THE LIMITS OF JESPERSEN’S CYCLE IN THE ROMANIA NOVA

Theresa Biberauer, University of Cambridge
Sonia Cyrino, Universidade de Campinas

1. French represents the most frequently cited example of Jespersen’s Cycle (JC; Jespersen 1917), whereby a sentential negator (NEG₁) may be reinforced by a second negation element (NEG₂), which may then become obligatory; thereafter, the initial negator may become optional, with NEG₂ ultimately being reanalyzed as the “real” negator (NEG₃), at which point the Cycle may begin again. See (1) and the corresponding French instantiation of the Cycle in (2):

(1) I. NEG₁ … II. NEG₁ … (NEG₂) III. NEG₁ … NEG₂ IV. (NEG₁) … NEG₂ V. NEG₃
(2) I. ne .. II. ne .. (pas) III. ne .. pas IV. (ne) .. pas V. pás

Our focus in this paper is on the Romania Nova (RN), i.e. Romance varieties spoken in the Americas, and the extent to which it is correct to view varieties that employ a reinforcing negator (NEG₂) as systems which have progressed beyond Stage II. Numerous previous researchers have proposed that this is indeed the case (cf. i.a. Schwegler 1986, 1991, Lipski 2001, Schwenter 2005), and that some RN varieties have consequently developed crosslinguistically rare and, in the context of Romance, otherwise unattested clause-final negation (cf. Horn 1989, Reesink 2002, Miestamo 2005, Dryer 2009). We show that this is incorrect, and that closer investigation of the RN compared to their better-studied European relatives in fact highlights important considerations determining the type of negative developments that we may expect, not only in Romance languages, but in language systems generally.

2. Brazilian Portuguese (BP) represents our point of departure as it clearly illustrates the patterns which have given rise to the view that French-style JC developments have also taken place in the RN. As (3) shows, northern varieties of BP permit a range of negation structures, including one which is not possible in standard spoken BP and which appears to feature just the originally reinforcing negator (cf. i.a. Schwegler 1991, Alkmim 1999, Schwenter 2005, Cavalcante 2007):

(3) a. A Maria nāo₁/num vai no teatro [standard and northern BP: ✓]
   the Mary not not.CL go in-the theatre = “Mary is not going to the theatre”
   b. A Maria nāo/num vai no teatro nāo₂ [standard and northern BP: ✓]
   c. A Maria vai no teatro nāo₂ [standard BP: ✗; northern BP: ✓]

Superficially, (3) suggests that northern BP at least is a system in which NEG₁, which may be reduced to clitic num, is steadily being replaced by NEG₂, which, in this case, is clause-final. A number of empirical facts, however, indicate that a JC-inspired analysis of the structures in (3) is misguided.

3. Firstly, while (3a,b)-type structures are grammatical in main and embedded clauses, (3c)-type are restricted to matrix clauses. This also entails that (3c)-structures are impossible in relative clauses (Hansen 2009). Secondly, (3c)-type structures are restricted to contexts featuring (a) prior presupposition(s), which nāo₂ then contradicts (e.g. in direct answers); (3a,b)-type structures are not (cf. Schwenter 2005, Cavalcante 2007). Thirdly, (3c)-structures are impossible in polite questions, unlike the (3a,b)-types; in interrogative contexts, (3c)-structures necessarily involve strong presuppositional emphasis that is otherwise absent:
(4) a. Você não comprou a casa (não)? [polite/simple yes/no Q]  
   “Didn’t you buy the house?”  
   b. Você comprou a casa não? [presuppositional yes/no Q]  
   “You DIDN’T buy the house?! (I thought you had!)”

Finally, (3a,b)-type unlike (3c)-type structures are compatible with NPI-containing idioms:

(5) a. Ele não tem um tostão furado não!  
   “He doesn’t have a red cent”, i.e. he is poor  
   b. Ele tem um tostão furado não! Tem um inteiro!  
   “He doesn’t have a red cent; he has a blue one” (literal meaning); ≠ “He is poor”

As shown above, NPI-idioms in (3c)-type structures can only be interpreted literally, if at all. Together, these facts raise the following question: if clause-final não in (3c)-type structures is simply a reanalysed version of clause-final não in (3b)-type structures, it is not obvious how to understand the diverse restrictions listed above (cf. Cavalcante 2007 for recent discussion). This is particularly true as (3c)- and (3b)-type structures are part of the same grammar.

