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Synchronic variation in the expression of French negation: A Distributed Morphology approach

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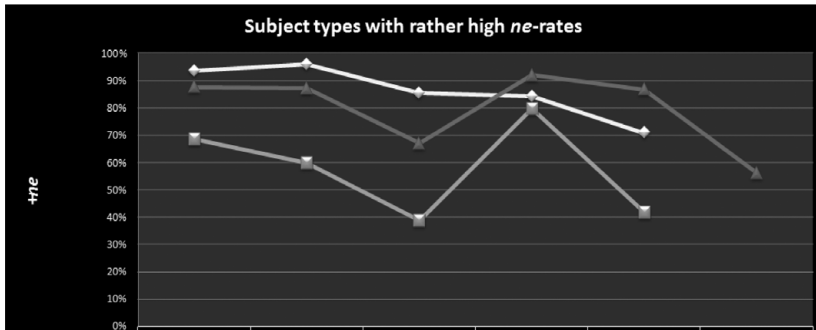
ABSTRACT

This article discusses *ne*-variation in French sentential negation based on the phonologically transcribed corpus T-zéro (cf. Meisner, in preparation) which allows a new interpretation of the facts. In the last decades, sociolinguistic and stylistic approaches to linguistic variation in French (cf. Armstrong, 2001) have shown that extra-linguistic factors, such as the speaker's age, sex, social background or geographic origin as well as the communication situation may have considerable influence on variable *ne*-omission. However, in contrast to most sociolinguistic studies dedicated to this phenomenon (cf. Ashby, 1976, 1981, 2001; Armstrong and Smith, 2002; Coveney, 2002) we will focus on the linguistic factors influencing *ne*-variation, since their importance is empirically evident but not yet fully exploited on a theoretical level.

One leading assumption with respect to *ne*-variation in literature is that the particle *ne* is most frequently retained in combination with a proper name or a full DP and is commonly omitted when combined with clitic subjects. However, there are many exceptions to this rule which, as we argue, can be better explained by considering the phonological form of the involved subject. *Ne*-realisation is treated here as an inner-grammatical phenomenon that is triggered by context sensitivity with regard to the element to its left, i.e. usually the grammatical subject, and not as a consequence of 'code-switching' between two grammars nor as a sociolinguistic variable characterising certain groups of speakers in the Labovian sense (cf. Labov, 1972), since we seek to describe general variational tendencies, present in nearly all speakers of contemporary European French. Our analysis, which is implemented in a Distributed Morphology framework (Halle & Marantz, 1994), is compatible, however, with stylistic approaches to *ne*-variation, such as audience design (cf. Bell, 1984, 2001).

1. INTRODUCTION

French sentential negation can be expressed formally by using a pre- and a post-verbal negation particle: *Je ne chante pas* 'I do not sing', or by using only the post-verbal particle: *Je chante pas* 'I do not sing', without any interpretational differences.



	Ashby 1976 ÎdF	Moreau 1986 BE (Radio)	Coveney 2002 Somme	Armstrong/ Smith 2002 F (Radio)	Meisner 2010 C-ORAL-ROM	Hansen/ Malderez 2004 ÎdF
nous	94%	96.16%	85.70%	84.50%	71%	
vous	68.70%	60%	38.90%	80.00%	42%	
lexical DP	87.90%	87.46%	67.20%	92.40%	87%	56.40%

Figure 1. *Lexical subjects,* nous *and* vous *(results of several empirical studies)*

This variation is one of the best known linguistic variables in contemporary French. Several extra-linguistic and linguistic factors which may influence its variation have been proposed in the literature. This contribution focuses on one of those central linguistic factors, namely on the subject type and its influence on *ne*-omission. In the literature, the leading assumption with respect to this factor is that the particle *ne* is most frequently retained in combination with a proper name or a full DP. It is commonly omitted when combined with clitic subjects (cf. e.g. Ashby, 1976, 1981, 2001; Armstrong & Smith, 2002; Coveney, 2002; Culbertson, 2010; Hansen & Malderez, 2004; Meisner, 2010). However, with respect to *ne*-omission there is no clear-cut distinction between full DPs and clitic pronouns, as we show. In Figure 1 we see that the pronouns *nous* and *vous* show high *ne*-rates just like full DPs do (nearly always above 50%). With respect to *ne*-omission, *nous* and *vous* are not very clitic-like; as illustrated in Diagram 2, we observe instead that *ne* is omitted with the clitics *je*, *tu* and *ce* (nearly always under 50%).[1]

Ne-realisation varies considerably within the so-called 'clitic paradigm'. In other words, not all clitics behave equally with respect to *ne*-retention. As we will argue later, both types of subjects (i.e. those in Figure 1 and those in Figure 2) ought to be treated independently from each other.

Furthermore, we also find variation within one and the same subject type, as observed in nearly all studies concerned with this topic. In what follows, we assume that the variation with respect to *ne*-omission can be explained on at least two different levels. First, there is the well-studied variation found among different

[1] Following Culbertson (2010:85), we employ the terms *clitic subject* and *subject clitic* in a theoretically neutral way.

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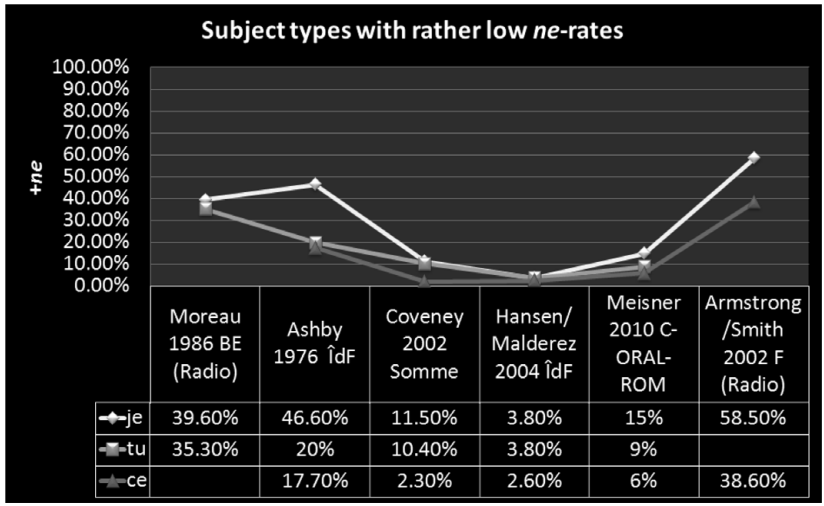

