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# Turning expletive: from embedded speech-acts to embedded propositions

Chloé Tahar and Alda Mari  
Institut Jean Nicod, CNRS/ENS/EHESS/PSL, Paris, France

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on a non-canonical use of negation in historical and modern French, characterized by an apparent absence of meaning, expletive negation. In search of the lost meaning of expletive negation, via a diachronic investigation from Latin to French, we establish that expletive negation originates from prohibitive negation. We put forward an analysis of prohibitive negation within Krifka (2014)'s model of embedded speech-act and propose that expletive negation is the continuation of prohibitive negation and it is what remains of a long gone embedded negative imperative in French. Along this line of analysis, the paper brings historical evidence in favor of the hypothesis that languages can develop from speech-act embedding to proposition embedding. Our analysis of prohibitive negation as a clause-typing negation marker in Latin and as a verbal mood negation marker brings new evidence to the claim that sentential and verbal mood marking are two intimately related phenomena.

**Keywords:** prohibitive negation, expletive negation, imperatives, priority attitudes

## 1 Introduction

Expletive negation<sup>1</sup> is a cross-linguistic phenomenon whereby a negation marker receives a non-negative reading. Across languages, the distribution of expletive negation is limited to a restricted set of contexts. Among these contexts, we find attitude verbs, and especially fear verbs, as shown in (1). We also find expletive negation with adverbial connectives such as exceptive connectives, notably with *unless* ('à moins que'), see (2), or *without* ('sans que'), as well as prospective temporal connectives, and in particular with *before* ('avant que'), see (3), or *until* ('jusqu'à ce que'). Also (for the most part in romance languages), expletive negation occurs within comparative clauses, see (4).

- (1) Depêche-toi! Je **crains que** tu **ne** sois en retard.  
hurry-2SG.IMP-CL.2SG! 1SG fear-1SG that 2SG EXN be-2SG.SBJV in late  
'Hurry up! I'm afraid you'll be late.'
- (2) Je te jure que je ne te toucherai pas, **à moins que** tu  
1SG CL.2SG swear-1SG that 1SG NEG CL.2SG touch-1SG.FUT NEG, unless that 2SG  
**ne** me le permettes.  
EXN CL.1SG CL.3SG allow-2SG.SBJV  
'I swear that I will not touch you, unless you allow me to.'

<sup>1</sup>ExN stands for expletive negation in the glosses.

- (3) Cendrillon doit rentrer chez elle **avant que** son carrosse **ne** se transforme  
 Cinderella must return at 3SG before that her carriage EXN REFL turn-3SG.SBJV  
 en citrouille.  
 into pumpkin.  
 ‘Cinderella must go back home before her carriage turns into a pumpkin.’
- (4) Elle est encore **plus** charismatique **qu’** on **ne** le pense.  
 3SG is-3SG even more charismatic than 3SG EXN CL-3SG think-3SG  
 ‘She is even more charismatic than what people tend to think.’

If expletive negation is an optional element in French, it is not necessarily so in other languages. In Greek, see (5-a), or Russian, see (5-b), expletive negation cannot be removed.

- (5) a. Fovame na **\*(min)** erthi. [Greek]  
 fear-1SG.PRS SBJV EXN come-3SG  
 ‘I fear that he might come.’  
 (Giannakidou 1998)
- b. Ja bojus’ kak by on **\*(ne)** zabolet. [Russian]  
 1SG fear-1SG.PRS that SBJV 3SG EXN get.sick-3SG.PRF  
 ‘I fear that he might get sick’.  
 (Inkova 2006).

In this paper, we choose to approach the distribution of expletive negation in French from a diachronic perspective, by tracing its historical trajectory to its Latin roots. In Indo-European linguistics, the idea of a historical relation between expletive negation and prohibitive negation is not new. Among others, it was explored concerning Greek by Chatzopoulou (2012), concerning Italian by Parry (2013) and concerning French by Mari and Tahar (2020). You may recall from van der Auwera (2005), 2010 or van der Auwera et al. (2013) that prohibitive negation is the morphologically specialized negation that two thirds of the world’s languages may possess for imperative sentences, see example (6-a).

- (6) a. **Chó** uống ruou! [Vietnamese]  
 NEG drink alcoholic  
 ‘Do not drink alcohol!’
- b. **Không** uống ruou.  
 NEG drink alcoholic  
 ‘I/you/he/etc. am/are/is not drinking alcohol.’  
 (van der Auwera et al. 2013)

We will show, based on cross-linguistic and historical evidence, that expletive negation arises from Latin prohibitive negation. While this is not a new claim (Ageno 1955; Lakoff 1968; Fruyt 2011; Parry 2013; Lakey 2015), the literature has left unexplained how the transition takes place. Our paper fills this gap. We will argue that the historical emergence of an expletive reading of negation is closely related to “harmonic” (akin to the combination between modal verbs and modal adverbs, see Lyons 1977; Huitink 2012; Giannakidou and Mari 2018) uses of prohibitive negation in Latin, which are inherited in French. In our analysis, expletive negation continues the harmonic meaning of prohibitive negation, while reanalysis takes place on the syntactic side, along with a gradual change in the system of clausal complementation, developing from speech-act embedding to proposition embedding.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we offer a view across three Indo-European languages – Greek, Albanian and Latin – of the distributions of prohibitive and expletive negations (Section

2). We focus on prohibitive negation in Latin in Section 3. Then we turn to the analysis of the negation *ne* in Latin and then in French in Section 4. Section 5 discusses a competing analysis. Section 6 briefly discusses previous approaches of expletive negation. Section 7 concludes.

## 2 Prohibitive negation across Indo-European languages

Many languages of the world distinguish two or more morphologically specialized negation markers that serve distinct functions. In many languages, negative imperatives cannot be formed with the standard propositional negation. This fact is well documented in the typological literature (e.g., van der Auwera 2005; van der Auwera 2010; van der Auwera et al. 2013).