4. Against this background, we offer a novel analysis of the BP data, which not only accounts for the peculiar distributional facts highlighted above, but also raises important questions about the extent to which JC developments have taken place in the RN. The core component of the analysis is the insight that the clause-final não in (3b)- and (3c)-type structures are not in fact the same; instead, they instantiate distinct lexical elements, which are differently associated with the clausal spine. Specifically, the former (henceforth: não) is a non-negative C-related Polarity head (cf. Laka 1994), which plausibly originated as discourse tag-element (i.e. an adjunct), which was subsequently integrated into the CP-domain (via downward reanalysis, which we propose to be the norm in cases where adjuncts become grammaticalised; this therefore contrasts with the upward reanalysis that typically occurs where already-integrated syntactic heads undergo grammaticalisation – cf. Roberts & Roussou 2003, van Gelderen 2004). By contrast, the latter (henceforth: não) is the anaphoric negator, which is homophonous with (non-reduced) NEG (and NEG) in BP and which remains an adjunct associated with the leftmost periphery of the CP. This distinction immediately accounts for the não- não discrepancies noted above: being a non-integrated left-peripheral element, não is incompatible with selected CPs, that não should be restricted to presuppositional contexts follows directly from its anaphoric negator status, and the idiom facts also follow directly since anaphoric negators cannot license NPIs (cf. *No, I drink anything/a drop vs No, I don’t drink anything/ a drop). Further evidence that não and não do not derive from the same source comes from diachronic considerations: while northern BP has innovated wide-scope short answers of the kind illustrated in (6Ab), this option, which parallels what is possible in positive short answers in all varieties (cf. (6Ab)), is not available in standard oral BP:

(6) Q: Você tem muitas dívidas?  
   “Do you have many debts?”  
   A: a. Tenho  b. Tenho, sim  
   have.1SG = “Yes” have.1SG indeed = “Yes”  
   A’: a. Não b. Tenho, não  
   no = “No”  

[positive short answer]
[negative short answer]
Evidently, then, northern BP features a plausible source-structure for single não-containing structures, which is absent in varieties which do not permit (3c)-type structures. Crucially, this fact, combined with the distributional asymmetries noted above, means that the latter should not be viewed as the product of a JC development; instead, final não-containing structures in northern BP appear to have arisen as the consequence of an independently available negative reinforcement structure.

5. Lipski (2001) and Bell (2004) discuss several further RN and Romance-based creole (RC) varieties, which resemble BP in featuring an obligatorily clause-final negator (Bell designates these Bipartite Negation with Final NEG/BNF languages). In some cases, e.g. Chocó Spanish, Caribbean Spanish and acrolectal Palenquero, BNF structures like (3b) are optional, suggesting a JC Stage II analysis; in others, e.g. Santomé (cf. Hagemeijer 2007), it is the unmarked option, pointing to Stage III. All of these varieties additionally permit (3c)-type structures, which, in basilectal Palenquero, are said to constitute the unmarked option, suggesting that this variety may be approaching Stage V. In each of these cases, then, the question of JC developments once again arises. Observing that Santomé (3c)-structures clearly involve a final NEG drawn from the outermost reaches of the CP-domain, which is, moreover, often formally distinct from that found in (3b)-structures and which behaves very similarly to BP não3 (cf. Hagemeijer 2007), we conclude that this BNF language, like BP, is not in the process of establishing a new unmarked sentential negator: there are, once again, two distinct final NEG elements in play, only one of which appears to be involved in JC. We present evidence that the reinforcing negator in all of the cases that we discuss is structurally “high”, located within the upper CP domain. This has not precluded the rise of JC-independent clause-internal negative reinforcement strategies, which serve to differentiate different types of negation (contradictory vs contrary/presuppositional, etc.). But we argue, based on the empirical fact that these Romance BNF varieties with “high” NEG2s are not undergoing Stage III-IV/V changes and the conceptual consideration that sentential negation may not outscope illocutionary force (possibly, Rizzi’s (1997) ForceP; cf. Han 2001), that there exists a syntactic constraint on the possibility of Stage III-IV/V JC developments (cf. also Biberauer 2009). This is given in (7):

(7) NEG2 may only be reanalyzed as a “real” negator, giving rise to NEG3, where it is sufficiently low in the clausal domain.

Strikingly, French and Western European languages which have undergone Stage III-IV/V changes have all drawn on VP/vP-related elements as the source for NEG2 (cf. Zanuttini 1997, Poletto 2008 and deVos & van der Auwera 2009 for discussion of the most common etymological sources for concord elements).

These facts, then, suggest that it is essential to distinguish postverbal negation of the familiar French type from clause-final negation in determining the likelihood of future JC developments. To the extent that the latter entails a “high”, necessarily final concord element, we do not expect the RN and RC varieties to develop the crosslinguistically rare neutral SVONeg patterns found in Africa and Polynesia. Instead, such structures are expected to remain marked reinforcement structures, signalling a particular type of negation (most plausibly, presuppositional negation). We therefore see that the oft-cited idea that “exported” European varieties which come into contact with non-European language systems will develop typologically rare properties does not hold in the case of negation in the RN languages, despite superficial appearances to the contrary.

6. What the paper shows, then, is that detailed consideration of the Romania Nova is crucial in allowing us to develop a more fine-grained understanding the limits of Jespersen’s Cycle.