

The acquisition of negative constructions by Jamaican learners of French: a pedagogical orientation

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1. Introduction

This article provides a contribution to the study of the acquisition of French as a foreign language by adult learners in different cultural settings, paying special attention to cross-linguistic influence. Indeed, it is common knowledge that certain features of a foreign language (L2) are acquired more or less easily, depending on the structure of the first language (L1). It is not an easy task however to describe precisely that influence. Such a research however is crucial to our understanding of L2 acquisition and teaching, as, on the one hand, it provides an element of explanation to why a learner's idiolect can be stuck at a certain stage of development and fail to improve towards the target language in cases of fossilization, and, as, on the other hand, it can help pedagogues develop optimal methods of instructions based on the characteristics of their student population.

The situation becomes even more complex when dealing with multilingual societies, because of the need to disentangle the respective influence of distinct mother tongues. Little research on third language (L3) acquisition of syntactic features has been done on the basis of a homogenous bilingual population (See Leung 2007, Zobl 1992). In this respect, a special form of bilingualism known as diglossia, provides an interesting case study. In Jamaica, for instance, the interactions among native speakers are characterized by a constant shifting of language varieties from Jamaican Creole, the so-called *Patwa*, to Standard (Jamaican) English, depending on the situation of communication. The university student population of native Jamaican, relatively homogenous in its form of bilingualism, constitutes therefore a unique source of information for L3 acquisition in a bilingual context.

This article focuses on the strategies used by adult Jamaican learners of French to express negative constructions in their automatic oral expression. The study is based on data from a longitudinal corpus of learners' oral productions recorded over a two-year period during individual interviews at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Jamaica.

Crucially, the present research identifies difficulties with the expression of French equivalents of English *never*, *no longer*, *nobody*, etc., which persist at advanced levels of proficiency. This phenomenon is exemplified in more or less felicitous avoidance strategies using temporal / aspectual negative adverbials in combination with the marker of negation (*ne*)... *pas* (not). I hypothesize that these strategies are caused by transfer influence from the Jamaican Creole that relies on the interaction of negation with such adverbs to express equivalents of 'never' and 'no longer.'

Once a potential 'problem' is identified, the practitioners can decide what pedagogical action should be taken to rectify it. In this respect, I suggest how more appropriate

avoidance strategies, and specific communicative activities, depending on the level of proficiency, could help prevent long term fossilization.

2. The oral interlanguage corpus: a brief description

The development of interlanguage corpora is of interest both to researchers who, according to Florence Myles, need to have access to good quality large learner data to build « models of underlying mental representations and development processes » (2005, p.374), and to pedagogues who can identify more precisely difficulties which otherwise would remain elusive. Furthermore, it allows comparison with other oral and written learners' data from different L1 backgrounds (as, for instance the corpus of Swedish speakers in Bartning, Schlyter 2004).

2.1. Purpose of the corpus

The objectives of this research are to gather precise oral interlanguage data of Jamaican adult learners of French in a guided environment at the University level; to document and analyze the state and the progression of these learners in a range of linguistic features; and to contribute to current theoretical debates on the process of foreign language acquisition in a diglossic context.

2.2. Data collection procedure and selection of participants

The present research follows a group of nine undergraduate students enrolled in the French language program at UWI. Interviews of these learners were recorded over a nineteen-month period (from the second semester of their first year until the end of the first semester of the third year).

Table 1: Basic information on Corpus

Groups	Number of learners involved	Length of time the participants were investigated	Corresponding years /semesters of the language programme	Number of interviews
Pilot	7	From November 2002 to April 2004	From Year II (semester1) to Year III (semester2)	1 – 3
Research	9	From April 2003 to November 2004	From Year I (semester2) to Year III (semester1)	6 – 7

As indicated in Table 1, a pilot-group of seven students enrolled in a French linguistic course had been previously interviewed, to practice the oral activities and the recording material, and to try out the socio-biographical questionnaire.

The participants were selected taking into account institutional constraints in the organization of the language program, as well as characteristics of the student population. Students placed together in the first year of the undergraduate language program can have very different previous exposure to the language, and often start at distinct levels of proficiency. Three main groups of students are distinguished here: the students with a

« Pass » in the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) in French¹; those with a « Pass » in a two-semester intensive Beginners' program in French offered at UWI²; and finally those who prepared the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), or equivalent³. As seen in Table 2, the sample of nine participants is constituted by three students of each group.

