

# Negative priorities: evidence from prohibitive and expletive negation

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**Abstract.** In this paper we propose an analysis of prohibitive and expletive negation that relies on two ways of building negative priorities. Our empirical ground is the diachronic development of expletive negation from Latin to French. We show that the negative expression *ne* (from Indo-European *mē*) is found in two contexts in Latin: imperatives and priority attitudes. We propose a unified semantics for these contexts, that leaves room to accommodate a distinction between positive (e.g. *order/wish*) and negative (e.g. *forbid/fear*) priority attitudes. We argue for an ambiguity account of *ne* driven by these two types of attitudes, and argue for a distinction of a prohibitive *ne* acting as a true negation in the context of imperatives and positive priority attitudes and an expletive *ne*, reversing the ordering relation encoded in the lexical semantics of negative priority attitudes. We extended the analysis to expletive negation in the context of epistemic attitudes conveying a meaning of contrariness such as *doubt* or *deny* thus establishing a unified semantics for negative attitudes that cuts across priority and epistemic ones.

**Keywords:** priority modality, attitudes, speech acts, negation.

## 1. Introduction

Expletive negation is the cross-linguistically attested form/meaning mismatch whereby a negation marker appearing in a complement clause does not contribute proper negative meaning. Expletive negation does not occur randomly, and across languages a large variety of triggers have been identified. Not all languages feature all triggers, but there is some overlap cross-linguistically (see Yoon (2011), for the most recent inventory). Among the core contexts that license expletive negation *ne* in French – the language under scrutiny here – and across languages, we find attitudes expressing apprehension (1), doubt (2) verbs, as well as before-type of clauses, (3) and comparatives, see (4).

- (1) Je **crains** qu’ on        **ne** nous    ait                    entendus.  
I    fear    that 3SG.CL *ne* 2PL.CL have.3SG.SUBJ heard  
‘I **fear** that someone heard what we were saying.’
- (2) Personne **ne doute** que tu    **n’** en        sois                    capable.  
Nobody    NEG doubts that you *ne* it.ACC be.3SG.SUBJ capable  
‘No one **doubts** that you are able to do it.’
- (3) Partez        **avant** que je **ne** change                    d’ avis.  
Leave.IMP before that I    *ne* change.1SG.SUBJ my mind.  
‘You should leave **before** I change my mind.’

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- (4) Je me crois **plus** fort que je **ne** le suis.  
 I 1SG.REFL believe more strong than I *ne* it.ACC be.3SG.SUBJ  
 ‘I think of myself as stronger than I am.’

In this paper, we will follow the insight of some previous studies that have pointed to a relation between expletive negation in modern languages (and in particular Greek) and the so-called Indo-European prohibitive negation, dedicated to the construction of negative imperatives. Chatzopoulou (2012), for Greek, observed that the same morphological form NEG<sub>2</sub>, *min* (as opposed to the standard propositional negation NEG<sub>1</sub>, *dhen*) occurs as a negative element in imperative clauses, see (5), while it occurs as an expletive element with attitudes like *fear* (see (6)).

- (5) **Min** fέris ton Jáni!  
 NEG<sub>2</sub> bring.2SG the.ACC John.ACC  
 ‘Don’t bring John!’
- (6) Fováme na **min** erthi.  
 fear.PRES.1SG SUBJ NEG<sub>2</sub> come.3SG  
 ‘I fear that he comes.’

We will show that Latin NEG<sub>2</sub> (*ne*), like its Greek counterpart, is used to build a negative priority (negative command, wish, or permission). More specifically, we will argue that negative priorities come in two types. Negative priorities can be formed of an imperative operator or what we call a positive priority attitude (eg. *wish/order*) followed by a semantically plain *ne*, see (7), (8). They can also be formed of a negative priority attitude (eg. *fear/forbid*) followed by an apparently semantically empty *ne*, see (9).

- (7) **Ne** vivam si tibi concedo.  
 NEG<sub>2</sub> live.1SG.SUBJ if you.DAT abandon.1SG  
 ‘May I not live if I let you down.’ (Cic, *Epis*, 2.209)
- (8) Velim **ne** intermittas.  
 wish.1SG NEG<sub>2</sub> stop.2SG.SUBJ  
 ‘I wish that you will not stop.’ (Cic, *Epis*, 11.12.4.6)
- (9) Timeo **ne** laborem augeam.  
 fear.1SG NEG<sub>2</sub> work.ACC increase-1SG.SUBJ  
 ‘I fear that I shall increase my work.’ (Cic, *Leg*, 1.4)

Our analysis will substantiate the descriptive categories ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ priority attitudes (see section 3), by fine-tuning a unified modal semantics for imperatives and priority attitudes, which leaves room to accommodate key differences between two ways of building negative priorities. We will thereby propose an ambiguity account where *ne* contributes negative meaning only when it is prohibitive; we will argue that, in the context of negative priority attitudes, expletive *ne* operates over the ordering source of the attitude by spelling out a negative component lexically encoded in the meaning of the verb. We will show that this ambiguity of *ne* found in Latin is lost in French, where only expletive *ne* survives, also appearing in new environments. We argue that solitary prohibitive *ne* undergoes the Jespersen Cycle and is no longer found in this language. In section 2 we discuss current theories of expletive negation by highlighting the main points of overlap with our account. In section 3 we present our diachronic

study. Section 4 is devoted to the semantic analysis and its (diachronic) predictions. Section 5 offers further predictions, discussing epistemic verbs triggering expletive negation. Section 6 concludes.

