

Negation, presupposition and quantification: the case of the French n-word *plus*

Pascal Amsili¹ Claire Beyssade²

¹ Laboratoire de Linguistique Formelle, Université Paris Diderot & CNRS

² Structures Formelles du Langage, Université Paris 8 & CNRS

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Introduction

- how do French n-words (*rien*, *personne*...) combine with sentential negation *pas*?
- it is generally assumed that they do not combine with *pas*
apart from a well-known exception (*ce n'est pas rien*)
- however, it is not that hard to find counter-examples for most *n-words*,
- except maybe for *plus* (*no/any more*).

Aims of the talk:

- Is this intuition confirmed by data?
→ corpus study (Part 2)
- What can explain the distribution of *plus*?
→ specific properties of *plus* among *n-words* (Part 3)
- Terminology about negation in French (Part 1)

1 Negation in French

2 Corpus study

- pas–personne
- pas–rien
- pas–nulle part
- pas–plus

3 Why *plus* is specific

- From comparative to negative
- *Plus* is not quantificational
- *Plus* is a presupposition trigger
- The negation of *plus* is lexicalized
- *Plus* and *pas* as elliptical answers

4 Conclusion

Negation in French

In contemporary French, the lexicon of negation comprises :

- the particle *ne*
- the negation *pas*
- *n-words* (semi-négations (Muller, 1991)):
 - *rien* ([no/any]thing),
 - *personne* ([no/any]one/body),
 - *nulle part* ([no/any]where),
 - *plus* ([no/any]more),
 - ...
- Negative sentences are formed by combining *ne* and either *pas* or an *n-word*.

- (1) a. Jean *ne* mange *pas*.
 Jean does not eat
- b. Jean *ne* mange *rien*.
 Jean does not eat anything

Possible combinations

- Combination *ne* + *pas* **or** an *n-word*.

(2) Pierre *ne* mange *pas/rien*.

Pierre does not eat/Pierre does not eat anything

- Combination *ne* + several *n-words* but no *pas*.

(3) a. *Personne* n'a *rien* dit.

No one said (any/no)thing

b. *Personne* n'a *plus jamais rien* dit à *personne*.

(No/Any)one (n)ever said (no/any)one (no/any)thing (no/any)more

- Combination *ne* + *pas* **and** an additional *n-word*.

(4) a. Ce *n'est pas rien*.

It is not nothing

b. Il *ne va pas nulle part*, il va à son travail.

He is not going nowhere, he is going to work

(Muller, 1991)

Interpretations I

ne + several n-words

- Negative concord (NC)

- (5) a. *Personne n'a rien* dit.
 b. = Tout le monde s'est tu.
No one said anything = Everyone one kept silent
 c. $\neg\exists x (Px \wedge \exists y (Cy \wedge Dxy))$

- Double negation (DN)

- (6) a. *Personne n'a rien* dit.
 b. = Tout le monde a dit quelque chose.
No one said nothing = Everyone one said something
 c. $\neg\exists x (Px \wedge \neg\exists y (Cy \wedge Dxy))$

Double Negation interpretation is less frequent, but can be enforced by intonation, or specific contexts. (Corblin et al., 2004)

Interpretations II

ne + *pas* and an additional *n-word*

- Negative Doubling

Kind of negative concord: the *n-word* loses its negative content.

Frequent in Quebecois, but also found in France French:

- (7) Marine Le Pen ment aux Français, elle *n'a pas aucune* réponse concrète.