In this section, we present evidence for the morphological distinction between propositional (or declarative) negation and prohibitive negation in Indo-European languages, based on Turano (2012)’s study for Albanian, Chatzopoulou (2017)’s study for Greek, as well as historical data from Classical Latin. We will refer to the former (declarative) negation as  $\text{NEG}_{\text{DECL}}$  and to the latter as  $\text{NEG}_{\text{PROH}}$  in the glosses.

	Root clause		Embedded clause
	Declarative clause	Imperative clause	Fear verbs
Latin	<i>non</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>ne</i>
Albanian	<i>nuk/s’</i>	<i>mos</i>	<i>mos</i>
Greek	<i>dhen</i>	<i>mi(n)/me</i>	<i>mi(n)/me</i>

Table 1: Choice of negation marker in Latin, Albanian, Greek

Unlike Joseph and Janda (1999) and Joseph (2002), we will not explore the details of the variety of functions that the prohibitive negation may serve in each of these languages. We will rather focus on a similarity between these languages, namely that the prohibitive negation may receive expletive uses, notably under fear verbs (see Table 1). We consider this cross-linguistic similarity as strong evidence of an intimate connection between prohibitive and expletive negation that warrants considering in detail the nature of this relation.

### 2.1 Albanian

Modern Albanian distinguishes between a standard propositional negation *nuk* (which can be replaced by *s’*) and the negation *mos*, which is related to the imperative, optative, or subjunctive mood, in root clauses. In declarative contexts, *nuk* cannot be replaced by *mos*, see (7), and in imperative contexts, *mos* cannot be replaced by *nuk*, see (8), as observed by Turano (2012).

(7) **Nuk/ \*mos** vajta në bibliotekë.  
 $\text{NEG}_{\text{DECL}}/\text{NEG}_{\text{PROH}}$  went-1SG.PST in library  
 ‘I didn’t go to the library.’

(8) **Mos/ \*nuk** më ndihmo!  
 $\text{NEG}_{\text{PROH}}/\text{NEG}_{\text{DECL}}$  CL.1SG help-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Don’t help me!’

Importantly for us, *mos* can receive expletive uses in the embedded clause of fear verbs, among other contexts (where it occurs as an optional element).

(9) Kam frikë se **mos** më vdes babai.  
 have-1SG fear that  $\text{NEG}_{\text{PROH}}$  CL.1SG die-2SG father-the

‘I fear that my father will die.’

## 2.2 Greek

Modern Greek distinguishes between a standard propositional negation *dhen* and the negation *mi(n)*, found in non-declarative contexts like imperative clauses or with the subjunctive (marked by the particle *na*). As observed by Chatzopoulou (2017), these two negations cannot freely alternate, see (10) and (11).

- (10) o Jánis **dhen/** \***min** írthe.  
the-NOM Janis-NOM NEG<sub>DECL</sub>/ NEG<sub>PROH</sub> came-3SG.PP  
‘John did not come.’
- (11) **Mi/** \***dhen** féris ton Jáni!  
NEG<sub>PROH</sub>/ NEG<sub>DECL</sub> bring-2SG.PNP the-ACC Jani-ACC  
‘Don’t bring John!’

*Min* can receive an expletive use in the embedded clause of fear verbs, among other contexts (where it does not occur as an optional element).

- (12) Fováme na **min** érthi.  
fear-3SG SBJV NEG<sub>PROH</sub> come-3SG  
‘I fear that he may come.’

## 2.3 Classical Latin

Classical Latin (roughly from 150 BC to 300 AD) distinguishes a standard propositional negative marker *non*, used with the indicative mood, and the negation *ne*, used with the imperative or subjunctive moods.

Latin prohibitive negation, which we discuss in subsequent sections, receives a (seemingly) expletive use with fear verbs, and with a wider set of verbs (where it does not occur as an optional element).

- (13) Timeo **ne** laborem augeam.  
fear-1SG.PRS NEG<sub>PROH</sub> work-ACC increase-1SG.SBJV  
‘I’m afraid that I shall increase my work.’ (Cic, *Leg*, 1-4)

In view of this set of data, we turn to the investigation of the connections between prohibitive and expletive negation focusing on Latin and French.

## 3 Prohibitive negation in Latin

The goal of this section is to provide evidence that Latin prohibitive *ne* does not occur randomly in embedded clauses. Rather, the distribution of *ne* in embedded clauses is restricted to a set of attitude verbs that describe a certain type of imperative illocutionary force (e.g. directives, desideratives, etc.), thus adding a piece of evidence in favor of the hypothesis of a semantic connection between *ne* in unembedded and embedded contexts.

Imperative clauses are conventionally associated with a wide range of illocutionary forces (see Schmerling 1982; Hamblin 1987, König and Siemund 1999; Aikhenvald 2010; Condoravdi and Lauer 2012; Kaufmann 2012, Jarry and Kissine 2014, among others). For instance, depending

on contextual conditions, imperatives may express a request, an advice, a permission, a wish, etc. The set of attitude verbs with which *ne* occurs also describe the various types of illocutionary forces that imperatives may have. For an overview of the distribution of *ne* in embedded clauses, see Table 2.