Table 2: Codes of participants classified with respect to their previous exposure to the language as well as to their enrollment in languages programs at UWI

	French only	French & Spanish
A Level	Loc14	Loc20, Loc31
CSEC	Loc17, Loc18	Loc38
Beginner	Loc08	Loc12, Loc16

The investigation is concerned with acquisition in a formal environment because this is the way the language is learned by most Jamaican who have little access to French-speaking territories, at least until they graduate from the university⁴. Therefore, only students who did not previously spend an extended period of time (set at less than one month) in a French-speaking country or region were selected for the study. Additionally, as we are interested in examining the effect of the diglossic language context, we limited the sample to Jamaican students, resident in the country from birth.

All participants were audio-recorded carrying on various production tasks in French (semi-guided conversations and exposé or essay discussion during French oral examinations (a formal context), or during scheduled interviews (in a quite informal and relaxed atmosphere), with topics such as university life, leisure activities, future career plans, comments on recent events, or discussions about famous personalities, and tasks such as cartoon story retelling, description of a photo, or role plays⁵. All interviews were conducted following standard codes of ethics.⁶ This data is in the process of being transcribed. The transcriptions allow us to analyze the development of specific linguistic

¹ The CSEC, a regional exam administered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), requires a minimum of 200 hours of instruction. However, these students usually remain two years without practicing the language while they prepare their advanced level subjects before entering the University, and this state of affair adversely affects their proficiency.

² The Beginners' program, at the time, consisted of two semesters of 130 contact hours each. Subsequent changes to this program, with reduction of contact hours and introduction of an online component, are described in Marie-José Nzengou-Tayo (2005).

³ Since 2002, Cambridge GCE 'A' level is progressively replaced in all schools of the English Caribbean by the CXC CAPE. The CAPE syllabus in French consists of two units of 150 hours each. (For details, see Cévaër 2002, Cévaër, Peters 2005).

⁴ Some exchange programs are available to a minority of students in private high school. After they graduate from the university, however, many students (around thirty per year) take advantage of the assistantships provided by the French government as English language assistants in France.

⁵ For more details on methodology, transcription conventions, and participants, see Hugues Peters (2005b).

⁶ At all times, the participants were aware that the recording was taking place. At the end of the recording, they signed a consent form authorizing the use and the dissemination of the data solely for the purpose of research and ensuring that all steps will be taken to ensure anonymity of the participants. All personal information and all data are kept strictly confidential in a secure location.

features over a period of time. They constitute the raw data on which all qualitative and quantitative analyses are performed.

Apart from oral interviews, participants also completed a standard socio-biographical questionnaire (on previous and current exposure to the language, time spent in a French-speaking country, rank of French among languages learned as well as personal information). A grammaticality judgment task administered during the last semester, and written samples collected at various stages, provide additional information.

Thanks to the socio-biographical questionnaire, it is possible to determine the rank of French among foreign languages learned. As seen in Table 3, apart from Loc13, Loc17 and Loc18, all subjects had exposure to the Spanish language before French.

Table 3: Rank of French with respect to Spanish, as First or Second Foreign Language

	Rank 1	Rank 2
A Level	Loc14	Loc20, Loc31
CSEC	Loc17, Loc18	Loc38
Beginner		Loc08, Loc12, Loc16

3. Diglossia in Jamaica: a Creole continuum

The specificity of this research is to examine the effects on L2 acquisition of the diglossic language background, a complex form of bilingualism described as a linguistic *continuum* between an English-lexicon Creole and Standard (Jamaican) English (DeCamp 1971). Jamaican speakers constantly code switch between several varieties situated on a scale in their everyday informal conversations, as in the following example from Pauline Christie (2003, p.33):

wi (d)a go > wi goin > wi is goin > wi is going > we are going

The variety to the left is called the basilect, the variety to the right the acrolect and the varieties in between are referred collectively as the mesolect. As the syntactic means of expression are so varied, the situation creates interesting problems in potential cases of transfer from the L1 varieties to the L2.

4. Data analysis: the structure of sentential negation

Negation is one of the most fascinating and widely studied topics in linguistics, as it is at the intersection of morphosyntax, semantics and pragmatics. Due to space limitation, however, I only present a brief syntactic characterization of sentential negation in French and Jamaican. For French, the reader is referred to the many specialized studies on the topic (Gatone 1971, Larrivé 2001, Muller 1991, Rowlett 1998, among others).⁷

⁷ No detailed monograph exists on the syntax of negation in Jamaican Creole to my knowledge.

4.1. The system of sentential negation in French and Jamaican tensed clauses

Sentential negation in French can be described as a two-part morpheme *ne... pas* surrounding the finite tensed verb. The first element *ne* is a phonetically weak particle, generally omitted in speech⁸, although maintained in written modalities by orthographic conventions, while the second element *pas* (not) is the semantic core of sentential negation. Negation with *ne* alone, although surviving in a limited set of environments in formal registers, is no longer grammatical.