Marine Le Pen is lying to the French, she hasn't got no concrete answers

France Inter, 10.3.2011, 7h52, in (Larrivée, 2016)

- Double Negation

Sentential negation + *n-word* retaining its negative meaning:

- (8) Il *ne va pas nulle part*

He is not going nowhere

= it's not the case that he is not going anywhere

Combinations: summary

	Negative Concord	Double Negation
<i>n-word</i> + <i>n-word</i> <i>Personne n'a rien</i> dit 'No one said (no/any)thing'	<i>Tout le monde s'est tu.</i> 'Everyone remained silent'	<i>Tout le monde a dit quelque chose.</i> 'Everyone said something'
	Negative Doubling	Double Negation
<i>pas</i> + <i>n-word</i> <i>Ce n'est pas rien</i> 'It is not (no/any)thing'	<i>Ce n'est rien.</i> 'It is nothing'	<i>C'est quelque chose.</i> 'It is something'

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Corpora

FrWaC	(Baroni et al., 2009)	1 328 628 428 words	
Frantext	PoS-tagged version	127 515 681 words	(1 940 texts)

- only immediately neighbouring collocations *pas*□*n-word*
- excluded : non sentential negation *non pas... mais...* (9-a)
 nominal negation *pas un N / plus un N* (9-b)
 speech act reports (9-c)

- (9) a. Je t'aimerai, moi, non pas plus du tout peut-être, mais moins, beaucoup moins...

I will love you, not no more maybe, but less (so), much less (so)...

- b. Plus une larme pour pleurer quand tu n'es pas là.

No more tears to cry when you're away

fan2lara.myblog.fr

- c. Ne dites pas personne ! = Ne dites pas : « personne »

don't say: "no one"

Combination pas–personne

	doubling	dble neg	total
FrWaC	4	6	10
Frantext	0	1	1

- (10) — Tu vois que je ne sais pas qui m’envoie ces fleurs. La première fois il n’y avait même pas de carte et maintenant c’est signé « de rien ».
 — De rien n’est pas personne. Delay F, Le Aïe Aïe de la corne de brume, 1975
 — “*You’re welcome*” is not nobody
- (11) Je suis catholique, ou berrichon, ou paysan, ou communiste, je ne suis pas personne, je ne risque pas d’être englouti par le néant. ts29.free.fr
I’m catholic, berrichon, peasant, or communist, I am not no one, I’m not in danger of being swallowed up by the nothingness

Combination pas-rien

	doubling	dble neg	total
FrWaC	≈ 6%	≈ 94%	2 206
FrWaC	13	221	234
Frantext	14	74	89

- (12) Nous sommes l'un des pays où le nombre de chercheurs étrangers est le plus élevé proportionnellement au chiffre global de chercheurs: 25 % des effectifs du CNRS, ce n'est pas rien. iledere.parti-socialiste.fr
25% of the CNRS staff, it is not nothing
- (13) Ce n'est pas rien de réunir tous ces hommes et femmes à quelque deux mois du scrutin, avec cette ambiance politique générale pesante. dartigolles.gauchepopulaire.fr
It is not nothing to gather all these men and women...
- (14) Nous ne savons pas rien, mais nous ne savons pas tout. jeanzin.fr
We don't know nothing, but we don't know everything

Combination pas-nulle part

	doubling	dble neg	total
FrWaC	1	4	5
Frantext	2	0	2

- (15) Tu sais Ginger, ceux qui font des reproches ne les puisent [pas nulle part](#), c'est en eux qu'ils se servent [hermaphrodite.fr](#)

Those who make criticisms don't take them nowhere, they take them inside themselves

- (16) La question de la prévenance aura été approchée ici, non pas de façon exhaustive, mais par des tentatives d'ouvrir des chemins vers l'école qui ne mènent [pas nulle part](#). [inshea.fr](#)

... attempts to open ways to school that don't lead nowhere

- (17) Quand on est seul avec soi, on n'est [pas nulle part](#), on est en soi.

When one is alone with oneself, one is not nowhere, one is inside oneself

[nezenlair.unblog.fr](#)

Combination pas-plus

	doubling	dbl neg	total
FrWaC	??	??	42 666
FrWaC	3	0	1000
Frantext	0	0	0

plus can be comparative (18-a) or negative (18-b).

