

Negation in Non-Standard Varieties

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter discusses the relevance of data from non-standard varieties to our understanding of natural language negation, and in particular, to theories which seek to model and explain natural language properties. The chapter focuses specifically on the different types of Negative Concord exhibited in non-standard Englishes, in West Flemish, and in Romance varieties, showing that in relation to Standard English, Standard Dutch, and Standard French, these non-standard languages exhibit much more intricate points of syntactic variation. The theoretical relevance of subject/non-subject asymmetries, the lexical nature of postverbal negative constituents, and intra-speaker variability in the expression of negation are discussed. The syntactic structures examined reveal that when non-standard languages serve as the main reference point in linguistic theory, this extends the hypothesis space in crucial ways, and more fruitful and revealing cross-linguistic comparisons can be made.

Keywords: bilectalism, multiple grammars, negation, negative polarity items, non-standard varieties, negative concord, standard varieties, standardization, variants, variability

29.1. Introduction

THE aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the relevance of data from *non-standard varieties* to our understanding of natural language negation, and in particular, to theories which seek to model and explain natural language properties. The idea that negation in non-standard varieties is different enough from that of *standard varieties* to warrant treatment in an independent chapter calls for some initial clarification. Specifically, we first need to be clear on what we mean by “non-standard” versus “standard,” and on the fundamental differences between the two. We clarify these points here in the Introduction, drawing from relevant work in variationist sociolinguistics, before turning to a more in-depth discussion of negation in sections 29.2 and 29.3. In those sections, we develop the argument that negation in non-standard varieties should play a privileged role relative to negation in standard varieties in informing theories of natural language.

29.1.1. Standard vs. non-standard varieties

As argued by Milroy (2001: 531), standardization is a process that works to promote “invariance or uniformity in language structure.” Because this process is “continuously in progress” (2001: 534), those linguistic varieties considered to be *standard* do not exhibit complete invariance. Consider for example the two forms in (1), which for argument’s sake we take to be *syntactic variants* (i.e. semantically equivalent distinct syntactic forms; see also Childs 2017), in Standard English (though see section 29.4):

(1)

- a. I saw nothing.
- b. I didn’t see anything.

(p. 516) Standard varieties are often perceived to represent an ideal of invariance and uniformity (Joseph and Taylor 1990: 2; as cited in Milroy 2001: 531), an ideal that contrasts with realities such as (1). The perception of an ideal, fully standardized and invariant variety is thus not clearly aligned with anything observable in linguistic behavior (Lippi-Green 1997: 53). The ideal of invariance contrasts most clearly with what we find in varieties that have not been subject to the process of standardization.

29.1.1.1. Defining *non-standard* varieties

Based on the above discussion, one might conclude that a *non-standard* variety is any language which has not been subject to the standardization process. But this conclusion would miss an important fact. A linguistic variety is conceptualized as “non-standard” only if it stands in relation to a “standard.” Consider in this regard Gɪsɪdɔ, a variety of Anii spoken in Basilla, Benin (Morton 2014). While Anii is currently undergoing revitalization, with efforts to use it as a language of formal instruction, the language of instruction in schools and of the national government is primarily “Standard French,” the language of colonization. Because there is no Standard Anii variety, there is thus no sense in which Gɪsɪdɔ can be conceptualized as *non-standard*. For this reason, we instead characterize languages like Gɪsɪdɔ as *non-standardized*, which contrasts with the concept of a *non-standard* variety.

Unlike Gɪsɪdɔ, varieties such as “Appalachian” (Wolfram and Christian 1976) and “African American” (Green 2002) English do in fact stand in relation to a “standard,” namely, “Standard English” (Fisher 1996). In this sense, varieties like Appalachian and African American English can in fact be considered *non-standard*.¹ They are of course also *non-standardized* varieties; that is, like Gɪsɪdɔ, they have not been subject to processes that work to promote invariance and uniformity. The class of non-standard varieties is thus subsumed by the category *non-standardized*, which entails varieties which do (e.g. Appalachian) or do not (e.g. Gɪsɪdɔ) stand in relation to a standard.

29.1.1.2. Privileging non-standard varieties

As Milroy (2001: 534) notes, in standard language cultures, non-standard varieties are seen as “satellites that have orbits at various distances around a central body—the standard.” These cultures pervade, even in linguistics. For example, we speak of syntactic phenomena such as *copula deletion* (e.g. ‘John running late’; e.g. Labov 1969) precisely in terms of “deletion,” as opposed to assuming that structures like ‘John is running late’ exhibit *copula insertion* (Milroy 2001: 533).