Mon chien (ne) chasse pas les voitures (My dog doesn't chase cars)
Mon chien (n') a pas chassé ta voiture (My dog hasn't chased your car)

Jamaican, like most Caribbean Creoles, negates verbs by placing a negative particle *no*, before the string of Tense-Mood-Aspect markers and lexical verb, and interacting with modals verbs *kyaan* (can't). *No* is often realized as *don(t)* or *neva*, the latter usually encoding an 'Past+Negation' meaning (Adams 1991, Cassidy, LePage 2002).

Him no say (He doesn't say) (Adams 1991, p.34)
Mi neva know dat (I didn't know that)
Dem don' cook herly (They don't cook early) (*ibid.* p.35)

Within current interpretations in the generative framework assuming the splitting of the functional layers of the clause, following Jean-Yves Pollock (1989), Negation is syntactically represented as a separate Negative functional projection, NegP. In French, NegP is headed by the defective head *ne* with *pas* in its Specifier. The order of tensed verbs in French with respect to the respective negative particles is explained by the fact that tensed verbs pick up the defective head *ne* on their way up to the inflectional level above NegP, and thus appear to the left of the negator *pas*, as well as to the left of other short adverbs located inside the verb phrase (See Haegeman 1995, Pollock 1989, Rowlett 1998, on this topic).⁹

In Jamaican Creole, like in other Caribbean Creoles, verbs do not move in overt syntax, and the negative particle *no*, alternatively *don'*, *neva*, head of NegP, precedes lexical verbs. This contrast can be schematized in the form of two syntactic trees.¹⁰

⁸ Unless, as pointed out to me by Sophie Moirand, *ne* facilitates pronunciation, for instance, by intervening between two vowels as is the case in: *Il n'a pas...* pronounced [inapa], following [l] deletion in the subject pronoun.

⁹ As pointed out by a reviewer, the original proposal by Jean-Yves Pollock (1989) which saw NegP generated as a complement of Tense has been subsequently revised following the introduction of another layer of functional projection, (Subject) Agr(eement), Agr_sP, above Tense. Various proposals have argued that NegP should in fact be located in between Agr_sP and TP (See Haegeman 1995, Rowlett 1998). However, following the recent developments of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995), it is generally considered that Agreement projections lack conceptual necessity and therefore should be dispensed with (See also Iatridou 1990, Bouchard 1995, Peters 1999). I will not enter into this theoretical debate. Suffice it to say that the tensed lexical verb moves to a layer of functional projection, let us say Tense, to the left of *pas* because of a need to satisfy morphological requirements.

¹⁰ As pointed out by a reviewer, *not* is not generally considered to be a head in English (although Pollock is indecisive on the issue), and is rather considered to be merged into the Specifier of NegP (However, see

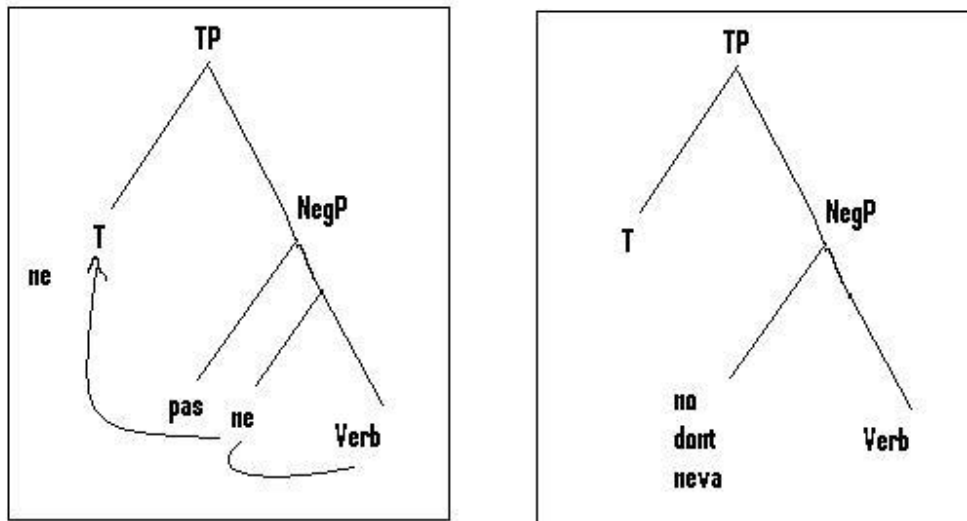


Figure 1: Syntactic representation of sentential negation in French and Jamaican.

However, issues surrounding sentential negation are not limited to an examination of word order, as negation has influence over the whole sentence, especially over adverbial and nominal nondefinites. As in many English vernacular dialects and other Caribbean Creoles, Jamaican is a *negative concord* language (Labov 1972): several negative words co-occurring within a sentence have a single negation interpretation. In Jamaican, like in Haitian (De Graff 1993), the negative particle, in one of its forms, must always be realized, even with a negative quantifier in subject position.