## 2. Previous approaches

Among the many proposals (Muller (1991); Tovenia (1996); Zanuttini and Portner (2000); Abels (2005); Eilam (2009); Makri (2013); Jin and Koenig (2017)), we will focus on two major approaches to expletive negation in attitude contexts. The first treats expletive negation as a Negative Concord item, while the second treats it as a mood morpheme with a comparative semantics.

### 2.1. Expletive negation as a Negative Concord Item

Zeijlstra (2004) and Espinal (2007) posit that expletive negation and the main verb do enter a Negative Concord relation with each other, yielding a ‘single-negation’ semantic reading. Espinal’s proposal consists in a Negative Concord analysis of the relation between nonveridical predicates (non-implicative predicates  $F$  such that  $F(p)$  does not entail  $p$  Giannakidou (2009)) and expletive negation. According to Espinal, only the main predicate is interpreted as semantically ‘negative’, while the negation marker in the subordinate clause is interpreted as a dependent concord item. The idea of a deep connection between the negative semantics of the predicate and expletive negation is important and we will maintain it here. However, there are several non-veridical predicates that do not trigger expletive negation (e.g. belief or command verbs), and our diachronic analysis will help us to pin down the negative contribution of the predicate at the level of its modal comparative semantics rather than at the level of its nonveridical property. In our account expletive negation does not enter a Negative Concord relation to the main predicate. We will rather propose that expletive negation is the overt spell out of a negative component in the main predicate’s lexical semantics, which fulfills the specific task of reversing the preferences encoded in the comparative semantics of the attitude.

### 2.2. Expletive negation as a mood marker

Yoon (2011) posits that in Korean, although expletive negation is morphologically identical to standard negation, it does not play the role of a standard negation marker but that of a subjunctive mood marker (see also Zovko-Dinkovic (2017)). In the line of reasoning of Giannakidou (2009), Yoon assumes that the subjunctive mood is licensed by nonveridical predicates as a Negative Polarity Item. Within this perspective, subjunctive mood is conceived as a semantically dependent morpheme, which does not actively contribute to meaning, but has a certain definedness condition that restricts its distribution to the scope of nonveridical predicates (see also Giannakidou (2009)). Yoon argues that expletive negation is a subjunctive mood marker that conveys a scalar (or evaluative) meaning. According to Yoon’s analysis, expletive negation (abb. EN in (10)) imposes an ordering on the modal base  $M_B$  of verbs *fear*, ranking  $\neg p$ -worlds higher than  $p$ -worlds on a desirability scale.

- (10) *Scalar semantics for expletive negation with fear* (Yoon, 2011: p.161):
- a. If *fear* ( $x, p$ ) is true in a context  $c$ , then  $M_B(x) \cap p$  is not  $\emptyset$  in  $c$ .

- b. The evaluative component of EN  $(x,p)$  expresses in context  $c$  as the following:

$$M_B(x) - p >_{Desirability} M_B(x) \cap p \text{ in } c$$

In line with Yoon (2011), our analysis will recognize a connection between expletive negation and orderings, but we will abandon the idea that expletive negation is triggered by non-veridicality, as this assumption would overgenerate the use of expletive negation; indeed non-veridical predicates such as *believe* and *hope* do not licence expletive negation. Our empirical study allows us to identify a subclass of nonveridical environments that trigger expletive negation. Our analysis will substantiate the idea that expletive negation realizes the preference for the low-ranked worlds, as already encoded in the modal preferential semantics of the triggers.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Prohibitive and Expletive *ne* from Latin to French

In Classical Latin (roughly from 150 BC to 300 AD), negative imperatives are formed with the negative marker *ne*, which might originate from Proto-Indo-European prohibitive negation *\*mē* (see Löfsted (1966)). It mostly combines with the subjunctive mood, see (11). The choice of the standard negation *non* is associated with the indicative mood, as shown in (12).

- (11) **Ne** vivam si tibi concedo. (Command)  
 NEG<sub>2</sub> live.1SG.SUBJ if you.DAT abandon.1SG  
 ‘May I not live if I let you down.’ (Cic, *Epis*, 2.209)
- (12) Illud mihi verbum **non** placet, ‘quod nunc habes’.  
 this.ACC me sentence NEG<sub>1</sub> like what now have  
 ‘This phrase, ‘What you have now’, doesn’t please me.’ (Pl, *Aul*, 547)

It is a well-known fact that imperative clause type is a notional category that can have different flavors in context. Condoravdi and Lauer (2012) and Kaufmann (2012) propose a typology of imperatives, whereby they can be interpreted as commands, wishes and permissions. Each one of these main flavors features a variety of subflavors.<sup>3</sup> We observe here that these same flavors are found with negative imperatives in Latin where *ne* is found.