Despite this persistent and pervasive conceptualization of non-standard varieties, they have in recent years played a more prominent role in our understanding of natural language, and in many cases they have challenged existing theories, including theories of negation (see sections 29.2 and 29.3 below). The productive influence that the study of non-standard varieties has had in this regard is due to the fact that they are more accurate and complete representatives of natural language. As a result of the standardization process, (p. 517) which aims for uniformity and grammatical invariance, standard varieties have had many of the apparent irregularities bleached out of them. In contrast, non-standardized (and therefore non-standard) varieties retain these features. In the sections below we illustrate how, as linguists who analyze such varieties have repeatedly shown, these apparent irregularities offer crucial clues that refine our understanding of natural language.

29.1.2. Remainder of the chapter

In the following sections, we discuss aspects of negation in a handful of non-standard varieties, with an eye toward illustrating the relevance of these examples to grammatical theory. Section 29.2 focuses on negation in non-standard English, and in section 29.3 we discuss negation in West Flemish and Romance varieties. In section 29.4 we present some more general closing remarks, reviewing some hypotheses regarding the mental representation of syntactic variability, and discussing some outstanding theoretical questions.

29.2. Negation in non-standard Englishes

Standard English has featured prominently in the development of linguistic theory, and has served as the empirical basis, either explicitly or implicitly, for many influential theories of natural language negation. In this section, we discuss how consideration of non-standard Englishes leads to theoretical conclusions about negation which diverge from current widely accepted assumptions in linguistic theory.

29.2.1. Negative constituents and Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) in non-subject position

The inherent variability of natural language is reflected in the several ways that a single semantic negation can be expressed in non-standard Englishes. In this section, we focus on three ways of negating a sentence in English: by use of (i) a single syntactic negation,

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(ii) a Negative Polarity Item (NPI) in conjunction with a preceding negative element, and (iii), the use of two or more syntactic negations, a construction type known as Negative Concord (NC).

To illustrate, let us begin with Henry's (2016) corpus study, which finds robust evidence for the use of the following types of negative sentence in Belfast English (her examples (12) through (14), p. 137); syntactic negations in bold here and throughout:

(2)

Belfast English

- a. I saw **nothing**. (i) single negation)
- b. I **didn't** see **anything**. ((ii) NPI with preceding negative element)
- c. I **didn't** see **nothing**. ((iii) NC) (Henry 2016)

(p. 518) Sentence (2a) has a single syntactic negation, marked by the negative word *nothing* in object position. Sentence (2b) contains the object NPI *anything* preceded by the negated auxiliary *didn't*. Sentence (2c) is NC, with both the negated auxiliary *didn't* and the negative object *nothing* marking a single semantic negation. All sentences appear to have the same truth-conditional meaning, namely, that nothing was seen by the speaker.²

Of the three construction types in (2), NC is the most controversial. Though it is found in numerous natural languages and language families (Auwera and Alsenoy 2016), it holds the rare distinction in modern day English-speaking societies of being heavily socially stigmatized, and it is widely considered to be absent from Standard Englishes. NPI structures such as that in (2b) are typically regarded as the standard or correct form. This is despite the historical presence of NC in English, which dates back to at least the Old and Middle English periods, as the following example from Wallage shows (2012: 6, ex. (6a)):

(3)

Ne hafst tu nauere soðe eadmodnesse on þe ...
NEG have you never true humility in you ...
'You never have true humility in you ...' (thirteenth century; VICES_{1,33.398})

Nevalainen (2006) ties the decline of NC in written texts from the Early Modern English period to social factors. Specifically, she observes that speakers who avoided NC use tended to be social climbers, attempting to mark a higher social status. The shift away from NC was marked explicitly by prescriptive grammarian Bishop Robert Lowth, who in 1762 decried that in English, two negatives should equal a positive (Horn 2010). NC is thus a clear example of a *non-standard* form, as it stands in reference to its *standard* NPI variant.

Despite the heavy social stigma, NC is alive and well in contemporary English. It is pervasive in the Englishes of Africa, the Americas, Australia, and the Caribbean, and present in many more (Kortmann and Lunkenheimer 2013). Furthermore, many studies of child language development show that even when exposed to little or no NC input, children ac-

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quiring English produce unexpected amounts of NC tokens. For example, Miller (2012) found that between the ages of three and five, one child produced NC in 65% of the contexts in which NC could occur (as opposed to use of an NPI); in contrast, the child's parents produced NC less than 9% of the time. This suggests that regardless of the low degree of NC input, children exposed to English grow a grammar that naturally gives rise to NC. It further suggests that in its natural state, English is NC.³

In non-standard American Englishes, NC is a hallmark feature. Indeed, the only varieties in which it is believed not to be present are the standardized ones (Wolfram and Fasold 1974). Labov et al.'s (1968) seminal work on vernacular speech in New York City was the (p. 519) first in linguistics to document this feature thoroughly. Consider the following example (Labov et al. 1968: 305, ex. (273)):

(4)

I ain't gonna sit in no chair and let no crazy lawyer tell me no lies about no law that no judge has in no law book that no smart politician wrote or nothin' like that, nohow.

