

The interplay of multiple descriptive factors for the understanding of a text language, illustrated by the negation in Old French.

A study of manuscript variation of *ne-Ø*, *ne-mie*, *ne-pas*, and *ne-point*.

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The evolution of French negation is a fine example of an ongoing change that has been investigated by a large number of scholars, and from different theoretical approaches. My talk is motivated by the necessity of finding relevant parameters of description for corpus study of a text language in general, i.e. a language or a language stage, which has no speakers, but only written sources. Thus, my approach is intended also to be relevant for other cases of linguistic change. My choice of parameters is rooted in variational linguistics, implying that I investigate not only language internal, but also diasystematic factors that might explain language variation, i.e. diachronic, diatopic, diastratic, and diamesic ones.

One of the problems with text languages lies in the difficulty of understanding variation. In the present case, the difficulty concerns how to evaluate the variation between *ne-Ø*, *ne-mie*, *ne-pas*, and *ne-point* in the texts. I will use manuscript variation as a means to test the equivalence or difference between the four variants of negation. Indeed, there are two possible results of this test: (1) the text never displays variation of negation, which might imply the non-equivalence between negation variants, or (2) the text displays variation of negation. In the latter case it may happen that a verse is almost identical between manuscripts, but negation variation may occur. This must imply that the variants of negation are more or less synonyms. And indeed, I find cases of variation between the manuscripts of the *Charroi de Nîmes* (composed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century), see verse 2897 quoted below, meaning: ‘And Otran said: I don’t know what to say about this’:

- A1 Et dist Otran: "De ce **ne** sai que die;  
 A2 Et dist Otranz: "De ce **ne** sai que die;  
 A3 Et dit Otran: "De ce **ne** sai que die;  
 A4 Et dist Otran: "De ce **ne** sai que die;  
 F  
 B1 Et dist Otranz: "De ce ne sai que dire;  
 B2 Et dist Otran: "De ce ne sai que dire;  
 C Et dist Otran: "Iche **ne** sai je **mie**;  
 D Et dist Otran: "Grant folie me dites.

However, diasystematic factors, especially diachronic and diatopic factors, seem to play a role in the choice of negation form. In my talk, I intend to illustrate the intricate interplay between these different factors.

## Source references :

A1, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, f.fr. 774;  
A2, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, f.fr. 1449;  
A3, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, f.fr. 368;  
A4, Milano, Biblioteca Trivulziana 1025;  
F (fragment), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, nouv. acq.f. 934;  
B1, London, British Library, Royal 20 D.XI;  
B2, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, f.fr. 24369;  
C, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Bibl. Municipale 192;  
D, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, f.fr. 1448 ;