Root clause Illocutionary force	Matrix clause	
	Positive priority attitude	Negative priority attitude
Command	<i>Impero</i> ('I order')	<i>Prohibeo</i> ('I forbid')
	<i>Iubeo</i> ('I order')	<i>Recuso</i> ('I refuse')
		<i>Veto</i> ('I forbid')
Request	<i>Peto</i> ('I ask')	<i>Impedio</i> ('I prevent')
	<i>Mando</i> ('I ask')	<i>Obsto</i> ('I prevent')
	<i>Rogo</i> ('I ask')	<i>Deterreo</i> ('I prevent')
Warning	<i>Admoneo</i> ('I warn')	
	<i>Moneo</i> ('I warn')	
Advice	<i>Suadeo</i> ('I advise')	<i>Dissuadeo</i> ('I dissuade')
	<i>Cohortor</i> ('I encourage')	<i>Dehortor</i> ('I discourage')
Plea	<i>Obsecro</i> ('I implore')	
	<i>Quaeso</i> ('I beg')	
Wish	<i>Velim</i> ('I want')	<i>Timeo</i> ('I fear')
	<i>Opto</i> ('I wish')	<i>Metuo</i> ('I fear')
	<i>Cupio</i> ('I desire')	<i>Uereor</i> ('I fear')

Table 2: Root clause/Matrix clause matching illocutionary forces

We label 'priority attitudes' (after Portner's (2007; 2009) label for deontic, teleologic and bouletic modals) the category of attitudes in the embedded clause of which the prohibitive *ne* occurs in Latin. These attitudes come in two sorts. On the one hand, there are positive priority attitudes (e.g., directives, desideratives). According to the analysis we will advocate for in the next section, when *ne*-clauses are embedded under positive priority attitudes, they are interpreted in conformity with the meaning of the embedding verb. For instance, a desiderative attitude (e.g. *opto*, 'I wish') expresses a wish and indicates that the embedded *ne*-clause is to be interpreted as a speech-act of the wish-type, see (14).

- (14) Opto **ne** mihi somnus gratiam referat!  
 wish-1SG NEG<sub>PROH</sub> 1SG.DAT sleep-ACC gratitude-ACC report-3SG.SBJV  
 'I hope that my death will not be his reward.' (lit., 'I hope may my death not be his reward.') (Fro, *AurCaes*, 1.4)

On the other hand, there are negative priority attitudes (e.g., prohibitives, apprehensives). Embedded under negative priority attitudes, *ne*-clauses are interpreted in a redundant fashion with respect to the meaning of the embedding verb. For instance, an apprehensive attitude (e.g., *timeo*, 'I fear') expresses an apprehension and indicates that the embedded *ne*-clause is to be interpreted as a speech-act of the apprehension-type. This is redundant with what the embedded *ne*-clause expresses. This redundancy explains why such constructions, see for instance (15), are translated as involving no negation in the embedded clause. The exact nature of the concord mechanism which is at play in the "harmonic" interpretation of *ne* in clauses embedded under negative priority attitudes is a question that we discuss at length in Tahar 2022.

- (15) Haec timeo **ne** impediuntur.  
 this fear-1SG NEG<sub>PROH</sub> prevent-1SG.SBJV.PAS

‘I fear that I may be prevented from (doing) this.’ (lit., ‘I fear may I not be prevented from (doing) this.’) (Cic, *Fam*, 11, 10)

Note that across the three types of uses of Latin *ne*, namely in negative imperatives, under positive priority attitudes and under negative priority attitudes, we argue that *ne* carries one and the same semantic contribution: namely, *ne(p)* conveys that the speaker/the attitude holder prefers not-*p* to *p*. In a negative imperative, not-*p* is the course of action that the speaker favors. With positive priority attitudes, the attitude holder prefers not-*p* to *p*, e.g., in (14) the 1st person attitude holder prefers that his death not be somebody else’s reward. Finally, under negative priority attitudes, the attitude holder also prefers not-*p* to *p*, e.g., in (15) the 1st person attitude holder prefers not being prevented from doing it to being prevented.

With negative priority attitudes, for the whole construction to convey a prohibition or an apprehension towards a negative event, the propositional (or ‘verbal’) negation *non* is required, in addition to *ne*, see (16-a) and (16-b) (as mentioned in the synthetic works on Latin Orlandini 2001; Bodelot 2003; Fruyt 2011; Pinkster 2015, 2021. Note that a literal translation for such constructions would involve a double negation.

- (16) a. Sed timeo            **ne**        **non**        impetrem.  
 But fear-1SG.PRS NEG<sub>PROH</sub> NEG<sub>DECL</sub> achieve-1SG.SBJV  
 ‘But I fear that I may not obtain it.’ (lit., ‘But I fear may I not not-obtain it.’) (Cic, *Att*, 9)
- b. Timuit,            **ne**        **non**        succederet.  
 fear-3sg.pf NEG<sub>PROH</sub> NEG<sub>DECL</sub> succeed-3SG.SBJV.IPFV  
 ‘He feared that he would not succeed.’ (lit., ‘He feared may he would not not-succeed.’) (Hor, *Ep*, 1, 17)

Turning to the empirical characterization of the contexts where prohibitive *ne* occurs in Classical Latin, we describe side by side the occurrence of *ne* in root imperative clauses and in embedded clauses.<sup>2</sup>

In Latin, both morphological imperatives, as in (17-a), and morphological subjunctives, as in (17-b), could be used interchangeably in the 2nd person, for the construction of root negative imperative clauses, see (Pinkster, 2015, Chapter 7.50).

- (17) a. Uigila,            **ne**        somno        stude.  
 stay.awake-2SG.IMP, NEG<sub>PROH</sub> sleep-DAT seek.for-2SG.IMP  
 ‘Open your eyes, don’t fall asleep.’ (Pl, *Mil*, 215)
- b. Da            mihi            hanc            ueniam,        ignosce,        irata  
 give-2SG.IMP POSS.1SG.DAT DEM.ACC mercy-ACC forgive-2SG.IMP, angry  
**ne**        sies.  
 NEG<sub>PROH</sub> be-2SG.SBJV  
 ‘Give me this indulgence, forgive me, don’t be angry.’ (Pl, *Amph*, 94)

<sup>2</sup>We draw on extensive qualitative data from several classical Latin grammars; such as that of Scheller (1825); Allen and Greenough (1903); Bennett (1910); Ernout and Thomas (1951); as well as the more recent grammars of Vincent (1988); de Melo (2007); Pinkster (2015, 2021). Furthermore, we rely on data from several works that have extensively studied the Latin negator *ne*, such as those of Lakoff (1968); Orlandini (2001); Bodelot (2003); Fruyt (2011); Lakey (2015). For more resources, we consulted the online corpus prepared by The Packard Humanities Institute, which contains most of the texts written before A.D. 200, as well as some texts selected from later antiquity. We did not proceed to a quantitative corpus analysis to check whether embedded *ne*-clauses only appear under the set of priority attitudes to be given below. However, we believe that embedded *ne*-clauses are restricted to this set of contexts, since no others were inventoried by centuries of philological works.