This sentence, which has ten syntactic negations, suggests that a theoretically infinite number of negative elements in a clause may contribute to a single semantic negation: the sentence expresses the speaker's resolution *not* to sit in a chair and allow a lawyer to tell him things. Among the other American English varieties documented in the literature as instantiating NC are Appalachian English (Wolfram and Christian 1976), African American English (Green 2002, 2011), White Alabama English (Feagin 1979), and West Texas English (Foreman 1999).

Returning to the data in (2) from Belfast English, we see however that NC speakers variably use NC alongside the forms in (2a) and (2b), namely: (i) a single syntactic negation, and (ii) an NPI in conjunction with a preceding negative element. The following token from an Appalachian speaker shows how NC and NPI forms may even be used alongside each other in a single utterance:⁴

(5)

a. I **didn't** have no lice, . . .

b. . . and I **didn't** have any itch.

(AAPCAppE: SKCTC-EA-1,63)

Smith (2001) discusses similar patterns of variability in Buckie English, as does Childs (2017) for regional British English varieties, and Green (2011: 125) suggests the existence of such patterns in African American English. In short, studies of non-standard Englishes reflect variation between the forms in (2) as the natural language norm, as opposed to the exception.

29.2.2. Negative constituents and NPIs in matrix subject position

Previous research thus suggests that the three-way variability in the expression of a single semantic negation illustrated in (2) is universally found in non-standard Englishes,

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when the negative constituent or NPI is in non-subject position. However, as far as we know, there are no varieties which exhibit the equivalent of (2a) and (2b) and (2c) together, but with the negative constituent and NPI in matrix subject position:⁵

*non-existent English variety (cf. (2)):

(2')

- a. Nothing bothered me.
- b. Anything didn't bother me.
- c. Nothing didn't bother me.

(p. 520) With respect to NPIs, this subject-non-subject asymmetry would seem to corroborate the theoretical claim that *negative dependents* like NPIs require a downward entailing licenser in a c-commanding position (such as *n't* in (2b); Ladusaw 1979). However, the plot thickens: while there is no variety which exhibits all three variants in (2') together, there are varieties (rare though they seem to be) which exhibit structures either such as those in (2'b) or such as those in (2'c). For example, Appalachian English allows structures like that in (2'c) (but not (2'b)). Consider the set of data in (6):⁶

(6)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Nobody lived past the house. | (AAPCAppE: AOHP-WC-1,347) |
| b. Nobody wouldn't live in it . . . | (AAPCAppE: DOHP-JB-4,175) |
| 'Nobody would live in it . . .' | |

As with the trio of examples in (2), both (6a) and (6b) involve a single semantic negation; as such, they have the same meaning. As far as we know, there is no evidence anywhere, however, that Appalachian English allows the NPI equivalent of (6b) (i.e. (2'b)).

But as noted in Tortora and den Dikken (2010), while the NPI equivalent of (6b) is not possible in Appalachian English, it is possible in Belfast English (Henry 1995: 29):

(7)

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Any student didn't apply for the job. | (cf. (6b)) |
| 'No student applied for the job.' | |

Conversely, while Belfast English allows the structure in (7), as far as we know, there is no evidence that it allows structures such as that in (6b). Appalachian English and Belfast English thus appear to be mirror images of one another, with respect to the kind of element (negative constituent or NPI) permitted in matrix subject position, followed by a negative auxiliary, expressing a single semantic negation.

The phenomena exhibited by these two distinct non-standard varieties provide precisely the kind of opportunity to better understand the nature of negative dependencies related to the matrix subject position, which standard varieties of English simply cannot provide, because in standard Englishes, neither (6b) nor (7) are possible. Furthermore, the fact that Appalachian English and Belfast English allow each form respectively, but neither al-

lows both, opens the door for a more fine-grained understanding of the higher functional field.

The impossibility of (7) in Appalachian English is consistent with the generalization that NPIs require a c-commanding licenser. However, as Henry (1995) notes, the possibility of (7) in Belfast English appears to contradict this generalization. Tortora and den Dikken (2010) (T&dD) offer an explanation for the variation, which incorporates some of Henry's insights. In brief, T&dD argue for the existence of three different subject positions, SubjP, AgrP, and TP, with a NegP intervening between the latter two (thus: SubjP > AgrP > NegP > TP). Capitalizing on independent facts regarding subject-verb agreement in the two varieties, in their analysis, subjects in Appalachian English occupy either SubjP or AgrP, while subjects in Belfast English occupy either AgrP or TP (this latter analysis following Henry 1995). Because the position below NegP is never available for subjects in Appalachian English, matrix subject NPIs are prohibited, precisely because of the licensing requirement that they be c-commanded by NegP. Along the lines of Henry (1995), however, Belfast English allows matrix subject NPIs precisely because the TP position below NegP is available to subjects. Furthermore, Belfast English does not allow structures such as that in (6b) because the negative constituents can only appear in SubjP, a position which is not available in this variety.