- (18) a. Jean dort *plus_c* (que Marie).
Jean sleeps more (than Marie)
- b. Jean *ne* dort *plus_n*.
Jean doesn't sleep anymore

Looking for *pas_□plus_n* :

- In Frantext, where PoS-tags could be used, no instance could be found at all.
- In FrWaC, PoS-tagging is not reliable : we manually analysed $\approx 1\ 000$ instances:
- among them, only 3 occurrences of *pas_□plus_n*: doubling.

Combination pas-plus II

In FrWaC, looking for more specific forms
(where *du tout* or an *n-word* blocks a comparative use of *plus*)

pas plus du tout	1	doubling
pas plus personne	1	doubling
pas plus jamais	1	doubling
pas plus rien	1	double negation

- (19) je ne sens pas plus rien, je sens une drôle d'odeur amplifiée selon les aflux et qui m'écoeure[nt] quand c'est l'odeur du tabac, du parfum, du café.

I am not smelling nothing any more, I smell a funny smell of coffee amplified...

<http://kysicurl.free.fr/olfac/forum.php?salon=3&sujet=1&page=1>

Corpus study: summary

	Doubling		Double Neg	
	FrWaC	Frantext	FrWac	Frantext
pas personne	4	0	6	1
pas rien	$6\% \times 2\,206$ = 132	14	$94\% \times 2\,206$ = 2\,074	74
pas nulle part	1	2	4	0
pas plus	$0,3\% \times 42\,666$ = 128	0	$\approx 0\% \times 42\,666$ = ϵ	0

- the combination *pas* + *n-word* (with a DN interpretation) is not blocked by the grammar, even though it is not frequent;
- but among *n-words*, *plus* is even less frequent (but not impossible).

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Comparative vs. negative *plus*

Synchronically, comparative and negative *plus* are homographs, so that in written form, *pas plus* is ambiguous between *not more (than)* and *not anymore*.

In contemporary written texts, comparative *plus_c* is 3 times more frequent than negative *plus_n*.

What we found in corpora:

	Comp.	Neg.
<i>plus</i>	75%	25%
<i>pas plus</i>	> 99%	< 1%



this ambiguity and this unbalanced distribution may explain a reluctance to combine *pas* and *plus*.

plus is not quantificational I

According to (Corblin and Tovenca, 2003), *n-words* are negative quantifiers:
 Their semantics combines a negation and a quantification:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \textit{Personne ne } W &= \text{for all } x, \text{ if } x \text{ is human, then it is not the case that } x W \\
 &= \forall x (Hx \rightarrow \neg Wx) \\
 &= \text{there is no } x \text{ such that } x \text{ is human and } x W \\
 &= \neg \exists x (Hx \wedge Wx)
 \end{aligned}$$

<i>Personne</i>	quantifies over	humans	
<i>Rien</i>	quantifies over	things	$\neg \exists x (Tx \wedge Wx)$
<i>Nulle part</i>	quantifies over	places	$\neg \exists x (Px \wedge Wx)$

What does *plus* quantify over?

Not over times, contrarily to a common misconception.

plus is not quantificational II

- *jamais* is the *n-word* that quantifies over **times**:

(20) Jean *ne* dort *jamais*. $\neg \exists x (Tx \wedge \text{sleep}(j, x))$
Jean never sleeps

- *plus* doesn't quantify over times,
- it conveys information about present and past (but not future) times.

(21) a. Jean *ne* dort *plus*.
Jean is not sleeping anymore

b. = Jean was sleeping and he isn't sleeping (now).
 $\exists x (Tx \wedge x < \text{now} \wedge \text{sleep}(j, x)) \wedge \neg \text{sleep}(j, \text{now})$

Examples like (22) may suggest that *plus* quantifies over future times:

(22) Max *n'ira plus* au Canada.
Max won't go to Canada anymore

But this reading is pragmatically induced...

plus is not quantificational III

... the “quantification over future times” effect can be explicitly cancelled:

- (23) Jean n'ira plus au Canada cette année, il ira sans doute l'année prochaine.
Jean won't go to Canada anymore this year, he will probably go there next year

... the same effect can be obtained with future tense and (simple) negation:

- (24) Jean n'ira pas au Canada.
Jean will not go to Canada
 = $\exists t > \text{now}$ such that Jean won't go to Canada at t
 or $\neg \exists t > \text{now}$ such that Jean would go to Canada at t

To force a quantificational effect, the combination with *jamais* is used.