Mi neva tell him no lie! (I didn't tell him a lie!) (Adams 1991, p.34)
Im no wan gi nobody none (He doesn't want to give anybody any) (*ibid.* p.36)
Notn neva du it (Nothing ever happened to it) (Stewart 2002, p.4)

Interestingly, the Jamaican equivalents of English *never*, *not anymore* / *no longer* are realized by interaction of the negative particles with adverbs of temporal / aspectual perspective such as *yet*, and *again* (alternatively: *no more*).

Mi neva do it (I 'past+neg' do it = I didn't do it)
Mi neva do it yet (I 'past+neg' do it yet = I never did it)¹¹
Mi no do it again (I 'neg' do it again = I don't do it anymore)¹²

Ernst 1992, Zwicky, Pullum 1983, for different opinions). In this respect, English *not* would correspond to French *pas* while Jamaican *no* would correspond to French *ne*. The situation in English, however, is rendered a little bit more complex by the status of *n't* reduction.

¹¹ However, in combination with *no* in the present tense as in the stative, *yuh no hungry yet* (you are not hungry yet), it has the English interpretation (not yet). This fact does not negate the previous contrast.

¹² This use of *again* with negation « impl[ies] a change of state or action since an understood time » (Cassidy, LePage 2002, p.5).

Mi no luv im again (I don't love him anymore)
Nobody no eat meat no more (Nobody eats meat anymore)
He can't be coming again (He can't be expected to come any longer)¹³

Similarly, in French, a sentence can be negated by a series of negative adverbials (*jamais, plus*) or nominals (*personne, rien, aucun*), which realize a kind of sentential negation that I will conventionally call 'partial' negations (as in Sanell 2007 p.8), equivalent to the *semi-negations* of Christian Muller (1991). Several negative words can co-occur with optional *ne* within a clause, and trigger a negative concord interpretation. But co-occurrence with the negator *pas* automatically triggers a reading of double negation, as illustrated in the following examples:

Il (ne) mange rien (He doesn't eat anything)
Il (ne) veut plus jamais rien dire (He never wants to say anything anymore)
Ce (n') est pas rien (It is not nothing)

To summarize, the Jamaican learner of French must realize that:

- *ne* is deficient as centre of negation, and must be reinforced by at least one negative word, usually *pas* in case of sentential negation ;
- that temporal / aspectual information is encoded within negative adverbs such as *jamais, plus* rather than in separate temporal / aspectual adverbs ;
- that *pas* does not participate in negative concord with other negative words.

4.2. Learners' data from the oral corpus

In the part of the corpus that has already been analysed, 248 instances of sentential negation have been identified, among which I counted just four instances of partial negation. Even though the data is quite limited quantitatively, hypotheses can be sustained by our knowledge of the syntactic structure of each language, additional data from written compositions, and results from a grammaticality judgment test. These results can be compared with other studies on French L2 acquisition of negation (Stoffel, Véronique 2003, Rule, Marsden 2006, Sanell 2007, among others).

In this study of the interlanguage system of sentential negation, I identify difficulties with the expression of what I conventionally call 'partial' sentential negation: *jamais* (never), *rien* (nothing), *plus* (not anymore / no longer), *personne* (nobody), that remain at advanced levels of proficiency, even though the structure of 'total' sentential negation with the discontinuous particles (*ne*)... *pas* is apparently mastered.

Of course, correct surface word order does not necessarily entail identical underlying syntactic structure or processes. One piece of evidence pointing towards imperfect acquisition is provided by the fact that some potential structures are still missing. For instance, one never finds anything intervening between *pas* and the tensed verb.¹⁴

¹³ In this example, it has the intentional interpretation of *not anymore*.

¹⁴ See below for the incorrect construction *pas toujours* used instead of the target like forms *toujours pas* or *pas encore*.

Furthermore, errors still do appear occasionally. For instance, eleven negative sentences are still incorrectly produced with the preverbal *ne* as the sole marker of negation, a structure normally observed at early stages of acquisition (Bartning, Schlyter 2004, Rule, Marsden 2006, Sanell 2007, Stoffel, Véronique 2003).¹⁵ However, as shown in Table 4, this phenomenon is marginal and mainly the fact of one student, who produces half of the cases (6 over 12).¹⁶

Table 4: Use of *ne* as sole negator: 12 tokens, classified according to the learners (Loc) who produced them, and the year / semester they were produced

	Loc				
	16	18	20	38	
I 2	1				*le suicide ne [rezolve] votre problème
II 1	1				*qui ne vont avoir l'opportunité
	1				*qui n'ont l'argent
	1				*ils n'ont payé
	1	1			*le bureau ne veut donner l'argent *maintenant je ne pense que...
II 2			1	1	*le demande pour le français n'existe je ne sais où (This use is grammatically correct)
		1			*je ne certain
III 1	1		1		*je ne vais à l'école lundi et jeudi
		1			*je n'avais voyagé à la France avant
					*la majorité de la classe ne poursuivent une langue étrangère
Total	6	3	2	1	

Note: The year and the semester of study are indicated in the leftmost column with Roman and Arabic numerals. The * indicates the ungrammatical sentences.