In addition to accounting for the different kinds of negative dependencies related to subject positions in Appalachian English and Belfast English, T&dD's analysis further allows us to account for the different patterns of subject-verb agreement in the two varieties, capturing these apparently two independent points of micro-syntactic variation—matrix subject NC vs. matrix subject NPIs on the one hand and micro-syntactic variation in agreement patterns on the other—as surface realizations of a single grammatical difference between the two varieties, namely, the availability (or lack thereof) of certain subject positions. The analysis is also able to capture the subject-non-subject asymmetry found with the patterns in (2') (our non-existent variety) versus (2), by virtue of isolating a point of micro-syntactic variation in the higher functional field which implicates NegP, and which is not found in the lower part of the clause, where non-subjects (complements and adjuncts) are found.

29.2.3. Interim summary: Non-standard negation in English and syntactic theory

Regardless of whether the T&dD analysis turns out to be correct, the important point here is that such micro-syntactic variation could not be observed through examination of standardized data alone, since neither the NC nor the NPI subject variant is instantiated in standard varieties. The data from Appalachian English and Belfast English provide a far more complex picture regarding NC and more generally, negative dependencies. Furthermore, we see that while all non-standard Englishes exhibit NC with a negative constituent in non-subject position, not all varieties exhibit NC with a negative constituent

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(or allow an NPI) in matrix subject position. This highlights the fact that in non-standard varieties, it is not the case that “everything goes,” with NC.

The possibility for Appalachian English seen in (6b) puts this English variety more in line with other language varieties which exhibit NC. As noted by Herburger (2001: 327), while Romance varieties like Standard Spanish exhibit structures equivalent to that in (6a), as illustrated in (8) (falling into Giannakidou’s 1998 “non-strict” NC category), many Romance varieties, whether standard or non-standard, allow the NC-type structure in (6b), as shown in (9) (following Giannakidou’s 1998 “strict” NC pattern):

(p. 522)

(8)

Negative constituent in subject position with no sentential negative marker (cf. (6a)):

Nadie vino.
nobody came
‘Nobody came.’

(9)

Negative constituent in subject position with sentential negative marker (cf. (6b)):

a. Personne n’ est venu.	Standard French
n-body not is come	
b. Ningür nun ais...	Engadine; representative of some Northern
n-body not has...	Italian varieties

Likewise, as noted in Etxeberria et al. (2018), Basque Country Spanish allows for the optional presence of a sentential negative marker in the presence of a negative element in matrix subject position with a single negation (NC) reading, which is reminiscent of the Appalachian English variants seen in (6a,b):

(10)

Nadie (no) ha roto nada.	Basque Country Spanish
nobody (not) has broken nothing	
‘Nobody broke anything.’	

In sum, the variation observed in the expression of a single negation in non-standard English serves as a more complete and therefore more useful comparison when considering the facts of natural negation more generally. In other words, when non-standard English varieties are privileged in cross-linguistic analyses, and when Standard English no longer serves as the main reference point, more interesting and revealing comparisons can be made. We strengthen and extend this conclusion in section 29.3, through discussion of several non-standard Germanic and Romance varieties.

29.3. Negation in West Flemish and Romance varieties

In this section we briefly touch upon some properties of negation in West Flemish and a few Romance varieties, to give a sense of the fact that—like studies on non-standard English—studies on other non-standard varieties have led to theoretical conclusions about negation which diverge from previously accepted assumptions in linguistic theory, which themselves are based on data from standard varieties.

29.3.1. West Flemish Negative Concord

We consider West Flemish to be a non-standard variety, based on the considerations reviewed in section 29.1.1.1: it stands in relation to a standard variety, namely, “Standard Dutch.”

(p. 523) Like studies of negation in non-standard Englishes (in relation to Standard English), analysis of negation in this linguistic variety—most notably Haegeman (1995), Haegeman and Zanuttini (1996), and Haegeman and Lohndal (2010)—have challenged theories of negation based on Standard Dutch, and have refined our understanding of natural language negation. Focusing squarely on the results of Haegeman and Lohndal (2010) (H&L) to illustrate, consider the fact that West Flemish allows multiple negative constituents in a single sentence (with an optional clitic *en*), together giving rise to a single semantic negation (NC):

(11)

K' (en) een **nooit** **niets** **niet** gezien.
I (en) have **never** **nothing** **not** seen
'I have never seen anything.'