Embedded under attitudes, *ne*-clauses do not allow for the morphological imperative. Only morphological subjunctives are attested, see (Pinkster, 2021, Chapter 15.64). Still, embedded clauses of this kind closely correspond to root imperative clauses, which leads Pinkster to even call them "imperative" clauses.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the distribution of embedded *ne*-clauses argues in favor of a semantic connection between the interpretation of root imperative clauses and the interpretation of the embedded clause. The embedded clause, by spelling out the meaning of the embedding attitude, maintains the illocutionary flavors (or forces) characteristic of imperative clauses, which we now describe.

**Commands (and Prohibitions)** With Condoravdi and Lauer (2012), we group together directive illocutionary acts as COMMANDS. Furthermore, along with Sadock and Zwicky (1985); Bybee and Pagliuca (1985); Pakendorf and Schalley (2007), we refer to the negative counterparts of imperatives with a directive force as PROHIBITIONS. Directive and prohibitive speech-acts not only express the speaker's desire towards the (non)realisation of the situation described by the proposition, they also express a request for the addressee's compliance. This request for compliance, as argued by (Huddleston, 2002, 929), comes with various subflavors.

(18) **Negative Command ('Prohibition'):**

Meam domum **ne** imbitas.  
 POSS.1SG.ACC house-ACC NEG<sub>PROH</sub> enter-2SG.SBJV

'Don't enter my house!' (Pl, *Ep*, 145)

(19) **Directive attitude + *ne*-clause:**

Caesar suis **imperavit ne** quod omnino telum in  
 Caesar POSS.DAT order-3SG.PRF NEG<sub>PROH</sub> some none weapon-ACC to  
 hostes reicerent.  
 enemies-ACC throw-3PL.SBJV.IPFV

'Caesar ordered his soldiers not to throw back any weapon.' (Caes, *Bell.Gall.*, 1-46)

(20) **Prohibitive attitude + *ne*-clause:**

Gracchus (...) **prohibuisse ne** decerneretur ut imago  
 Gracchus (...) forbid-3SG.PRF NEG<sub>PROH</sub> decide-3SG.SBJV.IPFV that image-NOM  
 sua triumphali ornatu e templu Iouis  
 POSS.NOM triumphally decoration-ABL outside temple Jupiter

'Gracchus forbade people to decorate the temple of Jupiter with his image.' (Liv, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 38)

(21) **Negative Request ('Impediment'):**

(Palaestrio does not want a soldier to interfere while his former mistress, who has fainted, is regaining her consciousness.)

**Ne** interueneris, quaeso, dum resipiscit.  
 NEG<sub>PROH</sub> interrupt-2SG.SBJV, please, while regain-consciousness-3SG.PRS

<sup>3</sup>We are very thankful to Igor Yanovich for bringing to our attention the question of mood in root and embedded Latin *ne*-clauses and related issues discussed in Section 4.2.



‘Don’t interfere, please, while she’s recovering.’ (Pl, *Mil*, 1333-4)

(22) **Rogative attitude + *ne*-clause:**

Id            **ne**            facerem,            **rogarent.**  
PRO.3SG.ACC NEG<sub>PROH</sub> do-1SG.SBJV.IPFV, ask-3PL.SBJV.IPFV

‘They would have asked me not to do it.’ (Cic, *Planc*, 92)

(23) **Impeditive attitude + *ne*-clause:**

Scilicet    **obstabit**            custos,            **ne**            scribere possis?  
Apparently prevent-3SG.FUT guard-NOM, NEG<sub>PROH</sub> write-INF can-2SG.SBJV

‘Apparently, a guard could prevent you from writing?’ (Ov, *Ars*, 619)

(24) **Negative plea :**

Da            mihi            hanc            ueniam,            ignosce,            irata  
give-2SG.IMP POSS.1SG.DAT DEM.ACC mercy-ACC forgive-2SG.IMP, angry  
**ne**            sies.  
NEG<sub>PROH</sub> be-2SG.SBJV

‘Give me this indulgence, forgive me, don’t be angry.’ (Pl, *Amph*, 94)

(25) **Precative attitude + *ne*-clause:**

**Obsecro**            **ne**            indicium            ero            facias            meo.  
implore-1SG.PRS NEG<sub>PROH</sub> denunciation-ACC master-DAT do-2SG.SBJV CL.1SG.DAT

‘I implore you not to betray us to my master.’ (Pl, *Mos*, 743-5)

(26) **Negative advice (‘Dissuasion’):**

Isto            bono            utare,            dum adsit;            cum  
DEM.ABL good-ABL use-2SG.SBJV, while be.present-3SG.SBJV; as.long.as  
absit,            **ne**            requiras.  
lack-3SG.SBJV, NEG<sub>PROH</sub> seek-2SG.SBJV

‘Make use of that blessing, while you have it; when it is lacking, do not yearn for it.’ (Cic, *De Sen*, 33)

(27) **Hortative attitude + *ne*-clause:**

Non            it,            non            it,            quia            tanto opere **suades**  
NEG<sub>DECL</sub> go-3SG.FUT, NEG<sub>DECL</sub> go-3SG.FUT, because so.much advise-2SG.PRS  
**ne**            ebitat.  
NEG<sub>PROH</sub> go-3SG.SBJV

‘He won’t go, he won’t go, because you advise him so much not to.’ (Pl, *Stich*, 608)