Inversely, although generally omitted by native speakers (Ashby 1981, Coveney 1996), *ne* is rarely omitted in the speech of classroom instructed L2 learners of French (Dewaele 1992). Yet, I found 48 instances of omission occurring mostly with idiomatic language chunks such as *je sais pas* (I don't know), *je suis pas sûre* (I'm not sure), or stereotypical clauses *c'est pas...* (It's not...), as seen in Table 5.

¹⁵ One additional sentence *je ne sais où* (I don't know where) is grammatical in formal registers.

¹⁶ Curiously, Loc18 produces three pre-predicative negations during semester 2 of Year 2, a structure normally observed at earlier stages of acquisition (Bartning, Schlyter 2004, Stoffel, Véronique 2003).

je ne certain (I'm not certain)
le temps ne pas droit (Time isn't right)
l'économie ne pas certaine (The economy isn't certain)

Even though this pattern is the exact translation of the copula-less Jamaican adjectival predication, such structure is not otherwise instantiated at this level of L2 proficiency. This could indicate that some reorganization is taking place for this student. Alternatively, it could simply be a pronunciation mistake due to confusion between *n'est pas* and *ne pas*.

Table 5: *ne* omitted : 48 tokens

	Loc							
	08	12	14	17	20	31	38	
I 2		2			1			je sais pas (3 x)
				1				ils recherchent rien (see below)
II1		3			1			je sais pas (4 x)
		1						je suis pas sure
		1						c'est pas possible
II2		1				1		Loc12: je suis pas sure maintenant; Loc31: j'ai pas sûre
		1			1			Loc12: je sais pas si c'est le mot; Loc20: je sais pas quoi je veux faire
			2					c'est pas problème (twice)
III1	9	11			1			je sais pas... (*)
		2	1					Je suis pas sûre (3x)
	1							je suis pas certaine
		1						je pense pas maintenant
	1	5					1	c'est pas... (**)
Total	11	28	3	1	4	1	1	

* Loc08: je sais pas (8 x), je sais pas le mot en français ; Loc12: je sais pas; je sais pas comment vous expliquer; je sais pas où; je sais pas quand exactement; je sais pas après combien d'années ; je sais pas toujours; je sais pas quoi; je sais pas où est le meilleur pays; je sais pas pourquoi

** Loc08: c'est pas vingt-et-un c'est vingt-cinq étudiants; Loc12: c'est pas plus d'une semaine ; c'est pas mal; c'est pas bon mais sans essayer beaucoup; c'est pas le même chose avec le français; c'est pas bon ; Loc38: c'est pas le même langue

As students become more proficient, more examples of *ne*-omission are produced by more students (33 are produced in Year 3, Semester 1, by 5 students), which indicates that some sociolinguistic awareness is increasing within the instructional context. Interestingly, in a mirror case of Table 4, more than half the examples of *ne*-omission (28 over 48) are produced by one student, Loc12.

When comparing the last two tables, we notice that two speakers who exhibit radically opposite behaviours: one tends to omit *ne* while the other tends to use it solely, Loc12 and Loc 16, have the same language background with respect to their previous exposure to the French and Spanish languages (see Tables 2 and 3 above). This contrast emphasizes the importance of taking into account fine grained individual differences among learners.

As far as the difficulties with the expression of 'partial' sentential negation are concerned, the issue is not just the scarcity and poor grammaticality of the tokens produced, but more importantly the avoidance strategies employed by learners to express the intended meaning. The general tendency is to reduce all 'partial' negations to constructions with the markers of 'total' negation *ne...pas*. Three avoidance strategies are identified.

In the first strategy, partial negation is avoided by using the marker of negation *ne...pas* in conjunction with adverbial or nominal quantifiers. In the following examples, *toujours... pas* (always + not) is used instead of *jamais* (never), *toutes... pas* (all + not) instead of *aucune* (no), *pas... quelque chose* (not + something) instead of *rien* (nothing, not anything), and *pas... toujours* (not + always) instead of *pas encore* (not yet, still not). In the first two cases, the more direct ‘partial’ negation (never, no) is avoided by having recourse to a logically equivalent, but syntactically awkward construction. Nevertheless, such constructions are quite subtle, as the order of adverbs / quantifiers with respect to the negative marker is significant, as ‘always + not’ or ‘all + not’ are logically different from ‘not + always’ or ‘not + all’. The last two cases, however, gives the wrong semantics as, in order to be grammatical, *quelque chose* should have wide scope over negation, which is not the intended meaning that the learner is trying to express, and as *pas toujours* should mean *not always* while the meaning intended by the learner is *not yet*.