	Moreau 1986 BE (Radio)	Ashby 1976 ÎdF	Coveney 2002 Somme	Hansen/ Malderez 2004 ÎdF	Meisner 2010 C-ORAL-ROM	Armstrong /Smith 2002 F (Radio)
je	39.60%	46.60%	11.50%	3.80%	15%	58.50%
tu	35.30%	20%	10.40%	3.80%	9%	
ce		17.70%	2.30%	2.60%	6%	38.60%

Figure 2. *Clitic subjects* je, tu *and* ce

subject types (i.e. why do lexical DPs, for example, behave differently from *je*, *tu*, etc.?) and second, the variation found within one and the same subject pronoun (e.g. why is *ne* not always omitted with *je*?).

In section 2 we question Culbertson's (2010) approach which seeks to explain *ne*-realisation based on two central hypotheses: First, Colloquial French subject clitics are not clitics, but agreement affixes, and, second, unexpected *ne*-realisation are to be explained by the interaction of two grammars, i.e. Colloquial French and Standard French. Based on a corpus analysis (cf. section 3), we argue against her two hypotheses and show that *ne* is highly context sensitive with respect to the phonological form of the left-adjacent element, whereas the element on the right plays at most a secondary role. We argue, thus, that *ne*-realisation is a local and inside-out serial phenomenon explainable within one single grammar of French. In section 4 we implement, consequently, our findings in the framework of Distributed Morphology, a localist and inside-out serialist theory (cf. e.g. Embick, 2010).[2] And finally, the last section summarises our main conclusions.

1.1 *The (non) realisation of ne and its relation to the debate affix vs. clitic*

In order to explain the variation of *ne*-omission among different subjects, Culbertson (2010: 95) proposes a scale of subject types where she distinguishes between full DP subjects on the uppermost end of the scale and subject clitics in the lower end (either combined with a DP or alone): ❶ full DP subjects > ❷ no DP/subject clitic > ❸ subject clitic > ❹ DP + subject clitic. In her study,

[2] In contrast, in the framework of Optimality Theory (cf. Prince & Smolensky, 2004) optimisation processes are typically global and parallel.

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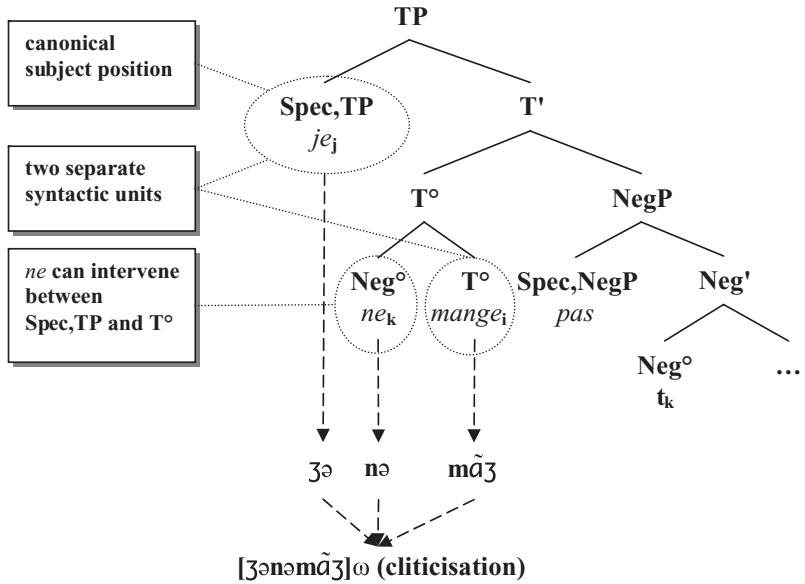

Figure 3. *Clitic Subject Hypothesis*

Culbertson shows that '*ne* is preferentially dropped just in the cases where it would intervene between the subject clitic and the verb' (Culbertson, 2010: 95) (cf. the lower part of the scale) and that the highest rate for *ne*-retention (83.3%) is obtained with full DP subjects. She then concludes that 'the rate of *ne*-retention is affected by the affix status of subject clitics in Colloquial French' (Culbertson, 2010: 97).[3]

To make this last point clearer, we summarise briefly the long-lasting debate of whether French subject clitics are in fact clitics or affixes. According to the Clitic Hypothesis (cf. e.g. Kayne, 1975, 1991; Rizzi, 1986; Belletti, 1999; De Cat, 2007) the elements *je*, *tu*, *il* etc. are equivalent to full DPs. That is, they are true verbal arguments, they receive case and a theta-role and, crucially, they occupy the canonical subject position (the specifier of the TP, cf. Figure 3). As the clitic subject *je* and the finite verb *mange* are two separate syntactic units, other syntactic elements, e.g. the clitic *ne*, can intervene between *je* and *mange*.[4] It is only post-syntactically that *je* is cliticised onto the verb (or, as in our case, onto another intervening clitic). The subject is thus only a phonological clitic.

[3] Null subjects or constructions without subjects as imperatives and dropped impersonal *il* are summarised under ❷. Other subjects (e.g. strong pronouns, the relative pronoun *qui*, indefinite pronouns such as *quelqu'un*) are not explicitly mentioned in Culbertson's (2010: 95) study.

[4] Owing to space constraints, we will not discuss here the assumption of NegP (= Negation Phrase) and head-movement of the particle *ne* to T°.