- (25) Jean n'ira plus jamais au Canada.
John will never go to Canada anymore

⇒

plus is to be distinguished from the other *n*-words
 which are all quantificational.

plus is a presupposition trigger

(26) Jean *ne* dort *plus*.

Jean is not sleeping anymore.

Assertion: John isn't sleeping now

Presupposition: John was sleeping

plus is a presupposition trigger

Interaction between negation and presupposition: (**in theory**)

(26) Jean *ne* dort *plus*.

Jean is not sleeping anymore.

Assertion: John isn't sleeping now

Presupposition: John was sleeping

plus is a presupposition trigger

Interaction between negation and presupposition: (**in theory**)

- Descriptive negation

(26) Jean *ne* dort *pas plus*. Il dort.

Jean is not not sleeping anymore. He is sleeping.

Assertion: ~~John isn't sleeping now~~

Presupposition: John was sleeping

plus is a presupposition trigger

Interaction between negation and presupposition: (**in theory**)

- Metalinguistic negation

(26) Jean *ne* dort *pas plus*. Il ne dormait pas !

Jean is not not sleeping anymore. He was not sleeping!

Assertion: ???

Presupposition: ~~John was sleeping~~

plus is a presupposition trigger

Interaction between negation and presupposition: (**in theory**)

- (26) Jean *ne* dort *pas plus*.
Jean is not not sleeping anymore.



By contrast with most other n-words, *pas+plus* will potentially be ambiguous between descriptive and metalinguistic negation.

The negation of *plus* is lexicalized I

- *plus* has a “negative” counterpart, which preserves the presupposition part of its meaning: *encore*.

(27) A: On me dit que Jean ne mange plus. C'est vrai ?

I am told that Jean is eating no more. Is that true?

B: # Non, il ne mange pas plus. Mais il mange très peu.

No, he isn't eating no more. But he doesn't eat much

Non, il mange encore. Mais il mange très peu.

No, he is still eating. But he doesn't eat much

Using *pas* to have negation bear over *plus* is not efficient, since a simpler alternative is available.

The negation of *plus* is lexicalized II

- The situation is not comparable with other n-words: for instance, the negative alternatives for *rien* or *personne* are syntactically more complex: *des choses*, *des gens* are full NPs. Indefinite forms *quelque chose*, *quelqu'un* would be inappropriate in the context of an answer to a negative proposition :

- (28) A: On m'a dit que Jean ne voit rien. C'est vrai ?
I am told that Jean sees nothing. Is that true?
- B: Non, il ne voit pas rien. Mais il voit très peu.
No, he does not see nothing. But he sees very little.
- # Non, il voit quelque chose. Mais il voit très peu.
No, he sees some thing. But he sees very little.
- Non, il voit des choses. Mais il voit très peu.
No, he sees things. But he sees very little.



The combination *pas+plus* is in competition with a simpler form

Plus and *pas* as elliptical answers

Unlike *n-words*, neither *pas* nor *plus* is possible as a single answer:

(29) A: Est-ce que Jean mange de la viande ?

Does Jean eat meat?

B: *Pas* *(du tout/maintenant).

Not (at all/now)

Plus *(du tout/maintenant).

No more (at all/now)

(30) A: Qu'est-ce que Jean mange ?

What does Jean eat?

B: *Rien*.