#### 1. COMMAND-type:

- (13) Nimium est ! – **Ne** clama. (Command)  
 Excess.ACC is ! – NEG<sub>2</sub> shout.2SG.IMP  
 ‘That’s too much! – Don’t shout.’ (Ter, *Ph*, 664)
- (14) Uigila, **ne** somno stude. (Warning)  
 Stay-awake.2SG-IMP, NEG<sub>2</sub> sleep.DAT seek-for.2SG-IMP  
 ‘Open your eyes, don’t fall asleep.’ (Pl, *Mil*, 215)
- (15) **Ne** parce uocem, ut audiat. (Request)  
 NEG<sub>2</sub> spare.2SG-IMP voice.ACC, so-that hear.3SG.SUBJ  
 ‘Don’t talk quietly, so that he can hear you.’ (Pl, *Mil*, 1220)

<sup>2</sup>Note that in French *ne* cannot be used with verbs such as *hope*, whereas this type of predicates trigger expletive negation in Korean. This seems to justify a different – but related – take on the question of the distributions of expletive negation.

<sup>3</sup>According to Condoravdi and Lauer (2012) these are subtypes of speech-acts.

- (16) Actum, aiunt, **ne** agas. (Advice)  
 done, say.3PL, NEG<sub>2</sub> do.2SG.SUBJ  
 'Don't, as they say, deal with done business.' (Ter, *Phorm*, 419)
- (17) Ignosce, irata **ne** sies. (Plea)  
 forgive.2SG-IMP, angry NEG<sub>2</sub> be.2SG.SUBJ  
 'Forgive me, don't be angry at me.' (Pl, *Amph*, 94)

## 2. WISH-type:

- (18) **Ne** magis sim pulcer quam sum. (Addressee-less wish)  
 NEG<sub>2</sub> more be.1SG.SUBJ beautiful.NOM than be.1SG-IND  
 'May I not be more beautiful than I am.' (Pl, *Mil*, 1086)
- (19) **Ne** di sirint! (Absent wish)  
 NEG<sub>2</sub> gods.NOM allow.3PL  
 'May the gods not allow it!' (Pl, *Amph*, 613)

## 3. PERMISSION-type:

- (20) Haec negat se tuam esse matrem. – **Ne** fuat se non  
 This-one.NOM.FEM denies CL your be mother.ACC. – NEG<sub>2</sub> be.3SG.SUBJ if *ne*  
 uolt. (Permission/concession)  
 want.3SG-IND  
 'She says she's not your mother. – Let her not be if she doesn't want to.'  
 (Pl, *Epid*, 584-5)

As for *ne* appearing in embedded clauses, we observe that it appears with priority attitudes.<sup>4</sup> We also observe that priority attitudes come in two sorts: they can either be *positive* (for instance *impero* 'order') – conveying that *p* is conform to the laws – or *negative* (for instance *prohibeo* 'forbid') – conveying that *p* is not conform to the laws. In the case where positive priority attitudes are followed by *ne*, *ne* maintains its negative meaning, see (21a). However, with negative priority attitudes, *ne* does not add visible negative meaning in the same way as it does with positive priority attitudes, see (21b).

- (21) 'Don't shout!'
- a. **Impero** **ne** clama.  
 Command.PRES.1SG NEG<sub>2</sub> call.2SG.IMP  
 'I order you not to shout.'
- b. **Prohibeo** **ne** clama.  
 Forbid.PRES.1SG NEG<sub>2</sub> call.2SG.IMP  
 'I forbid you to shout.'

Importantly, there is a strong parallelism between the range of flavors that imperative may have in context and the range of meanings that priority attitudes embedding *ne* may have. As for the *positive* priority attitudes, we see attitudes of ordering (*impero*, 'I order'), warning (*moneo*,

<sup>4</sup>This observation is based on data found in Allen and Greenough (1903), Lakoff (1968), Baldi and Cuzzolin (2011), Pinkster (2015) and Melo (2007). We have also checked samples of attitudes from other classes such as emotives and we found no occurrence of *ne*. We have instead found *ne* with epistemics such as *dubitare* (doubt) a fact that we address in section 4.

‘I warn’), asking (*rogo*, ‘I ask’), advising (*suadeo*, ‘I advise’), pleading (*obsecro*, ‘I pray’) or wishing (*opto*, ‘I wish’). These are followed by prohibitive *ne*. Negative priority attitudes – followed by expletive *ne* – include attitudes of prohibition, (*prohibeo*, ‘I forbid’), impediment (*impedio*, ‘I prevent’), refusal (*recuso*, ‘I refuse’) dissuasion (*dissuadeo*, ‘I dissuade’) or fear (*timeo*, ‘I fear’).