Putting aside the role of *en*, H&L note that the NC interpretation of the structure in (11) suggests that the negative constituents *nooit* ‘never’, *niets* ‘nothing’, and *niet* ‘not’ are not semantically negative; if they were, each would contribute its own negative semantics to the structure, contrary to what we see in example (11). The structure in fact seems to lend itself to a Multiple Agree analysis of sentential negation in West Flemish, along the lines of Zeijlstra (2004a), whereby the negative constituents are dependent on some higher (null) constituent encoding semantic negation. Under this view, NC in West Flemish (and more generally, cross-linguistically) would be analyzed as involving only one true negation which values—or, agrees with—any number of such negative dependents.

As H&L note, while this analytical approach is intuitively appealing, and while it may work for Standard Dutch, it makes predictions which are not borne out in West Flemish. Specifically, the Multiple Agree analysis only requires that the negative dependents each relate back to the true negation (a null operator); it does not predict there to be any relationship of dependence between the negative dependents themselves. However, as H&L illustrate (citing Haegeman and Zanuttini 1996), contrary to this prediction, West Flemish

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exhibits a restriction whereby complex negative dependents (which includes *niet dikkerst* ‘not often’ and negative constituents that contain the negative quantifier *geen* ‘no’) can participate in NC configurations with multiple negative dependents only if they are not the negative dependent closest to the sentential negator *niet* ‘not’ (H&L: 192). This is illustrated by the grammatical (12) versus the ungrammatical (13):

(12)

...	dat	er	doa	[niet dikkerst]	[niemand]	[niet]	gewerkt	NC
	that	there	there	[not often]	[nobody]	[not]	worked	
	‘that not often did anybody work there.’							

(13)

...	*dat	er	doa	[niemand]	[niet dikkerst]	[niet]	gewerkt	*NC ⁷
	that	there	there	[nobody]	[not often]	[not]	worked	

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(p. 524) In sum, complex negative dependents exhibit restrictions on their licensing in NC structures which simplex negative dependents do not. This restriction is not expected under a Multiple Agree analysis of NC, which applies “across the board” to all negative dependents.

We refer the reader to H&L’s analysis of such a restriction on NC structures in West Flemish, as our limited space does not allow us to provide the details. Our main point in this section is simply to provide another illustration of the relevance of non-standard varieties to the development of grammatical theory and our understanding of natural language negation.

29.3.2. Negative concord in non-standard Romance varieties

It is well known that a single sentential negation in Standard French is bipartite, consisting of the discontinuous forms *ne* and *pas*, as follows:

(14)

Je	ne	sais	pas.
I	NEG	know	NEG
‘I don’t know.’			

The post-verbal negative marker *pas* can be replaced by a variety of negative adverbs and arguments (such as *plus* ‘no longer’, *jamais* ‘never’, *guère* ‘hardly’, and *rien* ‘nothing’), as in (15) (Rowlett 1998: 139–40):

(15)

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-
- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| a. Paul ne sera plus riche. | ‘Paul will no longer be rich.’ |
| b. Paul ne sera jamais riche. | ‘Paul will never be rich.’ |
| c. Paul ne mange rien . | ‘Paul isn’t eating anything.’ |

However, as Rowlett notes, Standard French does not allow the co-occurrence of such negative adverbs/arguments with the postverbal negative marker *pas*, if a single negation reading (NC) reading is to be maintained; this can be seen in (16) (Rowlett 1998: 143):

(16)

- | | |
|--|--|
| a. *Paul ne verra jamais pas son père. | *Paul will never see his father. |
| b. *Paul ne verra pas plus son père. | *Paul won’t see his father any longer. |
| c. *Paul ne voit pas rien . | *Paul doesn’t see anything. |

This restriction, however, does not hold—in complicated ways—in non-Standard varieties of French. Here we briefly summarize variability and grammatical variation in this domain in Picard French, with some comparisons to Piedmontese (Northern Italian).

As discussed in Burnett and Dagnac (2014) (B&D), in contrast with Standard French *pas*, Picard French has two distinct post-verbal negative markers, *point* and *mie*; furthermore, they variably appear without the preverbal marker *ne*; the examples in (17) and (18) show their use without *ne* (examples (17) through (21) from B&D):

(17)

j’aveus **pont** fait mes d’voirs.
I had **point** made my obligations
‘I had not done my homework.’

(p. 525)

(18)

pi j’sauros **mie** où aller.
and I would-know **mie** where to-go
‘And I would not know where to go.’