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Table 1. *Comparison of 'subject-clitic' variants in Standard and Colloquial French (cf. Culbertson, 2010: 91, based on Morin, 1979 and Fonseca-Greber and Waugh, 2002).*

		Standard French		Colloquial French	
		before V	elsewhere	before V	elsewhere
sg	1	ʒ	ʒœ	ʒ	ʒœ, ʒ, ʃ
	2	ty		t	ty
	3 m	il		il	i
	3 f	ɛl		ɛ	ɛ
pl	1	ɔ [sic!]	ɔ̃n	ɔ̃n	ɔ̃
	2	vuz	vu	vuz, vz	vu
	3 m	ilz	il	iz	i
	3 f	ɛlz	ɛl	ɛlz, ɛz	ɛ, ɛl
		= subject clitics		= agreement marker	

However, as Culbertson (2010: 96) points out we cannot predict the asymmetry between DP subjects (= 83.3% of *ne*-retention) and clitic subjects (= 6.3% and 6.7% of *ne*-retention) with this analysis. If *ne* can intervene between the subject in Spec,TP and the finite verb in T°, why is *ne*-retention so much higher in the case of full DPs? In other words: Why is *ne* omitted more frequently in cases where we have a subject clitic?

In contrast to the above analysis, Culbertson (2010) supports the hypothesis that in Colloquial French elements like *je*, *tu*, *il* etc. are not subject clitics, but agreement markers. One argument in favour of this assumption is phonological idiosyncrasy (cf. see Table 1). Culbertson (2010: 91) states that the elements in question are 'extremely reduced phonologically' when compared to the Standard French subject clitics (cf. section 3.2 for a criticism of this claim) and assumes that this phonological erosion is indicative of being an affix (Culberston, 2010: 91; based on Siewierska, 2004 and Hopper & Traugott, 1993). In sum, in Standard French the listed elements are subject clitics, whereas in Colloquial French we have to analyse them as agreement markers, according to Culbertson (2010).

Under Culbertson's (2010) assumption, the syntactic derivation for *Je (ne) mange pas* would appear as shown in Figure 4. *Je* is not a verbal argument, it does not receive case nor a theta-role and it cannot occupy the canonical subject position (Spec,TP). Rather, it marks the phi-features of the subject (i.e. person and number) on the finite verb (i.e. it is an agreement prefix, cf. e.g. Jaeggli, 1982; Roberge, 1990; Auger, 1994). Thus, another consequence (mentioned but not explored by Culbertson, 2010: 124) is that Colloquial French has to be analysed as a pro-drop language or null-subject language; i.e. Spec,TP is occupied by a phonologically empty subject pronoun (= pro) specified for person and number and able to carry case and a theta-role. As the prefix *je* in Figure 4 and the finite verb build one single morphosyntactic unit, no syntactic element can intervene between the prefix and the verb. That is, because it is a clitic (= a syntactic unit), *ne* cannot intervene between *je* and *mange*.

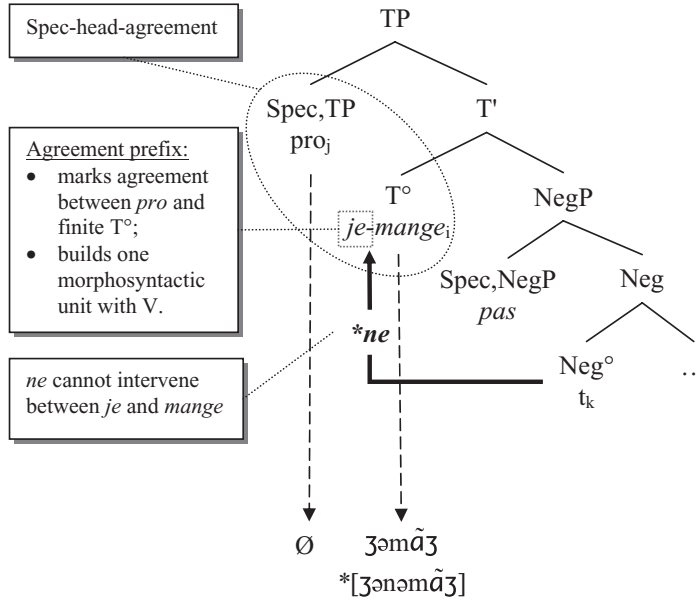

Figure 4. *Agreement Affix Hypothesis*

At this point, let us look again at the rates of *ne*-omission described by Culbertson (2010). With the derivation illustrated in Figure 3 we can explain 83.3% of *ne*-retention with a full DP subject and with the derivation illustrated in Figure 4 we can explain over 90% of *ne*-omission in both cases where we have a 'subject clitic'. But, how can we explain the remaining cases, i.e. the 16.7% where *ne* is omitted with full DP subjects and the 6.3% or 6.7% where *ne* is retained with a subject clitic?

Culbertson accounts for the remaining 6% by assuming 'a mixture of two grammars' (Culbertson, 2010: 97): Whenever *ne* is retained (6.3% with true subject clitics and 6.7% with DP + true subject clitics), this falls within the rules of Standard French grammar (see Figure 3). In contrast, when *ne* is omitted (93.7% with subject clitics analysed as agreement markers and 93.3% with DP + subject clitics analysed as agreement markers) this constitutes Colloquial French (see Figure 4).

What triggers the switch between the two grammars? Is it really, as Culbertson (2010: 97) assumes, the social or discourse context? In this case, we should be able to find empirical evidence for the grammar-switch in stylistically diversified corpora like ours (cf. section 3.4 for a verification of this hypothesis).

There is another problem with the Affix Hypothesis that concerns the derivation in Figure 4: We said above that *ne* cannot intervene between the verbal agreement prefix and the verb. However, why can it not intervene between the subject in Spec,TP (i.e. pro) and the finite verb? That is, why is *[nəʒəmɑ̃ʒ]ω ungrammatical? Culbertson (2010: 96) essentially says that instead of allowing *[nəʒəmɑ̃ʒ] the

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speaker opted to drop *ne*, 'since it is not needed'. This leads to subject agreement prefixes being in complementary distribution with the negative marker *ne* (for a further discussion of Culbertson's 2010 two grammar hypothesis, see Rowlett to appear 2013). We do not wish to question whether *ne* is needed in all the other cases in what follows; instead we want to focus on the idea of context sensitivity.