- |                              |                                 |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • COMMAND-type               | • ADVICE-type                   |
| – <i>Impero</i> (‘order’)    | – <i>Suadeo</i> (‘advise’)      |
| – <i>Prohibeo</i> (‘forbid’) | – <i>Dissuadeo</i> (‘dissuade’) |
| • WARNING-type               | • PLEA-type                     |
| – <i>Moneo</i> (‘warn’)      | – <i>Obsecro</i> (‘beg’)        |
| – <i>Impedio</i> (‘prevent’) | – ?                             |
| • REQUEST-type               | • WISH-type                     |
| – <i>Rogo</i> (‘ask’)        | – <i>Opto</i> (‘wish’)          |
| – <i>Recuso</i> (‘refuse’)   | – <i>Timeo</i> (‘fear’)         |

Summarizing, the same negative element *ne* is found in matrix negative imperatives and in embedded contexts. The attitudes that trigger *ne* in their embedded clause are priority attitudes. These attitudes can be positive with *ne* bearing negative content or negative with *ne* contributing *prima facie* no negative content.

As a quick view of what happens in French, expletive negation is found with negative priority attitudes.

- |                               |                                 |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • COMMAND-type                | • REQUEST-type                  |
| – <i>Défendre</i> (‘forbid’)  | – <i>S’opposer à</i> (‘refuse’) |
| • WARNING-type                | • WISH-type                     |
| – <i>Empêcher</i> (‘prevent’) | – <i>Craindre</i> (‘fear’)      |

Expletive negation is also found in a series of new contexts and most notably comparatives, *less-than* clauses, *before*, *unless* and *without* clauses.

- (22) Mout est prez la mors - **plus** que noz **ne** penssonz.  
 Much is close the death - more that we *ne* think.1PL.IND  
 ‘Very close is death - **more** than we think.’  
 (Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Notre-Dame*, 1218)
- (23) Ne fui gueres aseuree, or ma seur, **meins** ke einz **ne** fis.  
*ne* be.1SG not safe, now my sister, less than before *ne* be.1SG.PAST  
 ‘I’m not safe from danger, now my sister, **less** than I was before.’  
 (Hue de Hotelande, *Ipomédon*, 1180)

- (24) Mons. de Berry vendist sa vesselle pour nourrir ses gens, disant qu' il aymoist  
 Mr. de Berry sold his crockery to feed his people, saying that he wanted  
 mieulx menger en vesselle d' estain et de boys **avant** que ses gens **ne**  
 better eat in crockery of tin and of wood before that his people *ne*  
 fussent nourris.  
 be.3PL.PAST.SUBJ fed  
 (Jean Le Clerc, *Interpolations et variantes de la chronique scandaleuse*, 1502)  
 'Mr. de Berry sold his crockery to feed his people, saying he would rather eat in tin  
 and wood crockery **before** his people would be fed.'
- (25) Si tu vouloys prendre les [oyseaulx] saulvages [...] ils ne voudroient  
 If you wanted take the birds savages [...] they NEG want  
 pondre estants ainsi assubjectis et serrez, **à tout le moins** que ce **ne**  
 lay-their-eggs being thus subjected and oppressed, unless that CL *ne*  
 fust bien tard.  
 be.3SG.SUBJ much late.  
 'If you were to take savage birds, they wouldn't want to lay their eggs, being subjected  
 and oppressed, **unless** it would be very late.' (Claude Cottureau, *Les douze livres*,  
 1551)
- (26) "Que la gloire te demeure **sans** qu' on **ne**  
 May the glory PRO.2SG remain.3SG.SUBJ without that PRO.3SG *ne*  
 diminue une seule goutte."  
 diminish.3SG.SUBJ one only drop  
 (Jean Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne*, 1560)  
 "May the glory remain yours **without** any piece of it be diminished."

#### 4. Analysis

We offer an analysis for the Latin data where *ne* combines with imperatives, positive priority attitudes and negative priority attitudes to deliver a negative preferential meaning. This analysis allows to predict the diachronic development of expletive negation, most notably in contrast to propositional negation.

The correspondence between imperatives and attitudes of command has not escaped theoreticians, and Katz and Postal (1964) Sadock (1974) have advanced the hypothesis, known as the Performative Hypothesis, of a correspondence between imperatives and priority attitudes. This view makes some specific assumptions about the structure of imperatives and the corresponding attitude sentences, whereby an imperative clause has an abstract operator IMP in the deep structure, which can be spelled out by an attitude like *I order*. According to this idea, what the operator IMP and the attitudes that paraphrase it have in common is a performative meaning.

However, this idea has some limitations. Besides those noted by Portner (2018),<sup>5</sup> the immediate difference between the two is that the attitude report does not always have a performative meaning. This is most prominently the case when the attitude is not in the first person (*I order*

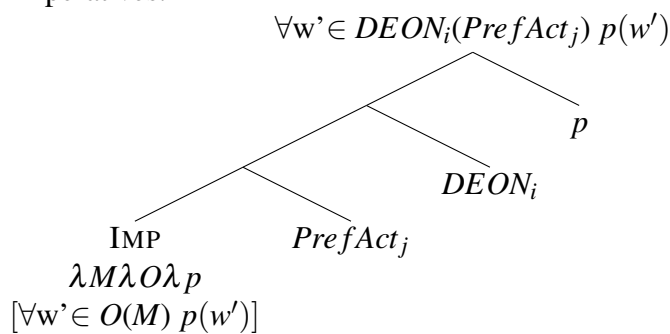
<sup>5</sup>According to Portner, the bare utterance 'It rains' and 'I declare that it rains' do not have the same truth conditions. If it is not the case that it rains, then only the former will be false.