(28) **Dehortative attitude + *ne*-clause:**

Hannibal (...) me            dehortatur            **dissuadetque**,            **ne**  
Hannibal (...) CL.1SG.ACC discourage-3SG.PRS dissuade-3SG.PRS-and, NEG<sub>PROH</sub>

bellum geram.  
war-ACC make-1SG.SBJV

‘Hannibal discourages me and dissuades me from making war.’ (Gell, *Noct*, 6.2)

(29) **Negative Warning:**

Uigila, ne somno stude.  
stay.awake-2SG.IMP, NEG<sub>PROH</sub> sleep-DAT seek.for-2SG.IMP

‘Open your eyes, don’t fall asleep.’ (Pl, *Mil*, 215)

(30) **Admonitive attitude + ne-clause:**

Illud autem te admoneo, ne [eorum more  
DEM.ACC yet CL.2SG.ACC warn-1SG.PRS, NEG<sub>PROH</sub> PRO.PL.GEN customs.ABL  
qui non proficere sed conspici cupiunt], facias  
PRO.REL NEG<sub>DECL</sub> progress-INF but show.off-INF.PASS want-3PL.PRS, do-2SG.SBJV  
aliqua.  
likewise

‘Yet, I warn you of this, don’t behave like those who want, not to progress, but to be seen.’ (Sen, *Epist*, 5)

**Wishes and Apprehensions** Imperatives may as well serve no directive function, but merely express the speaker’s desire for the (non)realisation of the content of the proposition. WISHES and their negative counterparts, APPREHENSIONS<sup>4</sup> do not express a request for the addressee’s cooperation. In fact, wishes can be addressed, such as well-wishes (*Get better!*), but they need not be.

(31) **Negative wish (‘Apprehension’):**

Ne di sirint!  
NEG<sub>PROH</sub> gods-NOM allow-3PL.SBJV

‘May the Gods not allow it!’ (Pl, *Amph*, 613)

(32) **Desiderative attitude + ne-clause:**

At ne videas velim.  
but NEG<sub>PROH</sub> see-2SG.SBJV want-1SG.PRS

‘But I wish you wouldn’t see it.’ (Pl, *Rud*, 23)

(33) **Apprehensive attitude + ne-clause:**

Timeo, ne malefacta mea sint inventa omnia.  
fear-1SG NEG<sub>PROH</sub> misdeeds-ACC mine be-3SG.SBJV discovered-PTCP-PST all.

‘I fear that my past misdeeds will be discovered.’ (Plaut, *Mil*, 4)

<sup>4</sup>Note that in the typological literature, the label *apprehensive* (‘volitive of fear’, as per Vuillemet (2018)) describes, among other things, the modal meaning conveyed by fear verbs or precautioning conjunctions such as the English *lest* (see also Lichtenberk 1995; François 2003 or Kuteva et al. 2019 for a recent discussion). This label is only marginally used to describe negative imperatives of the *wish*-type.

We now substantiate our hypothesis of a semantic relation between *ne* in imperative clauses and embedded contexts by designing a diachronic path from Latin to Modern French.

## 4 From speech-act embedding to proposition embedding

Our analysis spells out two stages of change in the syntax of clausal embedding from Latin to French. Speech-act embedding is the first stage. The embedding attitude selects a negative imperative clause. The second stage is proposition embedding. The embedding attitude selects a propositional complement, with expletive negation.

### 4.1 Parataxis

Jespersen (1917) was one of the first to suggest that Latin *ne*-clauses are in some way treated as independent sentences when occurring under prohibitive or apprehensive verbs (Jespersen, 1917, 75). Under his analysis, they retain both the syntax and the semantics of a root negative imperative. He was followed by different scholars, including Ageno (1955) and Parry (2013), for whom the Latin *ne*-clause is paratactically juxtaposed to the verbal clause (e.g., *timeo; ne veniat*, ‘I fear; may he not come!’).

What Jespersen was suggesting is that verbs like *prohibeo* and *timeo* receive a parenthetical use. They serve a presentative function having almost no interpretative effect upon the negative imperative, which has a main point status (see Simons 2007).

Prohibitive verbs name the illocutionary act performed by the negative imperative (“X forbids: PROHIBITION”). The meaning of the main verb is thus redundant with that of the *ne*-clause, with respect to the whole construction. In the same line of thought, one can also add that the presentative function that apprehensive verbs serve is meant to provide evidential motivation (see also Krifka 2017; Simons 2007) to the utterance of the negative imperative (“X fears: APPREHENSION”).

This line of analysis is based on the old assumption that languages follow a diachronic trajectory of development from parataxis to hypotaxis (see for instance Bennett 1910; Wallin 1910; Meillet and Vendryes 1924). According to this assumption, a language displays, at early stages of its development, paratactic constructions that ultimately develop into subordinated constructions.

The matching of illocutionary flavors between matrix imperatives and embedded subjunctives in Latin makes a paratactic analysis intuitively attractive. However, the paratactic analysis fails to adequately capture the Latin facts. In fact, even though subjunctive *ne*-clauses are introduced by no embedding device, they can also display characteristic properties of embedded clauses. They display sequence of tense, see (34), as well as coreference between the matrix and embedded subject, see (35) (McCloskey 2006).

(34) Caesar suis **imperavit** **ne** quod omnino telum in  
 Caesar POSS.DAT order-3SG.PRF NEG<sub>PROH</sub> some none weapon-ACC to  
 hostes reicerent.  
 enemies-ACC throw-3PL.SBJV.IPFV  
 ‘Caesar ordered them not to throw back any weapon.’ (Caes, *Bell.Gall.*, 1-46)

(35) [Sententiam **ne** diceret<sub>i</sub>] **recusavit**<sub>i</sub>.  
 opinion-ACC NEG<sub>PROH</sub> say-3SG.SBJV.IPFV refuse-3SG.PERF  
 ‘He refused to give his opinion.’ (Cic, *Off.*, 3)

In these cases we cannot evoke parataxis. For this reason we propose a middle ground analysis

between a paratactic and hypotactic (see Section 5) analysis.