A further difference is that in contrast with French (16), negative adverbs and arguments (*pu* ‘no longer’, *jamoais* ‘never’, *parsonne* ‘no one’, *rien* ‘nothing’) in Picard can variably co-occur with Picard *point* and *mie*, maintaining a single negation interpretation (NC):

(19)

Parsonne n’ a **poé** foait attention à li.
nobody NEG has **point** paid attention to him
‘Nobody paid attention to him.’

(20)

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O	n'	a	mie	jamoais	vu	un	calémichon	invaleu	un	hérichon!
one	NEG	has	mie	never	seen	a	slug	swallow	a	hedgehog
'One has never seen a slug swallow a hedgehog.'										

The examples in (17) through (20) might at first glance make it appear as if *point* and *mie* are true syntactic variants of one another. However, as B&D note, while *mie* exhibits no restrictions on the type of negative constituents it can appear with (*pu*, *jamoais*, *parsonne*, *rien*), *point* can only co-occur with *rien* 'nothing' and *parsonne* 'nobody'. Thus, we get ungrammaticality with the co-occurrence of *point* and *jamoais* 'never' in (21), in contrast with what we see for *mie* in (20):⁸

(21)

*O n'a **point** jamoais vu un calémichon invaleu un hérichon! (cf. (20))

B&D note that under Agree approaches to NC (such as in Zeijlstra 2004a), the ungrammaticality of (21) is not explained, given that *point* otherwise enters into NC relationships with *rien* and *parsonne*. They suggest a lexical approach to the problem, whereby the difference is attributed to the distinct lexical properties of the negative markers and/or negative constituents.

Here we might also take into consideration the syntactic/semantic analysis of *point* and *mie* offered by Auger and Villeneuve (2017) (A&B). A&B illustrate that like the postverbal negative markers *nen* and *pa* in Piedmontese (Zanuttini 1997), *point* and *mie* in Picard French are informationally distinct: roughly, *point* is the unmarked negation (akin to *nen* in Piedmontese), and *mie* is the presuppositional negative marker, not unlike Italian *mica* (Cinque 1976) or Piedmontese *pa*. As they further show, just as with *nen* and *pa* in Piedmontese, Picard *point* and *mie* occur in two distinct syntactic positions in the lower functional field, where *point* is syntactically lower than *mie*. Much as Zanuttini (1997) associated these distinct syntactic positions with the distinct interpretations of Piedmontese *nen* (unmarked) and *pa* (presuppositional), we can hypothesize the same for Picard *point* (unmarked) and *mie* (presuppositional).

(p. 526) A question for future study is whether this hypothesized syntactic difference between *point* (syntactically lower) and *mie* (syntactically higher) can lead to an account of their distinct behaviors, in terms of their co-occurrence restrictions (*point*: only with *parsonne* and *rien*) or lack thereof (*mie*: unrestricted). A comparison with Montréal French (discussed in Burnett, Tremblay, and Blondeau 2015), which reveals important contrasts with Picard, would no doubt lead to an even deeper understanding of micro-syntactic variation with postverbal negative markers and variable NC in Romance varieties.

We leave this question open, and close this section with the following observation: non-standard varieties such as Picard, Montréal French, and Piedmontese exhibit highly intricate points of syntactic variation; more lexical items and syntactic positions than would seem necessary for what should be a simple matter of reversing the truth conditions of a proposition; and apparent exceptions to rules. From the perspective of standard language cultures, this might appear to be nothing but chaos: the facts of standard French *pas*

seem much simpler and easier to get a handle on. But from the perspective of scientific inquiry, these apparent irregularities and quirks play a crucial role in our understanding of the hypothesis space in natural language negation.

29.4. Final remarks: One grammar, two grammars, multiple grammars?

Throughout this chapter, we have been using the term *linguistic variety* (and also the term *language*) to denote the observed, systematic linguistic behavior of a particular individual or community,⁹ or the linguistic repertoire we observe an individual or a community of speakers operationalizing in usage. While the term is rarely defined this way, this is in fact the way it is implicitly used in the literature, both sociolinguistic and theoretical. This is evidenced by the fact that when analyzing a non-standard variety such as “Appalachian English,” authors present the variant forms in (5), repeated below, as belonging to the same “dialect.”