*that you close the door* vs. *She orders that you close the door*). For this reason, we are reluctant to encode a performative meaning in the attitude itself.

To capture the common core of imperative and priority attitudes, following Portner (2007) Kaufmann (2012) Hinterwimmer et al. (2019) we assume that they share a modal meaning.<sup>6</sup> Likewise for attitudes, we will rely on Giannakidou and Mari (2021), who propose a unified semantics for attitudes and modals. Given this common modal denominator cutting across imperatives, attitudes and modality, we adopt the standard Kratzerian framework resorting to modal bases ( $M$ ) and ordering sources ( $O$ ), which we will anchor to individuals. One important novelty in our account is that with imperatives, the anchors of the modal base and the ordering source are not the same.

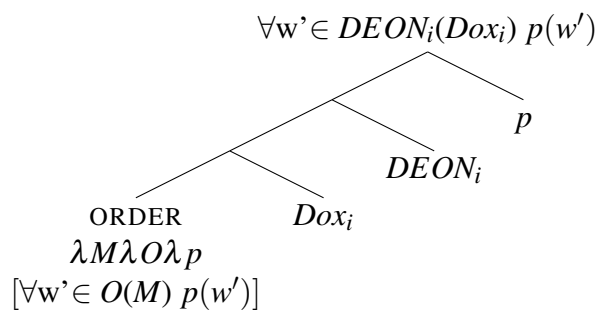
We align with the idea that imperatives are flexible with respect to their ordering source Portner (2007), therefore accommodating different contextual flavors. For simplicity here, for command-type imperatives, we assume that the ordering source is ‘what the speaker/laws order’; for wish-type imperatives, we assume that the ordering source is ‘what the speaker wishes’ (for recent discussion Giannakidou and Mari (2021)). We encode the addressee’s preferences for action ( $PrefAct_j$ ) in the modal base of imperatives.<sup>7</sup> The preferences of the speaker partition this modal base into possible actions of the addressee that conform to the speaker’s order/wishes etc. We use  $j$  for the addressee.<sup>8</sup>

(27) Imperatives.



For the attitudes, the modal base and the ordering source are lexically specified and none of them is parametric to the addressee.

(28) Order-type attitudes.



<sup>6</sup>See discussion in Portner (2007) and Hinterwimmer et al. (2019) for the divergences between the two.

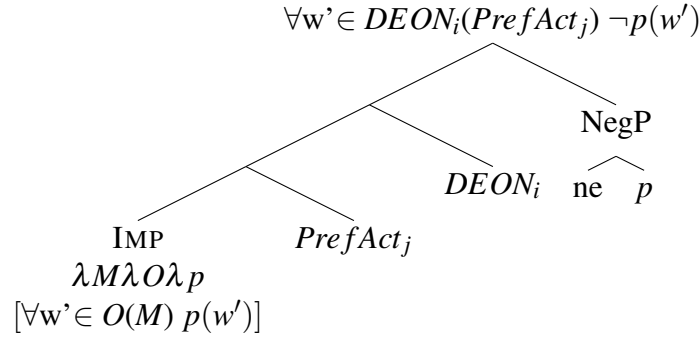
<sup>7</sup>This allows us to account for the fact that the imperatives relate to possible actions, in the spirit of Portner (2007).

<sup>8</sup>The imperative request is satisfied if the addressee carries about an action that is in the domain carved by the orders of the speaker; but nothing in the semantics implies that she will.

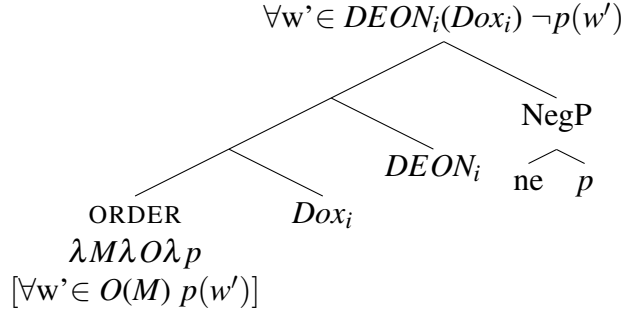


Returning to *ne*, our claim is that it comes in two guises: prohibitive and expletive. It is prohibitive in the context of root imperatives and positive priority attitudes. It is expletive in the context of negative priority attitudes. With these distributions in mind, we can now provide a semantic content to the labels ‘prohibitive’ and ‘expletive’. We propose that prohibitive-*ne* is a standard negation that scopes over the TP. In this case, *ne* does not differ in content from declarative negation. The only difference with declarative negation is that prohibitive-*ne* is triggered by priority modals. As we see in (29) and (30), the prohibitive-*ne* produces the expected meaning according to which the order targets a negative proposition.