**peut-être elle parlait franchement des choses qu'on toujours ne parle pas*
 (Maybe she spoke openly of things that people always don't speak about)
 (Loc01, Year II Semester 1, November 2002, Pilot group)

toutes les guerres ne sont pas nécessaires
 (All wars aren't necessary. Intended meaning: No war is necessary)
 (Loc34, Year I Semester 2, April 2003)

**il n'y a pas quelque chose de concret*
 (There isn't something concrete. Intended meaning: There isn't anything concrete) (Loc01, Year II Semester 1, November 2002, Pilot group)

**je sais pas toujours* (I don't always know. Intended meaning: I still don't know).
 (Loc12, Year III Semester 1, November 2004)

Although these examples are easily understood, at least as far as the negative construction is concerned, these forms are either idiomatically awkward or simply ungrammatical, and should be avoided. The first sentence is ungrammatical because of the position of the adverb *toujours* (always), incorrectly placed between the subject pronoun and the verb and because of the wrong choice of relative pronoun, but crucially not because of the ‘*toujours + pas*’ (always not) construal.¹⁷ The second sentence is grammatical, but usually

¹⁷ As pointed out by a reviewer, the comparison of actual uses of negation and ‘*toujours / always*’ in French and English is more complex than just the order of the elements from left to right. The merging point of the ‘always’ term in the clause is significant:

They always don't leave the keys out (Logically equivalent to: *They never leave the keys out*)
They don't always leave the keys out

If the second example is easily translated by *Ils ne laissent pas toujours les clefs dehors*, the French sentence with the temporal adverbial *toujours* internal to the verb projection *Ils ne laissent toujours pas les clefs dehors* means something rather different in English than the first example:

dispreferred. The third sentence is ungrammatical because of the incorrect use of the indefinite quantifier *quelque chose* (something), with the intended meaning of ‘anything,’ and the fourth one, apart from giving the wrong interpretation, is ungrammatical because of the incorrect position of *toujours* at the end of the sentence. The latter example also exemplifies the fact that learners tend to reject the separation of the negator *pas* from the tensed verb, even if it leads to ungrammaticality in the target language. So, *pas toujours* is produced instead of two possible target-like constructions: *je (ne) sais toujours pas* / *je (ne) sais pas encore*.

In the second strategy, the marker of negation is combined with a multipurpose temporal adverb *maintenant* (now) to express either literally *not now*, or *not yet* (*pas encore*), and even possibly, in a constituent negation, *not anymore*.

je ne peux pas penser maintenant (I can't think now)
(Loc38, Year II Semester 1, April 2004)

maintenant je n' ai pas une problème avec l'espagnol (Now I don't have a
problem with Spanish) (Loc33, Year I Semester 2, November 2003)

je ne trouve pas un professeur spécifique maintenant¹⁸ (I don't find a specific
teacher now. Intended meaning: ‘not yet’)
(Loc18, Year II Semester 1, April 2004)

- ton père il voyage beaucoup? (Does your father travel a lot?)
- *pas maintenant* (not now. Possible intended meaning: ‘not anymore’)
(Loc17, Year I Semester 2, November 2003)

This second strategy is communicatively less successful than the first one in the sense that it is three-way ambiguous, and forces the interlocutor to rely more heavily on the situational context to arrive at the intended interpretation.

In the third strategy identified, other attempts at expressing the meanings of *pas encore* (not yet) or *jamais* (never) with adverbs of temporal perspective typically result in awkward or ungrammatical structure, even more so that they are often accompanied by errors in the choice of verbal tenses.

They still don't leave the keys out. (Semantically equivalent to: They don't leave the keys out yet).

In order to get the wide scope reading of *toujours*, the adverb should merge at the level of the functional domain: *Toujours, il ne laissent pas les clefs dehors*. Though interpretable without any difficulty and, in my opinion, grammatical, this sentence is rather awkward in comparison with the preferred construction of partial negation *Ils ne laissent jamais les clefs dehors*.

¹⁸ The present tense is used instead of the expected present perfect.

*je n'ai pas trouvé déjà¹⁹ (I haven't found already. Intended meaning: 'not yet')
(Loc17, Year II Semester 1, April 2004)

*et bien je n'avais voyagé à la France avant (I had not travelled to France before.
Intended meaning: 'never') (Loc20, Year III Semester 1, Nov. 2004)

Here, *ne...pas... déjà* (not already) is used with the intended meaning of *pas encore* (not yet), and *ne... avant* (not before) with the intended meaning of *jamais* (never).