Nothing

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Conclusion

Observation

pas□*plus* is much less frequent than *pas* with another *n*-word

Possible explanations :

- *plus* is ambiguous : negative vs. comparative
- *pas*□*plus* is ambiguous : descriptive vs. meta-linguistic negation
- *pas*□*plus* is in competition with encore.

In addition,

- *plus* is not quantificational unlike the other *n*-words
- like *pas*, and unlike other *n*-words, *plus* alone cannot be used as an answer

Our proposal: *plus* should be analysed as a presuppositional variant of *pas*:

$$\textit{plus} = \textit{pas} + \langle \textit{temporal presupposition component} \rangle$$

Thank you

And thanks to Francis Corblin for a suggestion which started this work.

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What remains to be done

- more sophisticated corpora studies
- diachronic study
- another very special n-word: *que*
- more on the contexts that may favor double negative readings:
see (31) (several n-words) and (32) (*pas* + n-words)

(31) A: Qui n'a rien dit ?

Who said nothing?

B: Personne! (n'a rien dit –DN)

No one (said nothing)

(Corblin et al., 2004, 319)

(32) A: Qui ne veut pas de dessert ?

Who doesn't want dessert?

B: Personne! (ne veut pas de dessert –DN)

No one (doesn't want dessert)

Data: artificial examples of *pas+plus*

- (33) Tu ne vas plus du tout dans ton pays d'origine ?
You are not going back to your country any more?
Pas plus du tout, mais de plus en plus rarement.
Not not any more, but more and more rarely
- (34) — Demandons à quelqu'un qui ne dort plus.
Let's ask someone who is not sleeping any more
— Mais PERSONNE ne dort plus!
But nobody is not sleeping any more
- (35) Plus une femme n'aura pas le salaire d'un homme (à travail égal).
No more woman will not have a man's wages

found in corpus

- (36) je ne sens [pas plus rien](#), je sens une drôle d'odeur amplifiée selon les afflux et qui m'écoeure[nt] quand c'est l'odeur du tabac, du parfum, du café.
I am not smelling nothing any more, I smell a funny smell of coffee amplified.
<http://kysicurl.free.fr/olfac/forum.php?salon=3& sujet=1&page=1>

pas+n-word : doubling

- (37) Le phénomène est éminemment physique : certaines cordes dites harmoniques « sonnent ensemble », ce qu'elles pourraient faire même s'il n'y avait pas personne pour les écouter. editions-verdier.fr
- (38) Je partirais bien, (...), s'il n'y avait ce recoin (...), exclusivement réservé, d'évidence, je ne crois pas rien inventer, ni trop déformer, aux « dames de la haute société ». E345 - Borel J, Histoire de mes vieux habits, 1979
- (39) Édouard l'habitait quand ses vingt ans y passèrent les vacances d'automne, il y a six ans. Pour la première fois, j'ai vécu l'aventure, la seule, la même, n'y en a-t-il pas jamais qu'une !... R044 - Pozzi C, Journal : 1913-1934, 1997
- (40) a. Moi, je pars pas nulle part... mais j'habite à 10 minutes de la plage !
18h37.le.matin.free.fr
- b. vous le savez, éva, il n'y a pas nulle part au monde des hommes plus gais dans leur vie de chaque jour que nos habitants du Québec.

Genevoix M, Eva Charlebois, 1944

Double negation pas+n-word: more cases

- (41)
- a. On a commencé à travailler ensemble en 1997. Ce n'est pas rien.
www.linguee.com
 - b. Je ne suis pas tout à fait personne mais pas encore quelqu'un.
(Botho Strauss, Trilogie du revoir)
 - c. Ceux qui font des reproches ne les puisent pas nulle part, c'est en eux qu'ils se servent. (FRWAC)
 - d. Et je suis pas complètement stupide, j'ai bien vu que l'œuvre n'avait pas absolument aucun sens, mais on peut en parler justement du sens de l'œuvre. <http://www.jeuxvideo.com/forums/42-51-50953407-4-0-1-0-decadence-cette-oeuvre-d-art-sur-10.htm>
 - e. Je ne sens pas plus rien

Double negation with several n-words

- Negative concord is the preferred interpretation in most cases;
- However, double negation is in principle always accessible,
- and can be enforced by intonation,
- or specific contexts, like elliptic answers to negative questions (42).