2. OUR CORPUS ANALYSIS

2.1 The data-base

Our corpus of about 14,800 words, T-zéro (cf. Meisner in preparation), is a database containing linguistic and extra-linguistic data. Seventy-seven speakers (pupils, students, university staff and teachers) in France and French-speaking Switzerland were recorded in formal and informal situations. Hence, the corpus falls in two sub-corpora, a formal and an informal one: while the formal data were obtained during oral exams, the informal situations contain discussions in classrooms and informal conversations in the school hallways or in the university cafeteria.

The whole corpus contains 2,500 verb constructions, i.e. an inflected verb with all its arguments, and it is transcribed twice: orthographically and in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). This narrow transcription enables us to retrace the exact morphosyntactic context of the variable in question; e.g. whether a speaker produces [ʒəsɛpa] or [ʃɛpa] for *je sais pas*.

2.2 The classification of French subject types

The general assumption that different subject types display different *ne*-rates is completely confirmed by our corpus data (cf. Figure 5, showing the overall *ne*-retention with respect to subject types).

In contrast to other corpus studies, we propose a classification where the phonological properties of the subjects are considered. While stressable subjects, i.e. lexical DPs and pronouns including *nous* and *vous*, show relatively high *ne*-rates, unstressable clitic pronouns like *je*, *tu* and *il* show only 6% of *ne*-realisation. Contexts in which a lexical DP or a strong pronoun occurs together with a co-referential subject clitic do not show any *ne*-realisation at all. In our classification these cases of subject doubling or of dislocation (depending on the syntactic analysis) are split up from the other subjects (cf. Figure 6), because in our corpus they never display *ne* (see also Massot, 2010, who assumes that the absence of *ne* is systematic with subject doubling). We also propose to subdivide the remaining simple DPs and pronouns into stressable elements that can occur in isolation (e.g. as an answer to a question) and elements which cannot occur in this context. The distinction is illustrated by the examples under (1) and supported by a significant difference with respect to *ne*-realisation in our corpus ($p = 0.001341$).

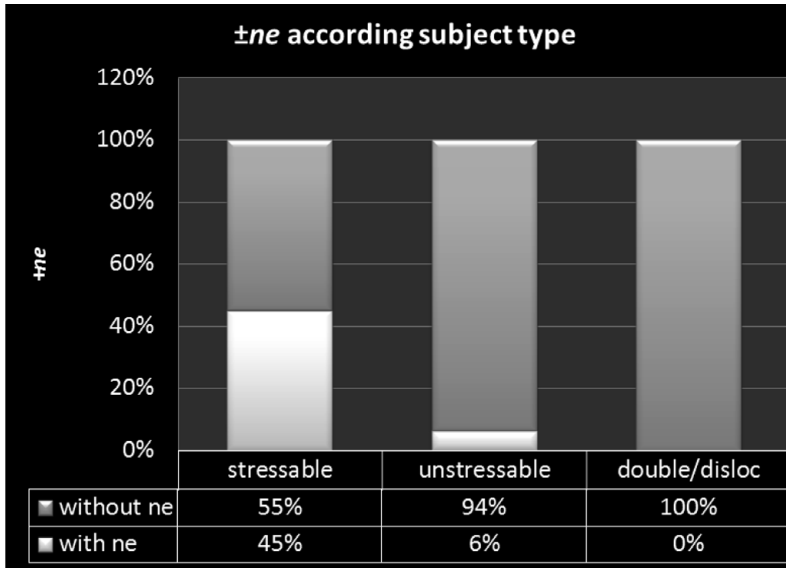

Figure 5. ±ne *according to subject type*

(1) a. Question: *Qui est venu(e)?*
Answer: *La fille / Pierre / quelqu'un / personne / nous / vous / elle(s).*
**Je /tu / il(s) / on.*
b. Question: *Qu'est-ce qui c'est passé?*
Answer: *Ceci / cela / ça.*
**Ce.*

Furthermore, those pronouns which can appear in isolation cannot be classified as clitics. Most traditional classifications (cf. Table 2) assume hence that they are syncretic (or homophonous) with the non-clitic pronouns.

We are convinced that it is due to this particular morpho-phonological status that the pronouns *nous* and *vous*, and also *elle(s)*, behave differently from other personal pronouns with respect to *ne*-omission in our corpus. However, we need to acknowledge that the pronouns *nous* and *vous* are also characteristic of more formal styles, and that *ne*-deletion, which is contextually sensitive, is hence more unlikely to appear in formal communication situations (cf. Armstrong, 2001: 122–4; Coveney, 2002: 72–5).

The average *ne*-rates of every speaker in the corpus have been determined for the two subject types *stressable* (= occur in isolation) vs. *unstressable* (= do not occur in isolation). The Friedman chi-squared test shows a significant difference between the two groups ($p = 0.001341$). Before we come back to this point, we consider the phonological variants of personal pronouns that actually occur in the corpus.

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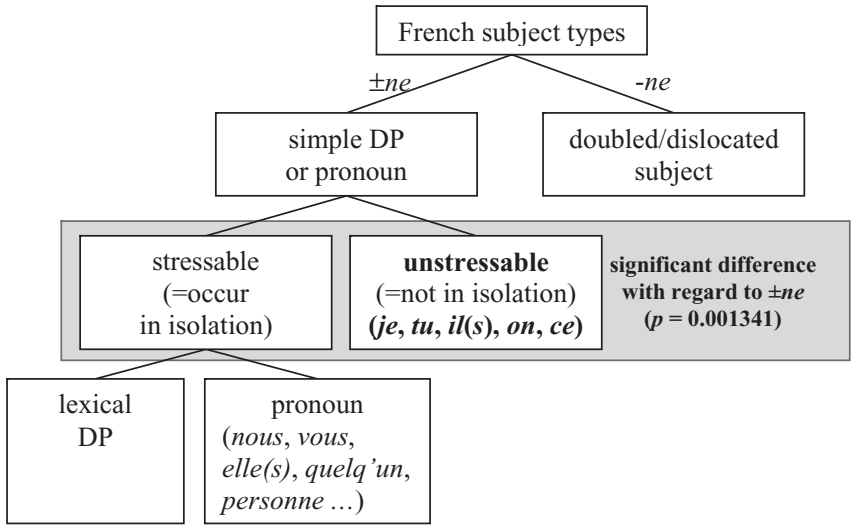

Figure 6. *Classification of subject types*

Table 2. *French personal pronouns (incomplete).*

		clitic (unstressed)	stressed
sg	1	je	moi
	2	tu	toi
	3 m	il	lui
	f	elle	
3sg impersonal/1pl		on	(soi)
pl	1	nous	
	2	vous*	
	f m	ils	eux
	f	elles	

* also used as singular polite form

2.3 Ne-omission with unstressable pronouns

All subject clitic variants attested in our corpus are given in Table 3.