We notice a tendency to place temporal adverbs at the margins of the clause, either at the beginning or at the end, which is ungrammatical with short adverbs like *déjà* (*still*), generated inside the verb phrase, and supposed to be located between the auxiliary and the past participle.

On the basis of the previous avoidance strategies, it could be argued that the learners simply have failed to learn these other sentential negative expressions. However, the data shows that such expressions are occasionally attested in their oral production.

*personne ne peut pas hum euh voyager pour le travail (Nobody can't travel for work) (Intended meaning: Nobody can travel for work) (Loc17, Year I Semester 2, November 2003)

- parce que ici ils recherchent euh rien (Because here they research nothing)
(Loc17, Year I Semester 2, November 2003)
- rien? (nothing?) (Asked by the interviewer)
- pas rien mais un petit peu (not nothing but a little bit).

je n'ai jamais dit ça (I never said that)
(Loc38, Year II Semester 2, April 2004)

je n'ai jamais mangé de cuisine française (I have never eaten French food)
(Loc08, Year II Semester 2, April 2004)

The first example is particularly interesting as the learner erroneously adds a post-verbal negator *pas*.²⁰ The second example provides us with a target-like use of a post-verbal *rien* (nothing). However, I suggest that this construction does not represent sentential negation, but rather constituent negation, in the interlanguage of this learner. This hypothesis is based on the fact that, even though the omission of *ne* is grammatical in spoken French, it is abnormal for this learner as this phenomenon is never otherwise instantiated in her production. It is also based on the observation that *rien* is preceded by a marked hesitation and a pause, and followed, in the next turn of the conversation, by a

¹⁹ The pluperfect is used instead of the expected compound past. The marker of sentential negation is missing.

²⁰ One informant producing this structure confirmed to me that she doesn't feel *personne* to be negative and identifies negation with *ne...pas*.

clear constituent use: *pas rien*. Finally, the last two examples are target like grammatical uses of *jamais* (never).

Before presenting my hypothesis on this avoidance phenomenon, let us examine some additional data.

4.3. Additional data on learners' language

Written samples, characterized by higher levels of planning, and monitoring, confirm that negative constructions appear in a quite native-like fashion in formal modalities for these same learners.

Year I, Semester 2:

Loc12: Il n'y a plus d'examens (There are no more exams)

Loc16: Beaucoup d'instituteurs n'ont aucune formation professionnelle (Many elementary school teachers have no professional training)

Loc17: Ici il n'y a que des enseignants qui n'ont pas des bonnes qualifications (Here there are only teachers who don't have good qualifications)

Loc20: mais toujours les professeurs recevaient presque rien (but still teachers would receive almost nothing)

Notice again the orthographically incorrect *ne*-omission with *presque rien* (almost nothing). This suggests a constituent negation value in the mind of this other student.

Year II, Semester 1:

Loc16: il a jamais écrit un mauvais chanson (he never wrote a bad song)

Year III Semester 1:

Loc12: le gouvernement ne va sponsoriser plus le 80% des frais de scolarité (the government is no longer going to sponsor 80% of tuition)

Loc14: Il ne fait guère de doute que... (There is little doubt that...')

Loc14: ...car ils ne peuvent guère acheter leurs médicaments. (because they hardly can afford to buy their prescription drugs)

Loc20: Il n'y a guerre (= guère) d'argent (There is little money)

All these examples show that the learners might very well have a conscious (learned) knowledge of these forms (information in the declarative memory), some of them are not attested in the oral corpus: *aucun* (no), the exceptive *ne...que* (only), the quite formal *guère* (not a lot), while being unable to automatically access that information in the flow of the oral conversation (processed online in the procedural memory), indicating that acquisition in the unconscious grammar has not taken place (see Bialystok 1982 for a

view of proficiency relative to the modality of use, and Krashen 1977, Zobl 1995 for a distinction between ‘learning’ and ‘acquisition’).²¹

Grammaticality judgment tasks offer some interesting light as well. When 10 learners were asked to judge whether negative sentences were grammatical or not, the percentage of learners giving correct judgments, that is, correctly predicting that a sentence is grammatical when grammatical in the L2, or ungrammatical when ungrammatical in the L2, tends to confirm the observation that their interlanguage requires one and only one post verbal negative (*pas, jamais, plus*).

Table 6: Metalinguistic Judgment task: percentage of correct judgment

Je ne veux plus jamais lui parler	10%
Je ne fais plus confiance à Paul	80%
Je n’irai jamais plus dans ce magasin	20%
*Il ne fume plus pas	90%
Paulette n’a jamais joué au tennis	80%

The three post-verbal adverbs therefore compete for a single position and cannot co-occur. Of course, this can be traced back to the Jamaican L1 use of *no, don’* and *neva* as sentential negators with the temporal / aspectual values expressed by separate adverbials.

