms for N-words like *rien* and *personne* in SF all with an overt determiner: *Un petit rien le dérange* “A little something bothers him,” *Une personne... “one/a person.”
negative meaning of *aucun* correlates not with the weakening of negation, but more significantly with the disappearance of its plural form and perhaps more generally with the disappearance of null determiners in the language. Its invariability suggests that *aucun* may have climbed back up the nominal structure, again becoming an independent quantifier similar to *chacun*. Its resulting negative value may perhaps be explained in terms of a proposal by Postal (2000), who suggests that all indefinite terms contain sets of negative features that can either annihilate one another (positive value), create a negative dependency (NPI), or be reinforced (pure negative value). However, why the negative value of these features should correlate with a high position in the determiner structure still needs to be understood better, as does the role that number plays in these instances.\(^8\) At this point in our diachronic inquiry, however, this question must be left for further study. To conclude this section, Table 14 summarizes the suggested analysis of the facts presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OF</td>
<td><em>Aucun</em> = Positive existential Q = PPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MF</td>
<td><em>Aucun</em> = D(^0) increase of pronoun (and plural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16(^{th}) c.</td>
<td><em>Aucun</em> becomes adjectival = weak or strong numeral indefinite, quantificational or predicative. When weak, it no longer is in D(^0) (postnominal).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17(^{th}) c.</td>
<td>Adjectival <em>aucun</em> is increasing: Pronoun and plural are losing ground. D(^0) is emptied. A dependency emerges that parallels the dependency of bare nouns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18(^{th})-19(^{th}) c.</td>
<td>Disappearance of <em>aucun</em> in D(^0). D(^0) is null. It must be legitimized (NPI) or filled (<em>d’aucuns</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20(^{th}) c.</td>
<td>New change: Invariable (singular) <em>aucun</em> climbs back into D(^0) but now with a negative value.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: *Scenario of the evolution of aucun*

3. **Conclusion**

This chapter presented a comparative landscape of the NC properties in a variety of francophone dialects and historical states and has proposed an analysis that relies on the internal structure of N-words to account for the observed diversity. Two structures have been proposed: (13a) locates the N-word in a quantificational determiner-like position and (13b) assumes, on the

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\(^8\) A full explanation as to how the negative value arises is yet to be provided. We could, as others do, simply add or activate an arbitrary [+Neg] feature to motivate the movement of N-words to D, but pending a valid semantic analysis of how negation incorporates to N-words, this would amount to a mere restatement of the facts.
contrary, that the N-word is dominated by a null determiner. Distinct semantic properties are associated with each structure and movement internal to the nominal structure of N-words could account for the variations observed synchronically and diachronically among the distinct dialects. A more detailed study of the syntactic properties of N-words would be useful to better support the suggested analysis, but we hope to have provided sufficient evidence to establish the value of our proposed approach.

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