## 4.2 Speech-act embedding in Latin

In a series of recent studies (Krifka 2014; Krifka 2017; Krifka 2020), Krifka has promoted the idea and developed a formal model for speech-act embedding (see also discussion in Crnič and Trinh 2009; Kaufmann 2012; Woods 2016). He argues that in English, just as in German, the verb *say* can be used in two different configurations, as in (36). The verb only embeds a proposition in (36-a); in (36-b), *say* is claimed to embed a speech-act (of assertion).

- (36) a. Mary said that she hates John.  
b. Mary said she hates John.

For Krifka, speech-act embedding is a device that can be applied to embedded clauses that show root clause property, such as the absence of sequence of tense in English, see (36-b), or verb-second in German, see (37-b).

- (37) a. Mary sagte, das sie John hasst.  
b. Mary sagte, sie hasst John.

The structure corresponding to proposition embedding is given in (38-a) and that corresponding to speech-act embedding in (38-b) (Krifka 2014).

- (38) a.  $[[[_{VP} \textit{Mary} [_{V'} \textit{say} [_{CP} \textit{that} [_{IP} \textit{she hates John} ]]]]]]$   
b.  $[[[_{VP} \textit{Mary} [_{V'} \textit{say} [_{ForceP} \textit{she hates John} ]]]]]]$

We follow Krifka's proposal and propose that, in Latin, *ne*-clauses are embedded speech-acts.<sup>5</sup> However, embedded *ne*-clauses cannot display root clause property, as they do not allow for morphological imperatives, which remains an open issue for our speech-act embedding analysis.

In our perspective, we assume that *ne* is a specialised negation, with a clause-typing function. More precisely, we propose that *ne* heads the Force projection (Rizzi 1997). The structures corresponding to the fragments (39) are given in (40).

- (39) a. **Ne** me territes. ('Don't try to frighten me.')
- b. Iubeo, **ne** me territes. (lit., 'I order, don't try to frighten me.')
- c. Prohibeo, **ne** me territes. (lit., 'I forbid, don't try to frighten me.')

- (40) a.  $[[[_{ForceP} \textit{Ne me territes} ]]]]$   
b.  $[[[_{VP} \textit{Iubeo} [_{ForceP} \textit{ne me territes} ]]]]$   
c.  $[[[_{VP} \textit{Prohibeo} [_{ForceP} \textit{ne me territes} ]]]]$

An important insight of Krifka (2014) is that speech-act embedding verbs are speech-act reports, that is to say, they describe a locutionary act. A question embedding verb may describe a locutionary act in an explicit (e.g., *ask*) or implicit manner (e.g., *wonder*). To Krifka, *wonder* is a speech-act report insofar as it describes the psychological attitude one has when asking oneself questions.<sup>6</sup> We follow Krifka in assuming that directives explicitly denote a locutionary act, as

<sup>5</sup>Note that, in English, contrary to assertions, imperatives cannot be embedded.

<sup>6</sup>A similar idea is that speech-act embedding verbs are used to report the performance (by the speaker or another agent) of the embedded speech-act, on the mode of (mixed) *quotation*, see Kaufmann 2012; Woods 2016. Namely, the intuition that embedded imperatives are relayed as quotations in Latin is not new, see (Wallin, 1910, 11):

It is inconceivable, for instance, that a speaker would say: *eum moneo: abeat*, 'I advise him: let him go



categorize for *que*-clauses (or infinitival complements) by the end of the Old French period. They thus cease to embed imperative speech-acts and start behaving, syntactically, as attitude reports.

Our proposal is that with the development of the *que* from Latin to French, prohibitive *ne* loses its clause-typing function in embedded clauses. The key phenomenon occurring is that prohibitive *ne* fossilizes into a modal negation, undergoing downward-reanalysis from ForceP to MoodP, under negative priority attitudes, see (45). Crucially, there is a continuity of meaning of harmonic *ne* in Latin and French, despite its syntactic reanalysis. To get from (43) to (44) essentially no semantic change is required.

- (43) **Timeo, ne** malefacta mea sint inventa omnia.  
 fear-1SG NEG<sub>PROH</sub> misdeeds-ACC mine be-3PL.SBJV discovered-PTCP-PST all.  
 ‘I fear that my past misdeeds will be discovered.’ (Plaut, *Mil*, 4)
- (44) Je **crains** que mes anciens méfaits **ne** soient découverts.  
 1SG fear-1SG that my ancient misdeeds EXN be-3PL.SBJV discovered.  
 ‘I fear that my past misdeeds will be discovered.’
- (45) [[<sub>VP</sub> Je crains [<sub>CP</sub> que [<sub>IP</sub> mes anciens méfaits<sub>1</sub> [<sub>MoodP</sub> ne + sont<sub>2</sub>-SBJV [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>1</sub> t<sub>2</sub> découverts ]]]]]]]

With *ne* reanalyzed as a negation marker base-generated in the Mood projection, our diachronic investigation resonates with accounts that reach a similar conclusion based on synchronic evidence. In particular, Zovko-Dinkovic (2017)’s synchronic analysis of expletive negation in Croatia and Slovenian (building on Abels (2005)’s analysis for Russian) also concludes that the negation which receives an expletive reading is base-generated in MoodP.

From a semantic perspective, we propose that *ne* in MoodP conveys the speaker’s preferential attitude towards the negation of the proposition. Just as in imperatives clauses, *ne* conveys a general meaning of dispreference: the speaker wants not-*p* to be realized. We argue that *ne* is reanalyzed in MoodP as it enters ‘Modal Harmony’ with embedding verbs that express negative preferences.

The notion of ‘Modal Harmony’ was introduced by works that have explored the relation between modal verbs and adverbs (a.o. Lyons 1977, Huitink 2012, Giannakidou and Mari 2018).

- (46) John must definitely be at home.