(5)

a. I **didn't** have no lice, . . .

b. . . and I **didn't** have any itch. (AAPCAppE: SKCTC-EA-1,63)

However, it is important to note that an individual's linguistic repertoire operationalized in usage is an **empirical observation**; it is a behavior we observe. This must not be conflated with the concept of **a grammar**, which is a theoretical construct. There is an ongoing debate in the literature regarding this theoretical construct, in the context of non-standard varieties (and vernaculars more generally). The high degree of variability exhibited in these varieties has led researchers to go down two distinct theoretical paths (see e.g. Wallenberg and Fruehwald 2013). One theory holds that a single grammar underlies the (p. 527) observed variability (e.g. Labov 1969; Anttila 1997; Guy 1991; Reynolds 1994; among others). In other words, the variants in examples like (5a) and (5b) are generated by the same grammar, and this holds for all variants. Under this view, the concept of “linguistic variety” (or “language” or “dialect”) as defined above is coextensive with the concept of “a grammar.” The other theory, in contrast, holds that the different variants are each surface realizations of distinct grammars (e.g. Kroch 1989, 1994; Fruehwald, Gress-Wright, and Wallenberg 2010; Pintzuk 1991; Santorini 1992; among others); thus, the variants in (5a) and (5b) would each be generated by a distinct grammar. Under this view, the concept of a “linguistic variety” (or “language” or “dialect”) as defined above is not coextensive with the concept of “a grammar.” Proponents of this theory view such intra-speaker variability as a form of bilingualism, or bi-dialectalism (or bilectalism, as in Leivada et al. 2017), and the observed variability is seen as a form of code-mixing or code-switching.

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Focusing just on the bilectalism approach to syntactic variability for the moment, Leivada et. al (2017) implicitly assume—on analogy with bilingualism—a model in which speakers of non-standard varieties also have knowledge of the related standard variety (essentially, a situation of diglossia). However, their experimental evidence reveals that such bilectal speakers do not perform the same as bilinguals (or monolinguals) in acceptability judgment tasks. They suggest that both linguistic proximity, linguistic fluidity (= varying from one form to the other), and linguistic insecurity in the context of non-standard/standard bilectalism is responsible for their relatively poor performance.

However, this study and its conclusions raise further questions about how to define “linguistic proximity” and “linguistic fluidity,” and whether or not these notions are relevant only to the relationship between non-standard and standard varieties. In order to adjudicate whether there is something special about bilectalism qua standard/non-standard varieties, one would have to perform similar studies on speakers who move between two closely related **non-standard** varieties (e.g. a bilectal speaker of Paduan and Vicentino), and systematically compare those results with speakers who code-switch between two non-proximate standard varieties (e.g. Spanish and German).

There is another set of related issues with teasing apart the differences (if any) between bilectalism qua non-standard/standard on the one hand, and bilingualism on the other. Consider again the examples in (1) (NPI and single negation), which are both standardized forms. If the forms in (1a) and (1b) are true variants, the question arises as to whether the variability between the two forms represents a form of **standard-standard bilectalism**, and if so, how this relates to the findings on non-standard/standard bilectalism in Leivada et al. Also, it is often the case that speakers exhibit variability between more than two forms. As we saw for Picard in section 29.3, for example, a single semantic propositional negation with *jamoais* ‘never’ can involve (i) just *jamoais*, or (ii) *ne...jamoais*, or (iii) *ne...mie jamoais*—that is, three semantically equivalent variants. This can be seen also with Belfast English in (2) (and see also Childs 2017). Under a “multiple grammars” approach, as we multiply our semantically equivalent variants, we multiply our grammars. The existence of more than two variants is not in and of itself a deal-breaker for the “multiple grammars” approach, but it does complicate the assumptions made and issues raised in studies like Leivada et. al (2017), where variability is kept simple with no more than “two.” This problem is raised by López (2018) (a proponent of the “single grammar” camp), who cites cases of creole continua, where multiple semantically equivalent syntactic variants are the norm.

(p. 528) Yet another issue is the question of which variants belong to the standard and which variants belong to the non-standard grammar. The fact that (1a,b) are considered to be standard forms makes it very easy for us to assume that when a speaker of a non-standard variety employs such forms, they are exhibiting use of the “standard” grammar. But in reality, there is no evidence that this is the case. With respect to Appalachian English, note that the AAPCAppE (Tortora et al. 2017) is rife with examples of the form in

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(1a), namely, a single negation in the form of a negative constituent (see also Tubau 2016a):

(22)

- a. They had **no roads** and very much you know . . . (AAPCAppE: ALC-004-1,529)
- b. But uh I had **no problem** getting along with colored folks. (AAPCAppE: DOHP-RC-4,832)
- c. No, they was **nothing** for us to do. (AAPCAppE: ALC-355-1,232)
(*they* = there)
- d. And so I just said **nothing**. (AAPCAppE: DOHP-MS-3,737)
- e. and I seed **no panther** (AAPCAppE: JHC-04-1,21)
(*seed* = saw)

These forms are highly frequent as unmarked forms and occur in the same kinds of contexts that the corresponding NC variants (with a negated auxiliary) occur:

(23)

- a. Just when there wasn't **nothing** do uh they worked them like brutes.
(ALC-377-1,260; cf. (31c))
- b. We didn't have **no problem** with the neighbors either.
(DOHP-RC-4,486; cf. (31b))
- c. They were a little harder to deal with than the state police, cuz you didn't give them **no back-talk**.
(DOHP-RC-5,679)

Thus, the evidence above points to a non-standard status for forms like that in (1a) (in addition to a standard status).

