The distribution of preverbal *en* in (West) Flemish: syntactic and pragmatic properties

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The goal of this paper is to discuss the properties of (West)Flemish negation, focusing on the realization of the preverbal negative marker *en* illustrated in (i):

(i) K'en peinzen't niet, wè. I *en* think it not *wè*

'I don't think so.'

I will discuss similarities and differences with French ne both in terms of distribution and in terms of interpretation.

Unlike standard Dutch and northern Dutch dialects Flemish dialects of Dutch as well as the Flemish regiolect retain the preverbal marker, which originates as one component of a bipartite negation in Stage II of Jespersen's cycle. As expected, the WF preverbal marker cannot occur all by itself but must be licensed by a clause mate negative expression. In the northern dialects of Dutch and in the Dutch standard this particle has disappeared (Stage III). In spite of its relatively low frequency even in the dialects, *en* survives even in the Flemish variant that is referred to as *tussentaal* ('interlanguage') and has become an informal Flemish regiolect.

At first sight *en* may appear to be similar to French preverbal *ne* and its retention in Flemish dialects might be viewed as being due to intensive language contact. As I will show, the West Flemish dialect of Dutch provided independent evidence for a high level of borrowing from French, both with respect to its lexicon but also with respect to grammar and perhaps even to phonological properties (resyllabification and vowel deletion, as shown by Noske 2005-2007).

In the presentation I will discuss the syntactic and pragmatic restrictions on the use of *en* in Flemish and in its dialects. With respect to the discourse properties of *en*, I will following Breitbarth and Haegeman (2009) and I will argue that *en* has grammaticalized from being a preverbal marker of sentential negation into being a marker of polarity emphasis. I will provide a relevance theoretic account of its use. Time permitting I will discuss the syntactic properties of *en* and in particular, the question to what extent it should be associated with a specialized functional projection.

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