Modal Harmony relies on the idea that two modal elements bear the same meaning (in (46) the modal and the adverb bear the same epistemic flavor<sup>8</sup>). Unlike with Negative Concord approaches, there is no notion of semantic dependency (as in Espinal 1992; Espinal 2000), see discussion in section 6.1). The main idea is that, together with the embedding verb, expletive *ne* yields a unitary semantic meaning of dispreference at large. Note that, like adverbs, expletive negation can be omitted in Modern French, without any change in the interpretation of the sentence.

- (47) Je crains qu’ il soit arrivé quelque chose à mon chien.  
 1SG fear-1SG that 3SG be-3SG happened some thing to my dog  
 ‘I fear that something happened to my dog.’

<sup>8</sup>As Giannakidou and Mari (2018) argue, several cases of modal dis-harmony are observed, cross-linguistically, with respect to force.

To sum up, in our analysis, directive and desiderative attitudes embed imperative clauses in Latin, and in this context prohibitive negation is a contentful element which has a clause-typing function. Imperative embedding is lost and proposition embedding becomes the only option in French for directives and desideratives and their negative counterparts. Prohibitive negation fossilizes into expletive negation with negative priority attitudes.

Second, our analysis provides a new handle on understanding how languages develop from parataxis to hypotaxis, by positing an intermediary stage of speech-act embedding, where there is embedding — as evidenced by *consecutio temporum* and pronominal coreference — without complementizer. Finally, we hope that we have shed new light on the intricacies of sentential and verbal mood as two intimately related phenomena (see a.o. Portner (2018)).

## 5 An alternative hypotactic analysis for Latin

A competing analysis of the relation between prohibitive and expletive negations could rely on the Performative Hypothesis, notably by Lakoff (1968) (see also Mari and Tahar 2020). The Performative Hypothesis, also developed in the works of Ross (1970); Sadock (1974); Katz (1977) provides a declarative semantics for imperatives. In this (much criticized)<sup>9</sup> framework, imperative clauses contain an implicit performative verb in their deep structure: an imperative sentence like (48-a) and a performative sentence like (48-b) are deemed truth-conditionally equivalent.

- (48) a. Clean your room!  
b. [I order that] you clean your room.

More recently, Mari and Tahar (2020) have revisited the Performative Hypothesis. For them, along with Kaufmann (2012), the variety of forces that imperatives may have are hard coded in the semantics and not reconstructed in the pragmatics, via inferential mechanisms (à la Wilson and Sperber (1988); Condoravdi and Lauer (2012)). They posit the presence of an abstract operator IMP in the semantics of imperative clauses and propose a unified modal semantics for the imperative operator and for priority attitudes.

In Lakoff's analysis and, by extension, in Mari and Tahar (2020)'s, it is argued that *ne* in embedded position is a complementizer (a hypothesis shared by many, see also Vincent 1988; Orlandini 2001; Roussou and Robert 2003; Fruyt 2011; Lakey 2015, among others), which is selected by the embedding verb and has the capacity of selecting a subjunctive clause.

- (49) a.  $[[[\text{ForceP IMP } [\text{NegP } \mathbf{ne} \text{ [IP } \textit{me territes} ]]]]]$   
b.  $[[[\text{VP } \textit{lubeo} \text{ [CP } \mathbf{ne} \text{ [IP } \textit{me territes} ]]]]]$   
c.  $[[[\text{VP } \textit{Prohibeo} \text{ [CP } \mathbf{ne} \text{ [IP } \textit{me territes} ]]]]]$

An alternative syntactic analysis, approaching the embedded *ne*-clause as headed by a null complementizer, could as well be considered within Lakoff's and Mari and Tahar's line of reasoning.<sup>10</sup>

- (50) a.  $[[[\text{ForceP IMP } [\text{NegP } \mathbf{ne} \text{ [IP } \textit{me territes} ]]]]]$   
b.  $[[[\text{VP } \textit{lubeo} \text{ [CP } \emptyset \text{ [NegP } \mathbf{ne} \text{ [IP } \textit{me territes} ]]]]]]]$   
c.  $[[[\text{VP } \textit{Prohibeo} \text{ [CP } \emptyset \text{ [NegP } \mathbf{ne} \text{ [IP } \textit{me territes} ]]]]]]]$

<sup>9</sup>See for instance Boër and Lycan 1980, Levinson 1980 or more recently Jarry and Kissine 2014 and Portner 2016.

<sup>10</sup>We thank an anonymous reviewer for calling our attention to this point.

In both cases, however, we have to stipulate hidden mechanisms or operators, which, for methodological reasons, we prefer to abstain from. In (49), we have to stipulate that *ne* does not occupy the same syntactic position in root and in embedded clauses. In other terms, as per Fruyt (2011) and Lakey (2015), we have to posit that Latin prohibitive *ne* grammaticalizes onto a subordinator when occurring in embedded clauses (a claim for which there is no diachronic evidence, to the authors' knowledge).<sup>11</sup>

## 6 Previous analyses of expletive negation and discussion

This section compares our account to previous ones. We choose to leave aside the discussion of expletive negation in root clauses (such as Zanuttini and Portner (2000)'s account for exclamatives and Eilam (2009)'s account for free relatives), under the working assumption that expletive negation in root and embedded clauses is not a unified phenomenon (see also Greco 2019). We also leave aside the discussion of expletive negation in adverbial clauses (such as Tovená (1996)'s and Margulis (2016)'s accounts for *until*-clauses). Still, to understand how the present account would generalize to adverbial clauses, the reader is referred to Tahar (2021a), who argues that expletive negation enters Modal Harmony with the negative preference component conveyed at the pragmatic level by *avant que*-clauses ('before') or at the truth-conditional level by *à moins que*-clauses ('unless') in French.