Another question is what sets of forms count as “true syntactic variants,” that is constructions that are equivalent in meaning but have distinct surface syntax. This is a difficult issue. Part of the problem is to do with the fact that varieties often exhibit sets of forms which only partially overlap with respect to the meanings they can convey. In the area of overlap, the sets of forms appear to be syntactic variants. But what about those contexts in which the forms do not overlap in meaning? Furthermore, it is not straightforward to determine what counts as “semantically equivalent.” Does this include pragmatic information?

Additionally, what counts as a set of true syntactic variants in one variety may not count as such in another. Let us take (1a) and (1b) again as an example. It has been claimed (Giannakidou 2000b: fn.6) that the single negation form in (1a) cannot be used out of the blue, in contrast with the NPI version in (1b). Putting aside the question of whether this is an accurate description of Standard English, let us assume this is true.¹⁰ However, even if it (p. 529) is true for Standard English, this does not mean it is true for Appalachian English.¹¹ The string in (1a) can be pragmatically unmarked in Appalachian (see the examples in (22)), but by Giannakidou's assumption, it cannot in Standard English. In this

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case, it could turn out that the string in (1a) is structurally ambiguous, and that the surface form is misleading us into concluding that we are dealing with one and the same form in Standard English and Appalachian English. This point is made for French by Rowlett (2013), who argues that a sentence as simple as *Il vient pas* (lit: ‘he comes not’) is structurally ambiguous, whereby one structure contains a NegP with a null (but semantically contentful) head, while the other does not.

In sum, there is still much research to be done, in order to understand how the variability exhibited by speakers of non-standard varieties is grammatically encoded. While the multiple grammars or “bilectal” approach allows for many apt analogies with bilingualism, the question of whether such speakers “switch” between standard and non-standard grammars (and if so, what is involved in this) is perhaps more complex than some previous work suggests. However, we hope that the discussion in this chapter has made it clear that negation in non-standard varieties is a fruitful domain in which progress in this regard can be made.

Notes:

(¹) See Spears (2015) for a discussion “African American Standard English.”

(²) But see Wouden (1997), Smith (2001), and Palacios (2017) for the suggestion that they have distinct pragmatic or informational status in other Englishes.

(³) The presence of NC in child language also suggests that for those adult English speakers who judge NC to be unacceptable, we should not straightforwardly conclude that such unacceptability judgments translate into ungrammaticality. There remains the possibility that even for those speakers who roundly reject NC and claim to never produce it, their grammar produces NC structures (i.e. that NC is grammatical for them). Evidence for this can be found in Blanchette (2017), Blanchette et al. (2018), and Blanchette and Lukyanenko (2019).

(⁴) The example is taken from the *Audio-Aligned and Parsed Corpus of Appalachian English* (AAPCAppE; Tortora et al. 2017). The code includes the corpus (AAPCAppE), subcollection (SKCTC), speaker initials (EA), and token identifier (1.,63).

(⁵) For the purposes of the discussion, we ignore *Negative Auxiliary Inversion* (NAI), in which negative constituents and NPIs can appear in matrix subject position in American varieties, following the negated auxiliary (see footnote 5).

(⁶) Blanchette (2015) discusses (i) in relation to (6a,b):

((i))

Didn’t nobody live in there then.
‘Nobody lived in there then.’

(AAPCAppE: AOHP-WC-1,345)

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The sentence in (i) is an example of *Negative Auxiliary Inversion* (NAI), discussed extensively in the literature on non-standard Englishes (Foreman 1999; Green 2014, among many others). However, it is not clear that (i) should be considered a syntactic variant of (6a) and (6b), as Green (2014) suggests that in African American English it would not be used in the same contexts as the structures in (6).

(⁷) H&L report that (13) is marginally acceptable, with the right intonation, under a “double negation” reading, in which the two negations cancel each other to yield a logical affirmative (i.e. ‘that everybody worked there often’).

(⁸) See Burnett, Tremblay, and Blondeau (2015) for important contrasts with Montréal French.

(⁹) This of course puts aside irrelevant details of performance, such as disfluencies and other features that speakers collectively recognize as mistakes.

(¹⁰) See Tottie (1991b), Wallage (2017), among others for investigation and discussion of this question. For contemporary Standard American English, the question requires further empirical investigation.

(¹¹) See Childs (2017) for a recent investigation of this in non-standard varieties of British English.

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