The unstressable clitics generally display a very low *ne*-rate of only 6%. We assume that in those rare cases, when *ne* is realised with an unstressable clitic the phonological realisation plays a role. In order to find out whether this is true or not, we have established the *ne*-rates for all unstressable forms (except for those forms that ask for a *liaison* context, because we can never have *ne* with a *liaison*). The results of this corpus quest are shown in Figure 7 and the underlying raw data appear in Table 4.

The different phonological realisations of the 'clitics' which cannot occur in isolation seem to play a decisive role in *ne*-omission. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the

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Table 3. *Subject 'clitic' variants in our corpus (including ce).*

			unstressable	stressable
sg	1		**ʒə, ʒ, ʃ, zero**	
	2		**ty, t**	
	3	m	**il, i, zero**	
		f		ɛl
	ce		**sə, s**	
3sg impersonal/1pl	*on*		**ɔ̃, (ɔ̃n)**[5]	
pl	1			nu, (nuz)
	2			vu, (vuz)
	3	m	**il, i, (ilz, iz)**	
		f		ɛl, ɛ, (ɛlz)
			cf. Table 4 for the *ne*-rates	

In brackets: forms that only occur in *liaison* contexts and hence never co-occur with *ne*.

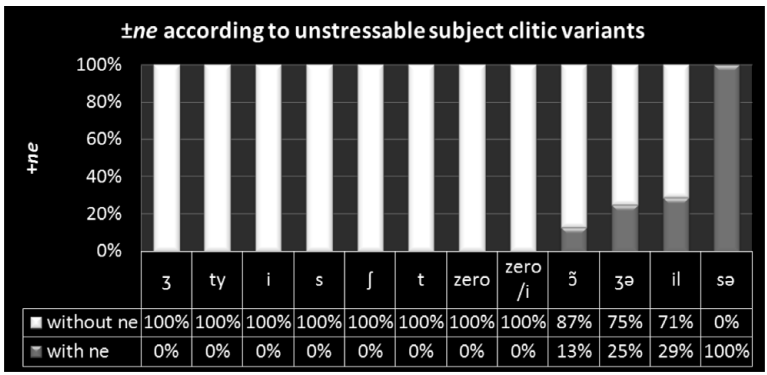

Figure 7. ±ne *according to unstressable subject variants (without* liaison *contexts)*

majority of these forms never co-occur with *ne*, namely: [ʒ], [ty], [i], [s], [ʃ], [t] and *zero*. Three others show quite low *ne*-rates, that is [ɔ̃], [ʒə] and [il]. The only element which constantly co-occurs with *ne* is [sə] with schwa (but we have only two negative tokens of this form). If we look at the differences between those forms that never co-occur with *ne* and those that do in some or in all cases, it is apparent that forms never showing *ne* are mainly *zero* or extremely reduced mono-segmental variants: [ʒ], [i], [s], [ʃ], and [t]. Only [ty] is bi-segmental and never co-occurs with *ne*, which could be due to scarce data.

[5] In the case of [ɔ̃n] it is unclear whether [n] is part of the pronoun *on* or part of the negation particle *ne*, hence these cases have been excluded.

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Table 4. *Underlying raw data of Figure 7*[6].

	-*ne*	%	+*ne*	%	total
ʒ	53	100%	0	0%	53
ty	9	100%	0	0%	9
i	8	100%	0	0%	8
s	43	100%	0	0%	43
ʃ	31	100%	0	0%	31
t	5	100%	0	0%	5
zero	10	100%	0	0%	10
zero/i	1	(100%)	0	(0%)	1
õ	20	87%	3	13%	23
ʒə	18	75%	6	25%	24
il	27	71%	11	29%	38
sə	0	(0%)	2	(100%)	2
total	199	95%	11	5%	210

2.4 *Our results under the Two-Grammar-Hypothesis*

The results obtained so far do not contradict at first glance the two grammar model of French variation. We could imagine mapping our subject 'clitic' forms onto two grammars. Figure 8 illustrates this idea: several elements would clearly belong to the 'grammar' of CF, i.e. all the mono-segmental forms in the grey section. These elements would be agreement prefixes and could never co-occur with *ne*. The elements in the white boxes would be 'ambiguous' in the sense that they belong to both grammars: In CF they would be prefixes appearing without *ne*, whereas in SF they would be clitics compatible with *ne*.

However, this assumption has several shortcomings, or at least shows unexpected results: First, having evolved strongly eroded forms which we could classify as affixes, why does CF still maintain the non-eroded forms? Would we not rather expect a distribution like the one found with the demonstrative pronoun *ce*, where we have a clear SF clitic form and (probably) a reduced CF affix form? And what are the positive properties of SF? As Figure 8 shows, we have only one form which would clearly belong to this grammar, namely [sə].

Our second objection is more complex: under the two grammar hypothesis we would expect the use of SF variants in formal situations, and of CF variants in informal situations. Let us look at the distribution of subject 'clitic' variants across formal and informal situations in our corpus, summarised in Table 5 and illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9 shows that only a few variants seem to be restricted to just one of the two sub-corpora, namely [t] for *tu* which is restricted to the informal corpus

[6] Some of the percentage values are based on only one or two occurrences and should be treated carefully; these appear in parenthesis in Table 4.