(29) Negative imperatives.



(30) Negative *order*-type.



To understand the role of expletive-*ne* with *negative* priority attitudes, we need a basic toolkit. First, we assume that modal bases  $M$  contain only worlds that are question sensitive. In other terms, we exclude far-fetched worlds. Second, ordering sources restrict the modal base to those worlds that comply with them. In our definition, we consider an all-or-nothing configuration where the worlds delivered by the ordering are those worlds in the modal base  $M$  in which all the propositions in the ordering source ( $P$ ) are true.

$$(31) \quad O(M) = \{w' \in M: \forall q \in P \ w' \in q\}$$

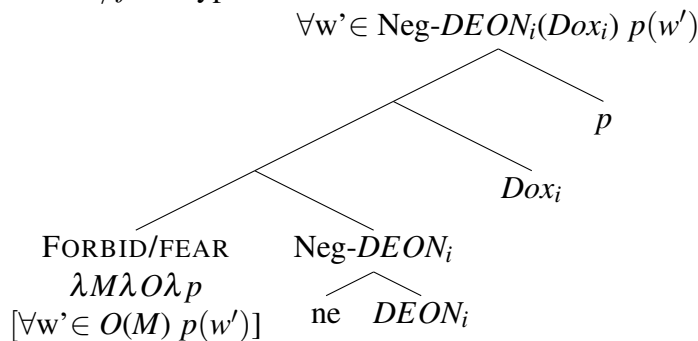
Given (31), we define the negation of the ordering as in (32). According to the definition, NEGATIVE- $O(M)$  worlds are those worlds in the modal base in which *none* of the propositions in the ordering source are true.

$$(32) \quad Neg-O(M) = \{w' \in M: \forall q \in P \ w' \notin q\}$$

With von Fintel (1999), Giannakidou and Mari (2016, 2018a, b), we assume that human ne-

cessity requires that the modal base be compatible with both  $p$  and  $\neg p$ . Let us now consider the FORBID/FEAR-type of attitudes and substantiate the component of *contrariness* that they involve (Espinal, 2007). ORDER-like predicates introduce an ordering that can be paraphrased as ‘in accordance with the laws/the orders of the attitude holder’. FORBID-like predicates introduce an ordering source that can be roughly paraphrased as ‘contrary to the laws’. *Forbid/fear p* conveys at the semantic level that  $p$  is *not compatible with what the attitude holder orders/wishes*. To grasp the meaning of contrariness encoded in negative priority attitudes, we claim that there is a silent negative operator over the ordering source, and that the semantics of the FORBID/FEAR-type of attitudes is as follows.

(33) *Forbid/fear-type.*



NEG- $O_i$  is the set of worlds that do not comply with what the attitude holder  $i$  orders or wishes. Negative priority attitudes, by quantifying over NEG- $O_i$  worlds state that, in these worlds,  $p$  is true. Since  $p$  is in the complement set of the propositions delivered by  $O_i$  (the laws according to what the attitude holder orders or wishes),  $p$  is conceived as ‘contrary’ to what the attitude holder orders or wishes.

A non-defeasible inference arises that  $\neg p$  is in accordance with the laws. Recall that NEG- $O$  partitions the modal base in two parts, one in which the propositions in the ordering source are true, and one in which none of them is true. By quantifying over the first set, the attitude conveys that, in the worlds that comply with the negative ordering source (i.e. those worlds which do not comply with the laws),  $p$  is true. The inference arises that if  $p$  is true in the worlds that do not comply with the laws, then  $p$  is false in the worlds that do comply with the laws.

(34)  $\forall w' \in \text{Neg-}O_i(M) p(w') \rightarrow \forall w'' \in O_i(M_i) \neg p(w'')$

We claim that expletive-*ne* it is the overt spell out of the silent negation operating over the modal base and encoded in the meaning of the verb (thus rendering justice to an intuition that underlies all accounts of expletive negation), and lack of apparent proper semantic contribution follows from this redundancy. Positive and negative priority attitudes thus convey the same meaning, but encode it in a different manner, which explains why with the latter only the negation is expletive.

Summing up, our account defends an analysis based on ambiguity in the interpretation of *ne*. In Latin *ne* acts as a true negation in the context of imperatives and positive priority attitudes and, in this case, it is *prohibitive*; it is a negation operating over the ordering source with negative priority modals, and, in this case, it is *expletive*. This difference is driven by the lexical meaning of negative priority attitudes that encode a component of ‘contrariness’ and that the

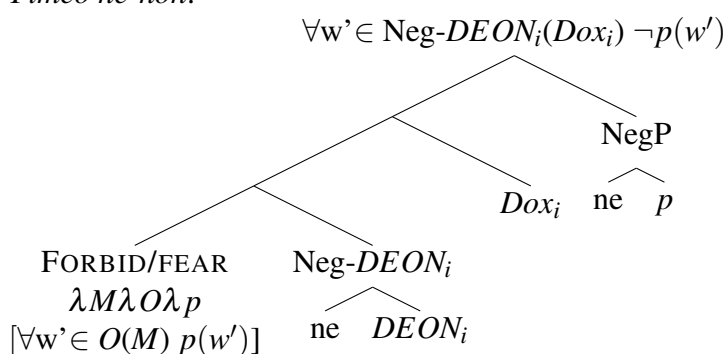
expletive negation makes visible. There is thus a type difference between the two *ne*: expletive *ne* operates over a set of propositions, whereas prohibitive *ne* operates over a proposition. We will now see that this view makes important predictions.

