Rethinking the Jespersen Cycle from a Bantu Perspective

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The Jespersen Cycle (JC) has been widely discussed from the perspective of numerous languages, and two types of analysis emerge from recent works:

- Morphosyntactic impoverishment of the old marker catalyses the cycle, as the interpretable negative feature is transferred to the reinforcer (van Kemenade, 2000; Roberts & al, 2003; Willis, 2008).
- The shift is caused by two simultaneous changes: reanalysis of the old marker into a polarity marker, and reanalysis of the old reinforcer into a negative marker (Breitbarth, 2009).

Common to both types of analyses is the following point: The interpretable negative feature should not at any time be carried by two morphological items simultaneously. This implies that the emergence of the bipartite strategy *ne..pas* or *ne..not* correlates with the loss of negative feature for *ne* in both French and English. In this paper, I challenge this shared premise on empirical ground by presenting the previously unnoticed data of Fe'fe' (a Grassfield Bantu language), and by offering a different analysis for existing data from Middle English, Middle Welsh and French.

(1)　　Siani　　lë **sì** γέ　　kò
　　　　Siani　　P3 NEG go　　farm
　　　　'Siani　　did not go to the farm.'

(2)　　Siani　　**sï** kά yɛ̃ kò　**bɑ̈**
　　　　Siani　　NEG FUT go farm　NEG
　　　　'Siani will not go to farm.'

(3)　　pά**ʔ** Siani **lɛ̀** yɛ̃ kò
　　　　Can Siani　NEG go farm
　　　　'Siani cannot go to the farm.'

(4)　　Siani　　**lɑ̈ʔ** yɛ̃　　kò
　　　　Siani　　NEG go　　farm
　　　　'Siani has never gone to farm.'

(5)　　Siani　　**kɑ̀ʔ** γέ kò
　　　　Siani　　NEG go farm
　　　　'Siani has not gone to farm.'

(5b)　Siani　　**kɑ̀ʔ** fú ŋgέ　kò
　　　　Siani　　NEG P1 go　farm
　　　　'Siani did not go to the farm (earlier today).'

(6a)　Siani　　lǒ syέ　　ă　**lɛ̀**　γέ kò
　　　　Siani　　quit ground　3sg NEG　go farm
　　　　'Siani got up and did not go to the farm.'

(6a)　Siani　　pέ nà **mbά ʔ** ŋgέ kò
　　　　Siani　　agree to NEG　go farm
　　　　'Siani has agreed not to go to the farm.'

(b)　**Pά ʔ** ngέ kò
　NEG go farm
　'Dont go to the farm.'

(b)　O　**sì**　yɛ̃　　kò
　2sg　NEG　go　　farm
　'Dont go to the farm.'

	Main clause	Sub. clause	Imp clause
Non-past	Sì bɑ̈		
Past 2&3	sì		
Past 1	kɑ̀ʔ		
perfect	kɑ̀ʔ		
Perspect.	lɑʔ		
Modal cl		lɛ̀	
Cons.cl		lɛ̀	
Subjunct		Pάʔ/ sì	
Purpose		Pάʔ/sì bɑ̈	
Infinitive		mbάʔ/sì bɑ̈	
			Pάʔ/sì
Table 1: Negative strategies in Fe'fe'			

Table 1 sums up the distribution of negative markers in (1) – (6). We observe that older markers are either in non indicative environments or in subordinate clauses, while new markers occur in indicative main clauses. Furthermore, at the exception of *lɛ̀*, older markers are in free variation with new ones as shown in columns 3 and 4 of the table. Hence, at the introduction of new markers, older ones persist in the language and one obtains a syntactic effect that lays strict restrictions on their distribution. This results into complementary distribution and free variation between co-existing markers.

Contrary to the standard analysis that presents JC as a series of discrete stages, data from Middle English, Middle Welsh and French show that multiple stages of JC co-exist in other language families as well. In Middle English, *ne, ne...not* and *not* co-existed, while Middle Welsh displayed the co-existence of *ny(d), ny(d)...ddim* and *ddim* (main clause), *na, na..ddim* (subordinate and imperative clauses), and *peidio /beidio* (imperatives and infinitives). Moreover, the contemporary co-existence of *ne*, *ne..pas* and *pas* in French is also revealing. Hence, the empirical data challenge the view that each language is at a discrete or clear-cut stage at any particular time. Rather, a language as a whole can be at more than one stage at the same time. Thus, we observe that subordinate environments are often one stage behind main clauses. For instance, at the point in Middle Welsh when main clauses had

gone through stages 1, 2 and 3 and completed the cycle, subordinate clauses were still transiting from stage 1 to stage 2 (see Borsley & al, 2005 for data). Furthermore, during the period when *ne*, *ne…not* and *not* co-existed in Middle English, there was a restriction on the distribution of the oldest marker *ne*, which was relegated to subordinate and if-clauses. On the contrary, the new marker *not* was highly disfavoured by subordinate clauses, and mostly found in main clauses (see Wallage, 2008 & Jack, 1978a&b for data). In the case of French, the older *ne* is found not only in subordinate environments, but is also associated with modal verbs. Such instances of variation illustrate what Hopper & Traugott (2003) term competition between the old and the new. It follows that standard analyses oversimplify the full richness and variety of JC. Hence, non-default markers that co-exist from stage 2 with the default for each stage are marginalised and excluded from standard accounts.

Taking into consideration a) The availability of multiple stages in the same time span resulting in competition between the new and old, b) The syntactic environments that get into play to make the alternate usages of co-existing forms possible, I argue that JC, just like any other language change, involves a period of synchronic "competition between grammatically incompatible options which substitute for one another in use" (Kroch, 1994). Therefore, I propose that the synchronic variation exhibited by the Fɛʔfɛʔ negation system is the result of an ongoing change. The correlation of synchronic variation with gradualness can be demonstrated in the case of French, English and Welsh with evidence from historical records. A language change account for Fɛʔfɛʔ however necessitates other tools, since Fɛʔfɛʔ lacks recorded dated from previous centuries. Adopting the uniformitarian hypothesis, my approach to the Fɛʔfɛʔ data is both analogical and comparative. First, typologically similar stages to the present state of the Fɛʔfɛʔ negation system are identified in French, English and Welsh. This provides a common type for Fɛʔfɛʔ and these languages in their previous states. On this basis, distributional generalisations are established, first in the languages with historical records, then by analogy for Fɛʔfɛʔ. Second, following Greenberg's (1978) synchronic typology, I compare the sister languages of Fɛʔfɛʔ in their synchronic states, interpreting each language type or state as a stage in the diachronic process. This results in a comparative reconstruction dynamicizing the relation between synchronic variants. I conclude that a competing grammars approach provides a more factual account for the variation and continual shifts exhibited in negation systems during JC cross-linguistically.

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