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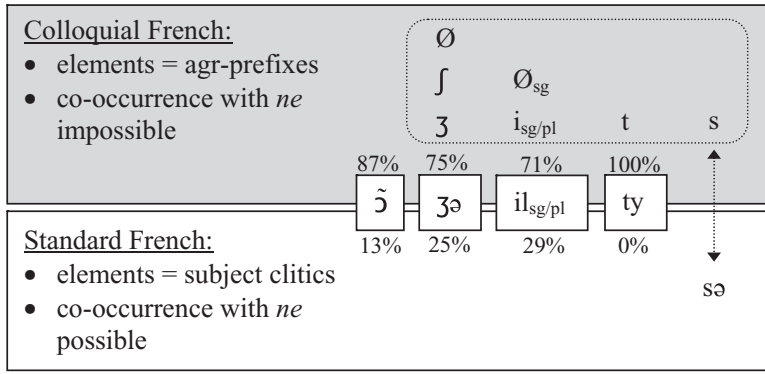

Figure 8. *Our findings under the Two Grammar Hypothesis*[7]

(= grey line) while [nu]/[nuz] and the extremely formal impersonal variant *l'on* only occur in the formal corpus (= white line). For all other variants we cannot state that they exclusively belong to one of the two sub-corpora, we can merely note frequency differences. In the formal corpus, *tu* and *je* tokens are reduced (but present), while *nous* and *vous* tokens are much more frequent than in the informal sub-corpus. The third person variants (especially in the singular) and [ʒə] with schwa are more or less equally present in both corpora. The same holds for *on*, which is seen as the informal variant of the 1st-person plural, but can also express stylistically neutral impersonal reference.

Even if we find essentially the same variants in both corpora, we also observe some stylistic variation with regard to the frequency of certain personal pronouns, such as described e.g. by Armstrong (2001). Now, we suggest that this well-known stylistic variation of personal forms is linked to *ne*-variation, and that ±*ne* is not in itself a stylistic variable but merely an epiphenomenon of this stylistic variation. More precisely, since the empirical frequency of clitic forms and of ±*ne* differs with regard to the communication situation, speakers might tend to associate the presence and absence of *ne* with these situations, which could create the 'illusion' of two different French grammars: Standard and Colloquial French. That is, the association between ±*ne* and a certain situation is purely linguistic (e.g. *ne*-absence in informal situations is triggered by the high frequency of clitic forms in this communication type), but it is empirically measurable, and hence perceived by the hearers. These may associate the linguistic variants with the situations in which they are frequent, for example the absence of *ne* and informal situations, and interpret the low *ne*-frequency as a characteristic of an informal style or grammar. Furthermore,

[7] Note that e.g. [ʒ] is also attested in Standard French, but only directly before a vowel. We will never find [ʒ] in a negative context unless we assume that *ne*-omission is also attested in Standard French and that the following verb begins with a vowel (e.g. *J'arrive pas* vs. *Je n'arrive pas*).

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Table 5. *Distribution of subject 'clitic' variants across formal and informal situations.*

Variant	formal sub-corpus		informal sub-corpus		total	
ʒə	36	43%	47	57%	83	
ʒ	57	25%	168	75%	225	
ʃ	28	24%	91	76%	119	
ty	4	4%	92	96%	96	
t	0	0%	34	100%	34	
il	117	62%	72	38%	189	
i	62	61%	40	39%	102	
ɛl	63	41%	91	59%	154	
ɛ	1	100%	0	0%	1	not considered in Figure 9
s	142	42%	196	58%	338	
sə	6	75%	2	25%	8	
sa	39	43%	51	57%	90	
z̃	102	67%	51	33%	153	
lz̃	2	100%	0	0%	2	
z̃n	41	57%	31	43%	72	
nu	5	100%	0	0%	5	
nuz	3	100%	0	0%	3	
vu	61	80%	15	20%	76	
vuz	36	72%	14	28%	50	
ilz	4	44%	5	56%	9	
iz	5	56%	4	44%	9	
ɛlz	1	100%	0	0%	1	not considered in Figure 9
ɛz	0		0		0	not considered in Figure 9
zero	30	59%	21	41%	51	
zero/i	0	0%	1	100%	1	not considered in Figure 9
total	845	45%	1026	55%	1871	

some speakers might (re)produce actively *ne*-absence or presence aiming at the perceived styles or grammars, within the situations in which they seem adequate. This strategy, producing intrapersonal variation such as observed in our corpus, has often been explained within the framework of *audience design*[8] developed by Bell (1984, 2001). Hence, the audience design approach is compatible with the two grammar hypothesis (cf. Bell, 2001: 146), since the two different grammars or styles of French would be used by the speakers as a sort of self-promotion in response to their audience. However, in sum, what may appear superficially as stylistic or even grammatical differences between the formal and the informal sub-corpus, are in fact only frequency differences of the same variants.

So how do our data generally fit into the picture of the two grammar hypothesis? If we are right in saying that our formal sub-corpus should be associated with SF,

[8] Within the concept of *audience design*, the dialogue is seen as the natural instance of human linguistic behaviour, i.e. the speaker's behaviour has to be evaluated by considering his audience or his interlocutor. In this context, *linguistic style* is defined as the linguistic behaviour of a speaker in response to his audience (cf. Bell, 2001: 141–2). The stylistic signification of linguistic entities is derived from their association with certain social groups.

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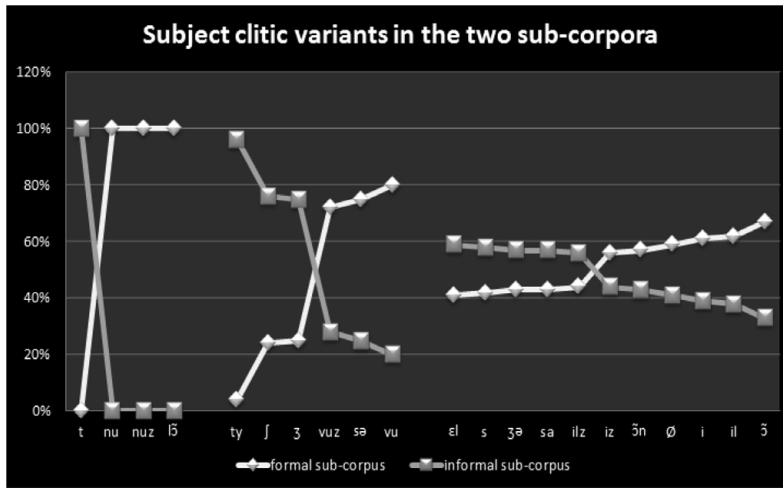

Figure 9. *Distribution of subject 'clitic' variants in the corpus*[9]

whereas the informal one is linked with CF, then we must recognize that there are no observable idiosyncratic features which could justify the assumption of two different grammars, since nearly all variants can appear in both corpora. Thus, we would like to explain *ne*-omission based on one single grammar of French.