#### 4.1. Predictions

**Prediction : the distributions of NEG<sub>2</sub> .... NEG<sub>1</sub>** Our first prediction is that negative priority attitudes such as *prohibere* and *timere* can embed *ne ... non*. This fact is observable in Latin, Albanian and Greek. In this case, the expletive *ne* is interpreted as a modifier of the ordering source and *non* is interpreted at the level of the proposition.

- (35) Sed **timeo ne non** impetrem.  
 But fear.1SG NEG<sub>2</sub> NEG<sub>1</sub> achieve.1SG.SUBJ  
 ‘But I fear that I may not obtain it. (Cic, *Att*, 9)

- (36) *Timeo ne-non*.



**Second prediction: only TP *ne* undergoes the Jespersen cycle** Our analysis allows to explain the facts pertaining to the evolution of negation from Latin to French, and in particular the observation that only *ne* in the context of imperatives and positive priority attitudes undergoes the Jespersen cycle. The Jespersen cycle is the diachronic process whereby the solitary negation marker *ne* becomes gradually doubled with the negative adverb *pas*. In Modern French negative imperatives and negative orders conveyed by the combination of a positive priority attitudes and an embedded negation, use *ne ... pas*.

- (37) **Ne** viens **pas** !  
 NEG come.2SG.IMP not  
 ‘Don’t come!’
- (38) J’ordonne que tu **ne** viennes **pas**.  
 I order that you NEG come.2SG.SUBJ not  
 ‘I order you not to come.’

We have proposed that the negation in the context of negative priority attitudes does not bear propositional negative meaning. Since it is not recognized as a proper negative element, it does not undergo the Jespersen Cycle. Solitary *ne* is still found with negative priority attitudes in Modern French and indeed strives in a new variety of contexts. Mari and Tahar (2020) show

that, once the Jespersen Cycle is completed in French, expletive negation strives as ‘freed’ by the end of the competition with the homonymous propositional negation.

Having established that negative priorities (technically, negative ordering sources) are the key element triggering expletive negation in modern French, explaining how the reversing of the ordering happens in *before*, *without*-clauses, *unless*-clauses and comparatives is a matter that we leave for future research. We note, however, that the common to the exceptives and *before* clauses is a contrariness relation between the two propositions that these connectors relate (see Mari and Tahar (2020) for further discussion).

### 5. Extension to negative doxastics

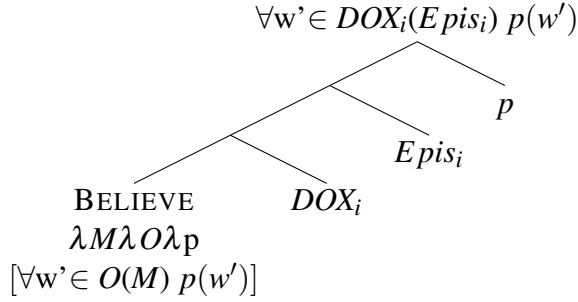
In French, *ne* receives a nonnegative reading in the embedded clause of verbs of doubt and denial, see (39), (40):

- (39) a. Si [les terres] pouvaient, mieux cultivées, rapporter plus, je **doute** que le  
 If the land could, better cultivated, bring more, I doubt that the  
 fermier **ne** s’ y attelle.  
 farmer *ne* REFL.3SG it undertake3SG.SUBJ  
 ‘If the land could, if better cultivated, yield more, I **doubt** that the farmer would undertake it.’ (André Gide, *L’immoraliste*, 1902)
- b. Je **ne doute pas** qu’ il **ne** nous arrive malheur.  
 I NEG doubt not that it *ne* CL happen.3SG.SUBJ misfortune.  
 ‘I have **no doubt** that something bad will happen to us.’  
 (Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, 1839)
- (40) a. Et je **nie** que le garçon aux pieds agiles **n’** eût eu d’  
 And I denied that the boy of feet agile *ne* have.3SG.PAST.SUBJ had the  
 yeux que pour elle.  
 eyes only for her  
 ‘And I **denied** that the boy with agile feet had only had eyes for her.’  
 (Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, 1922)
- b. Ils **ne nient pas** qu’ il **n’** y ait un Dieu  
 they NEG deny.2SG.FUT not that PRO-3SG *ne* CL have.3SG.SUBJ a God  
 supérieur.  
 superior.  
 ‘They do **not deny** that there is a superior God.’  
 (Maurice Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, 1914)