(42) A: Qui n'a rien dit ?

Who said nothing?

B: Personne

No one

= Personne n'a rien dit – DN

No one said nothing

(Corblin et al., 2004, 319)

Combination pas-plus II

In FrWaC, looking for more specific forms
(where *du tout* or an *n-word* blocks a comparative use of *plus*)

pas plus du tout	1	ambiguous	(43-c)
pas plus personne	1	doubling	(43-a)
pas plus jamais	1	doubling	(43-b)
pas plus rien	1	double negation	(43-d)

- (43)
- Ce que l'on réalise moins dans « l'opinion publique », c'est qu'un jour il n'y aura pas plus personne pour exercer certains métiers. frWaC
 - En exemple, la fin, où les deux amoureux sont coulés dans du béton pour “ne pas plus jamais être séparés” mais ensuite on les voit ensemble vieux.
frWaC
 - Personnellement je ny crois pas et je sais que les gars de BMW Oracle ne sont pas plus du tout serein. frWaC
 - je ne sens pas plus rien, je sens une drôle d'odeur amplifiée selon les afflux et qui m'écoeure[nt] quand c'est l'odeur du tabac, du parfum, du café.
frWaC

descriptive vs metalinguistic negation

- a descriptive negation would scope over the assertive content:

(44) Jean *ne* dort *pas plus*.

Jean is not not sleeping

Assertion: John is sleeping.

Presupposition: John was sleeping

⇒ John continues to sleep

- a metalinguistic negation would scope over the presupposition content:

(45) John *ne* dort *pas plus*.

It is not the case that John isn't sleeping anymore

Assertion: John isn't sleeping.

Presupposition: John wasn't sleeping

⇒ John continue to not sleep

French n-words

The full class of French *n-words* is heterogeneous (adverbs, determiners, pronouns...).

- they get a negative interpretation in case of verb ellipsis (46)

(46) — Tu as parlé à qui ?
 ‘Who did you speak to?’
 — À personne !
 ‘To no-one !’

(Muller, 1984)

- they licence negative polarity items such as *quoi que ce soit*, coordinating *ni*, nominal complement *de N*
- several *n-words* can combine in the same domain
- it is also said that they do not combine with *pas*

(Muller, 1991; Gaatone, 1971; Corblin, 1996)

plus is a presupposition trigger

	descriptive negation	metalinguistic negation	
	C'est Luc qui est parti <i>It's Luc who left</i>	Ce <i>n'est pas</i> Luc qui est parti, c'est Max. <i>It's not Luc who left, it's Max.</i>	Ce <i>n'est pas</i> Luc qui est parti, personne n'est parti! <i>It's not Luc who left, no one left!</i>
Presup.	Someone left	Someone left (<i>unchanged</i>)	No one left = Neg(Someone left)
Assert.	Luc left	Luc didn't leave = Neg(Luc left)	————

In principle, the combination of *pas* and *plus* will thus be ambiguous:

	descriptive negation	metalinguistic negation	
	Jean <i>ne</i> dort <i>plus</i> <i>Jean is not sleeping anymore</i>	Jean <i>ne</i> dort <i>pas plus</i> <i>Jean is not not sleeping anymore</i>	Jean <i>ne</i> dort <i>pas plus</i>
Presup.	Jean was sleeping	Jean was sleeping	Jean was not sleeping
Assert.	Jean is not sleeping	Jean is sleeping	————
	Jean keeps on sleeping	Jean keeps on not sleeping	

Combination pas-jamais

	doubling	dble neg	total
FrWaC	36	0	36
Frantext	4	0	4