3. SKETCH OF AN ANALYSIS: THE CONTEXT SENSITIVITY OF *NE*

One central point of our analysis is that the phonological form of the element preceding *ne* (e.g. the form of the subject) plays a crucial role for *ne*-omission. More precisely, *ne*-omission is local in the sense that the phonological shape of the left-adjacent element triggers allomorphy between *ne* and Ø, and it is serial, because the elements at issue are realized post-syntactically step by step from left to right (i.e. inside-out). Due to these characteristics of the phenomenon at issue, we present in what follows an account in the framework of Distributed Morphology.

Leaving some pronouns aside for the moment, our findings show that the rate of *ne*-realization increases together with the phonological complexity of the subject (cf. Figure 10), i.e. the left-adjacent element. *Ne* is absolutely excluded whenever the subject is realised by zero or by a mono-segmental (mono-moraic or mono-positional) variant of the subject. In all other cases we find variation: With unstressable, bi-segmental (bi-moraic or bi-positional) subjects there is a strong tendency towards *ne*-omission, whereas with stressable subjects *ne* is retained.

[9] We have only considered forms with more than one token in our corpus.

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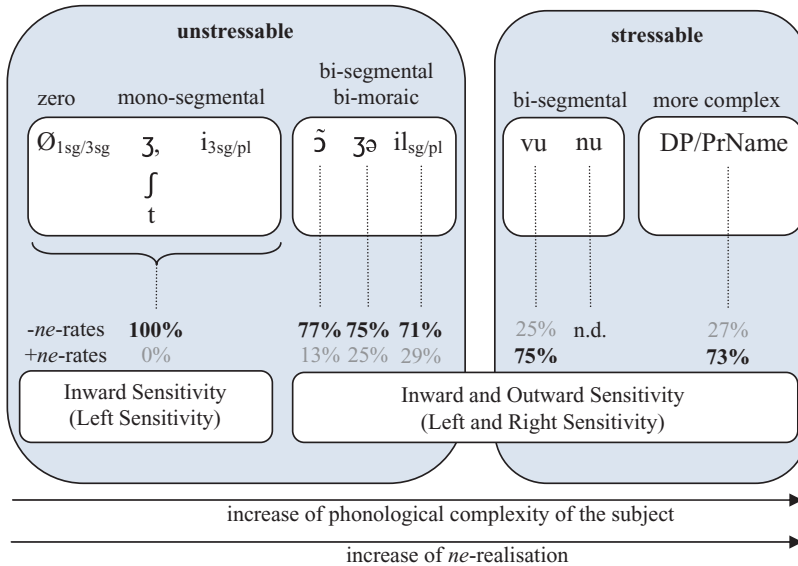

Figure 10. *(Colour online) Influence of the phonological complexity of the subject on ne-realisation (without [ty], [sə] and liaison variants; n.d. = no data in our corpus)*[10]

The hypothesis we want to propose here is that the particle *ne* is, roughly speaking, an 'enclitic' element in the sense that it is highly context sensitive with regard to the element on its left. The element on its right plays only a secondary role: It is irrelevant for zero and unstressable, mono-segmental subjects, but may have an influence with bi-segmental or more complex subjects. We have implemented this idea in a Distributed Morphology framework (cf. Figure 11). Here it is assumed that the syntactic structure is supplied with phonological material after syntax. Take for example Spec,TP: This syntactic terminal node bears only morphosyntactic features, but no phonological material. It is the process of Vocabulary Insertion (VI) which supplies the respective phonology. Let us assume, in order to illustrate our idea, that this slot is realised by the mono-segmental element [ʒ]. The next slot for VI is then Neg°.[11] At this point we claim, in the spirit of Bobaljik (2000: 14), that VI 'sees' the result of the previous application of Vocabulary Insertion (= Inward Sensitivity). Whether Neg is realised by *ne* or by zero depends mainly on the phonological material that has been inserted previously. That is, the

[10] See e.g. Paradis and Prunet (2000) and Féry (2003) for the discussion on whether French nasal vowel are bisegmental but monomoraic, or monosegmental but bimoraic. For our purposes, it suffices to notice that nasal vowels are more complex (or more marked) than oral ones.

[11] In contrast to other analyses which condemn the existence of Neg° (or a NegP) in syntax whenever *ne* is omitted (cf. e.g. Peters in this volume), we assume that *ne*-omission is (still) a morpho-phonological phenomenon.

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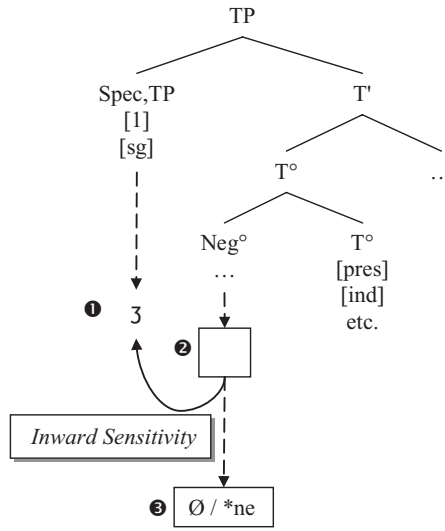

Figure 11. *Context sensitivity of the Neg°-realisation*

complementary distribution (the 'allomorphy') between Ø and *ne* is a case of inward sensitivity. In other words, *ne* can only be inserted at this point if the preceding element has been realised using the appropriate phonological material. In the case illustrated in Figure 11, *ne* is not possible. Instead we have to insert the allomorph zero.