The diachronic origin of *ne* under doubt verbs is different from the origin of expletive *ne* with imperative and priority attitudes. Indeed, the expletive negation found with epistemic attitudes originates from *quin*, resulting from the fusion of the interrogative adverb *qui* (how/why) with the enclitic negation *-ne* (see Fleck (2008)). However, we believe that it is possible to provide a unified semantics for expletive negation across priority and epistemic attitudes by extending the analysis we made for priority attitudes of the FORBID or FEAR-type to negatively-biased epistemic attitudes of the DOUBT-type. At the semantic level, we claim, these epistemic attitudes convey a meaning of *contrariness*. The starting point of our analysis is Mari’s (2016) proposal for belief predicates Mari (2016). To explain the fact that belief attitudes can licence subjunc-

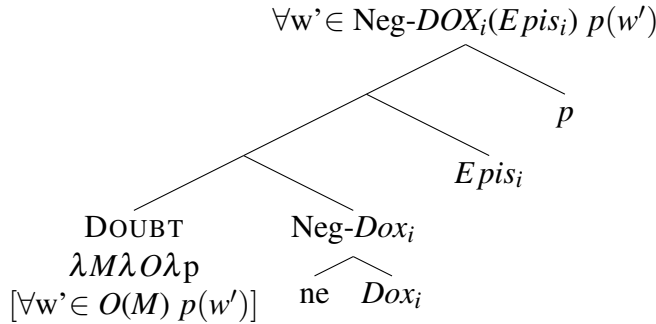
tive across languages, Mari proposes that belief predicates feature an epistemic modal base (which is partitioned, indicating lack of knowledge) and a doxastic ordering source.<sup>9</sup> By quantifying over worlds that comply with the ordering source, the attitude conveys that in worlds that best comply with the attitude holder's opinions,  $p$  is true, although she does not know whether  $p$  is true.

(41) *Believe-type.*



We now propose that *doubt* (a subjunctive selector cross-linguistically, see also Anand and Hacquard (2013) for the idea that *doubt* features a preferential component) encodes dispreferred belief, expressing that  $p$  is true in worlds that do not comply with what the speaker believes. In other terms, *doubt* is a negatively-biased epistemic attitude, akin to *forbid* in the realm of commands.

(42) *Doubt-type.*



One possible objection to our analysis is that the expletive *ne* is also found under *ne pas douter*, which means ‘be certain’ and can be argued not to feature an ordering source.

(43) Je **ne doute pas** qu'elle **ne** vienne à la fête.  
 I NEG doubt not that-she *ne* come.3SG.SUBJ to the party.  
 ‘I have no doubt that she will come to the party.’

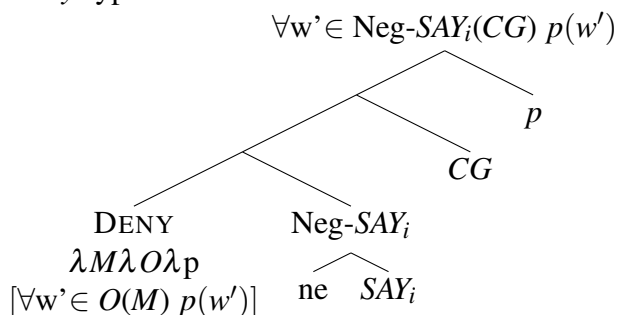
We argue that the main clause negation is metalinguistic: ‘I do not doubt that  $p$ ’ amounts to ‘It is not true that I doubt that  $p$ ’. According to well-established accounts of negatively-biased verbs, and negative expressions more generally, the higher negation is justified when the possibility that the speaker is ‘doubting that  $p$ ’ is active in the conversation (Ducrot (1985)).

Few occurrences of expletive negations are also found with negated negative modals (*impossible, unlikely*), as expected by the analysis.

<sup>9</sup>For extended discussion on how this proposal connects with the standard Hintikkaean semantics for belief, see Giannakidou and Mari (2021) and Mari and Portner (2018).

The same analysis extends to DENY type of verbs. The ordering source is the set of propositions that are the content of the attitude anchor's saying and orders worlds in the common ground according to those that best comply with the saying. Denying worlds would introduce contrariness by the same mechanism as above, by ordering as higher those worlds that worst comply with the attitude anchor's saying, see Mari and Portner (2018).

(44) *Deny-type.*



## 6. Conclusion

To conclude, these diverse origins of expletive *ne(s)* (from prohibitive negation or from an interrogative negation), and its distributions with imperatives and command attitudes on the one hand (for the expletive *ne* originating from *mē*) and with biased questions and epistemic attitudes on the other (for expletive *ne* originating from *quin*) points to a deep relation between types of attitudes (priority attitudes and epistemic attitudes) and speech acts types (imperatives and questions). We have tried to spell out these relations in terms of modal meaning on the basis of the diachronic evolution of expletive negation from Latin to Modern French. Whether our suggestions of such a unified analysis for attitudes and speech acts is on the right track still remains an open question which would benefit from further diachronic work. Focusing on French and its history from Latin, we hope that we offered a caveat to reconsider the nature of expletive negation as contributing new evidence to further establish a connection between attitudes, modality and speech acts (see Portner (2018) for the most recent discussion on these connections).

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