### 6.1 Expletive negation as a negative concord item

Previously, van der Wurff (1999); van der Wouden (1994) and Espinal (2000) have posited that expletive negation is a Negative Polarity Item. Relatedly, Zeiljstra (2004) and Espinal (1992); Espinal (2000) have in particular posited that expletive negation enters Negative Concord with the embedding context. Together with the main verb, expletive negation would yield a 'single-negation' semantic reading. To the previous authors, expletive negation is indeed embedded under 'inherently negative' contexts.

In the works of van der Wurff (1999) and van der Wouden (1994), it is argued that the negativity of the contexts of appearance of expletive negation relies on downward-monotonicity. Subsequent works like that of Espinal (2000) propose that the negativity of contexts where expletive negation occurs relies on nonveridicality (see also Jin and Koenig 2019), defined as the property of operators that do not entail the truth of the proposition they take as argument (see Zwarts 1995; Giannakidou 1998, Giannakidou 1999, Giannakidou 2011), with respect to an epistemic model (see Giannakidou and Mari 2015; Giannakidou and Mari 2016; Giannakidou and Mari 2021). Simply relying on downward-monotonicity or non-veridicality would lead to an obvious over-generalization. For instance, downward-monotonic predicates such as the emotive-factive attitudes *regret* or *be surprised* (see von Stechow 1999 for a discussion) do not allow for expletive negation. Similarly, belief predicates do not allow for expletive negation in spite of being non-veridical (they do not entail *p*).

Finally, for Espinal, the main predicate is interpreted as semantically 'negative', while the negation marker in the subordinate clause is interpreted (out of a semantic mechanism of 'logical absorption') as a dependent concord item, which is semantically empty. Our analysis proposes an alternative explanation, grounded in the diachronic trajectory from prohibitive negation, by appealing to the notion of Modal Harmony rather than the one of Negative Concord. According to our account, both the attitude and the negation bear the same modal meaning of negative preference. Since the negative preference remains once the expletive negation is omitted, it is hard to find contexts in which the negative contribution of the expletive *ne* is visible. However,

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<sup>11</sup>Indeed, there is no evidence that root negative imperatives are found at earlier stages of Latin than embedded *ne*-clauses.



there are cases - especially with temporal connectives – in which this component can still be seen, see (51).

- (51) **Context:** A doctor receives a patient who promises to stop smoking once he has recovered from his current pneumonia.
- a. Vous devriez arrêter de fumer **avant que** vous soyez guéri.  
 2SG should-COND stop of smoking before that you be-2SG.SBJV healed  
 ‘You should stop smoking before you get better.’  
 Intended: the speaker wants to convey a relation of consecution between the main event and the subordinate event.
- b. #Vous devriez arrêter de fumer **avant que** vous **ne** soyez guéri.  
 2SG should-COND stop of smoking before that you EXN be-2SG.SBJV healed  
 healed  
 ‘You should stop smoking before you get better.’  
 Intended: the same meaning as (51-a).

The use of expletive negation in (51-b) is infelicitous for the reason that the *avant que*-clause describes a positively valued event. Indeed, the most natural interpretation of (51-b) would be what Tahar (2021b) labels an apprehensive use of the *avant que*-connective, conveying that the goal of the doctor is that his patient does not get better, which is conflicting with the intended interpretation.

## 6.2 Expletive negation as a modal particle

For Yoon (2011) and Mari and Tahar (2020), expletive negation is not a standard negation marker but a modal particle (but see also Makri 2013). For these authors, expletive negation is the grammatical reflex of a component related to the ordering source of the embedding verb. According to Yoon’s analysis, expletive negation realizes the ordering source of the predicate, as it imposes an ordering on the (non-veridical) modal base  $M_B$  of the verb *fear*, ranking  $\neg p$ -worlds higher than  $p$ -worlds on a desirability scale.

- (52) *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:  
 $M_B(x) - p >_{Desirability} M_B(x) \cap p$  in  $c$

While stating that expletive negation is the morphological realization of the ordering source of the embedding verb is an *ad hoc* solution which we cannot retain as such, our diachronic analysis supports the view that expletive negation conveys a meaning of negative preference.

## 7 Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that there is a morphological distinction between a negation marker dedicated to the construction of imperatives and a standard negation marker, in Latin. We have taken as an assumption that expletive negation in French continues the prohibitive negation from Latin. For Latin, we have argued that prohibitive negation (i) heads ForceP, a functional head encoding clause-typing information, (ii) either introduces root negative imperatives or negative

imperatives embedded under directive or desiderative (and by extension, prohibitive and apprehensive) attitudes. We then argued that prohibitive negation, from Latin to French, (i) loses its grammatical function in embedded context (ii) undergoes downward syntactic reanalysis to MoodP. Semantically, we argued that there is a continuity between harmonic uses of prohibitive negation in Latin and the expletive negation. Our analysis proposes that expletive negation enters Modal Harmony with negative priority attitudes, as both bear a meaning of negative effective preference (i.e. that not-*p* be realized).

Once the expletive negation becomes stable in attitudinal context, its use starts spreading across other constructions, such as adverbial connectives (Tahar 2021a, 2022) as in later stages of the history of French, most specifically starting in the 17th century. The fact that expletive negation becomes productive in a new syntactic environment is not without reminding us of the grammaticalization path known as *generalization* (Hopper and Traugott, 1994, 104-106), (Heine, 2003, 580); (Boerm, 2008, 18). It is not a mere coincidence that the generalization of expletive negation to new syntactic contexts takes place by the 17th century, at the stage of the Jespersen's cycle when *ne* loses its negative meaning to *pas* or to another postverbal negator. It is reasonable to assume that preverbal negation *ne* at this stage is no longer a negation marker (as argued, for instance, by Wallage (2005, 2008); Breitbarth (2009)). The semantic reanalysis of the preverbal marker of standard negation into what Breitbarth (2009) names a "polarity" negation could have resulted in endowing this marker with a semantic content akin to that of expletive negation. Both expletive and standard *ne* could plausibly have merged at this point in the history of French into a single functional item, which could have triggered the observed resurgence of productivity in the usage of expletive negation.

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