What counts as appropriate? That is, which subject-realisation triggers which allomorph? We assume that all stressable subjects (e.g. *nous*, *vous*, DPs) trigger *ne*-realisation of Neg° and that the zero-allomorph is the elsewhere-realisation. Yet, as we have seen above, there are some exceptions to this generalisation both with bi-segmental unstressable subjects as well as with stressable subjects. We argue that these exceptions do not (only) depend on the context to the left of the variable, but (also) on the one to its right (= Outward Sensitivity). More precisely: In these cases, it is the context to the right, i.e. the morphosyntactic features coded under T° which (additionally) forces *ne*-retention or *ne*-omission. Note that at the point when Neg° is realised phonologically we have on its left side the phonological context of the previous Vocabulary Insertion and on its right, some morphosyntactic features (cf. Figure 12). Thus, with regard to the elements on its left, *ne* is sensitive to the phonological context and, to its right, it alters according to the morphosyntactic features associated with (complex) T° (cf. Table 6 for some of the relevant features).

It has been shown in many works that there are several morphosyntactic features encoded on the right context of *ne* (more precisely under T°) which influence its omission or retention. The examples in our corpus which escape the

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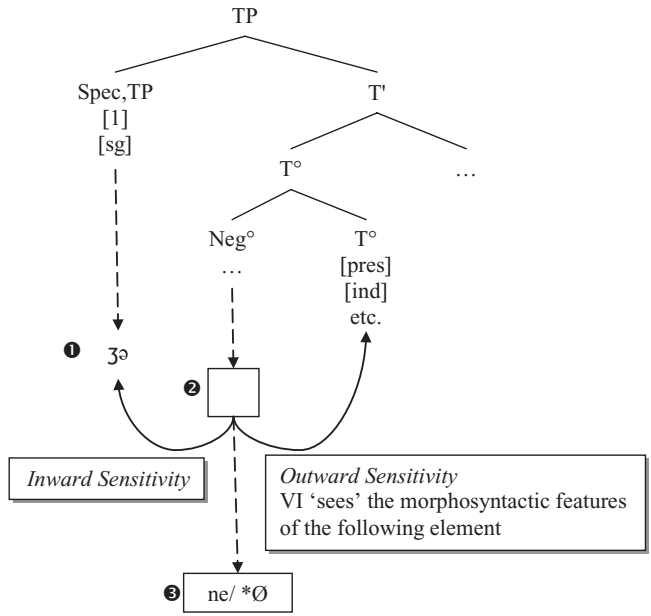

Figure 12. *Context sensitivity of the Neg°-realisation*

Table 6. *Features relevant for the Outward Sensitivity*

-ne	*+ne*	
TP in matrix clause	TP in embedded sentences	(Ashby, 1981: 678)
verb in indicative	verb in subjunctive	(Ashby, 1981: 678)
auxiliary verb / compound tense form	lexical verb	(Hansen/Malderez, 2004: 24, Moreau, 1986: 146)
presence of other proclitics	no other proclitics	(Armstrong/Smith, 2002: 28, Ashby, 1981: 679)

generalisation made above can all be explained taking into account the features in Table 6.

In (2) we have stressable subjects and thus would expect *ne*-retention, as the subject is phonologically a 'good host' for *ne*. However, the right context (e.g. a compound tense form) forces *ne*-omission, i.e. the Outward Sensitivity dominates in these cases. In (3) we see that the opposite is true: Due to the phonological form of the subject we would expect *ne*-omission, however, *ne* is retained. Again, this is due to the morphosyntactic feature in the right context.

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(2) Exceptions I: *Ne*-omission with stressable subjects
   a. [auxiliary *être*]: *la personne suivante Ø est pas là*
   b. [compound tense form]: *parce qu'en général les critiques Ø sont pas très bien fondées*
   c. [another proclitic]: *ça ça Ø m'influence pas vraiment*

(3) Exceptions II: *Ne*-retention with unstressable subjects
   a. [embedded, future]: *alors qu'il avait dit qu'il n'aura pas de problèmes avec ses amis*
   b. [embedded, lexical verb]: *puisque on ne l'écoutait pas*
   c. [embedded, lexical verb]: *en Afrique du nord vu qu'on ne sait pas ce qui s'est passé*

It is only if the subject is realised by zero or by a mono-segmental variant that the context to the right is completely irrelevant for *ne*-variation. In these cases, *ne* is always omitted. In other words: Even if the context to the right asks for *ne*-retention, *ne* has to be omitted as the subject to its left is (under phonological perspective) an impossible host.

4. SUMMARY

In order to explain *ne*-variation, we have argued that stressable (e.g. full DPs, *nous*, *vous*, *elle*) and unstressable (e.g. *je*, *tu*, *il*) subjects are to be treated independently from each other; because subject forms that never co-occur with *ne* are mainly *zero* or extremely reduced mono-segmental variants: [ʒ], [i], [s], [ʃ], and [t]. Under the two grammar model – i.e. assuming, roughly speaking, that whenever we have *ne*-omission we are within the Colloquial French grammar, whereas when we have *ne*-realisation we are within the Standard French grammar –, we cannot explain our findings, since: (i) neither of the two grammars seem to show idiosyncratic features; (ii) most of the variants occur in the formal and the informal corpus and (iii) CF displays both eroded (affixal) forms and non-eroded (affixal?/clitic?) forms. Within a DM framework we can capture the allomorphy between *ne* and *zero* by specifying its inward and outward sensitivity within one French grammar.

Our analysis captures the fact that *ne* is highly context sensitive with respect to the phonological form of the element to its left. Our corpus analysis shows that *ne* is absolutely excluded whenever the subject is realised by zero or by a mono-segmental (mono-moraic or mono-positional) variant of the subject. In all other cases we find variation: With unstressable, bi-segmental (bi-moraic or bi-positional) subjects there is a strong tendency towards *ne*-omission, whereas with stressable subjects *ne* is retained. Exceptions of this tendency are explainable if we take into account the right context of *ne*, i.e. the morphosyntactic features coded under (complex) T°. Finally, *ne*-realisation is treated in our analysis as a

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phenomenon within one grammar and not as a consequence of 'code-switching' between two grammars.

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