The requirement to use a post verbal negator in these learners’ interlanguage also explains the incorrect negative concord of the pronominal subject *personne* with the post verbal negator *pas* in the spontaneous example we have examined.

5. Discussion

First, we notice no significant difference between our heterogeneous groups of students with respect to the expression of negation, and very little progression. This is explained by the fact that these learners are already at an intermediate / low advanced level which shows a good control of sentential negation, while still being in the process of acquiring other negative words and temporal adverbials (See Sanell 2007). We have however pointed out some individual preferences: one student tending to omit *ne*, another one to use it as sole negator, and an increase in *ne*-omission pointing towards increase sociolinguistic awareness.

As the main negator in Jamaican Creole, *no* is a syntactic head of NegP, we could have expected more instances of *ne* as the sole negator. This prediction is not borne out. Indeed, the saliency of *pas* in the French input seems to ensure that the double marking of negation surrounding the tensed verb will be noticed, and rapidly acquired²². However,

²¹ It should be pointed out as well that Jamaican Creole being essentially a spoken language, it might be less likely to influence writing in French than speaking. Thanks to Deborah Arteaga for pointing this out.

²² Of course, we would need to include in the corpus participants at a beginners’ level to find about this possible influence from the Jamaican language.

the fact that *ne* is generally not reduced in pronunciation²³, as well as the rather limited number of *ne* omission tends to indicate that, except maybe in various ready made chunks (*je sais pas, je suis pas sûr, c'est pas*), this particle is still perceived as an integral part of the negative construction, possibly at its centre.

I have hypothesized that the difficulties, especially with respect to negative adverbials, are caused by transfer influence from the Jamaican Creole language that relies on the interaction of negation with various adverbs of temporal perspective to express partial negation. The structures observed in the oral corpus can be deduced from the comparison of the syntactic structures of the languages at the relevant level of abstraction. Now I would like to clarify the transfer mechanism.

According to Schachter (1992, p.32), transfer is not at all a process, but a constraint on the learner's hypothesis testing process: it is both a facilitating and a limiting condition. Transfer, therefore, is as likely to be manifested, not just in errors, but in avoidance or overgeneralization of certain constructions. Zobl (1982) makes the link between language transfer and developmental processes as interacting processes rather than opposing ones: Transfer cannot change the route of acquisition of syntactic patterns. However, it has the potential of bringing about a delay or a plateau, if there is a developmental stage in the acquisition of the L2 that corresponds to a pattern in the learner's L1. This delay can turn into permanent fossilization.

We have seen that, for Jamaican learners of French, mastery of sentential negation is not accompanied by mastery of partial negation, but mainly by avoidance strategies that persist at advanced levels in their automatic oral productions. Within this limited corpus, we have not been able to show evidence of an acquisition route for negation, but other developmental studies focussing on earlier stages of acquisition clearly show such a route (Bartning, Schlyter 2004, Sanell 2007).

6. Pedagogical remediation

Once a specific 'problem' potentially leading to fossilization is identified, the practitioners decide what pedagogical action should be taken to rectify it. We have to keep in mind however that a specific linguistic construction will not be acquired no matter how much it is taught until the right level of cognitive maturation has been reached. Some level of leniency must therefore be exercised at lower levels of proficiency with those deviant language uses that are proven to remain at higher levels of proficiency (if these structures do not impede communication).

At the intermediate level, learners should be made aware of the diversity of structures of sentential negation. Their errors could be pointed out using forms of recast or prompts (Lyster 2004). Additionally, more appropriate avoidance strategies should be suggested. For instance, better adverb placement, especially with temporal adverbials like *toujours, maintenant, avant, déjà*, could be corrected by presenting input showing that short adverbs have to appear inside the VP rather than at the margins of the clause.

²³ This fact was pointed out to me by James Lee (personal communication).

At more advanced levels, however, students are expected to show evidence of mastering the negative structures. Better choice of tenses would indirectly improve the quality of their avoidance strategies in automatic uses of the language. Form-focused instruction on partial negation as well as on adverbs of temporal perspective acquired at the same time, as Ana Sanell (2007) has shown, on the one hand, accompanied by opportunities for meaningful communicative activities, such as role plays, mock interviews, designed to elicit negative expressions, on the other hand, could help prevent long term fossilization of erroneous patterns.

One important lesson of this research is the necessity to keep in sight not only the L2 structure targeted, but also the avoidance strategies utilized by learners. In that respect, it seems to be as useful to learn about adverbs of temporal perspective as about specific words of partial negation. Both seem to be acquired in parallel anyway.

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