

The periodization of the Pre-Classical French through the study of *nennil* and *non* in grammars, remarks and treatises (15th-17th centuries)

Key words

Pre-Classical French, Periodization, Historical Pragmatics, Negation markers, Remarqueurs

Abstract

The periodization of Pre-classical French is relatively recent compared to the other generally accepted periods for French (Medieval, Classical and Modern French). Based on morphosyntactic criteria, Combettes (2003) isolates the period 1500-1650 (Preclassic French), where the language does not function as in the 15th century (Middle French), nor as in the late 17th century (Classical French). Combettes and Marchello-Nizia (2010) revisit the periodization of Pre-Classical French, taking 1550 as the initial boundary and 1650 as the final boundary. More recent studies (Ayres-Bennett & Caron 2016; Amatuzzi *et al.* 2020) have analysed the accuracy of the commonly accepted final boundary (1650), identifying a break around 1620-1630 which implies the culmination or the beginning of a number of morphosyntactic changes. Only in a decade, the French language underwent an upheaval that can be identified in oral corpora and which was also perceived in French language treatises, remarks and grammars of the time, as demonstrated by Ayres-Bennett and Caron (2016).

The aim of this presentation is to contribute to the reflection on the periodization of Pre-Classical French by analysing the evolution of the use of the disagreement markers *nennil* and *non* between 1450 and 1700. *Nennil*, the disagreement marker complementary to the agreement marker *oil/ouy* of Medieval French, disappears during this period in favour of *non*, which will be paired with *oui* from Classical French onwards. After a brief presentation of the distribution and the pragmatic and interactional functioning of the markers *nennil*, *non* and *non* + verb substitute (*non feray*, *non est*), I will analyse the comments made about these markers in the 33 publications collected in the *Grand Corpus des grammaires françaises, des remarques et des traités sur la langue (XIV^e-XVII^e s.)* (Colombat & Fournier 2011).

Remarks such as those made by Vaugelas (1647) and Mauger (1659) will help me to date the transition from the use of medieval *nennil* to modern *non*, especially with regard to the complementarity with *oui* and the language level.

« [*&c* eft bien placé] apres *ouÿ*, & *non*, comme *Oÿy Madame, Non Madame, il ne fe voit rien &c.* »

[*&c* is well placed after *ouy* and *non*, as in *Oÿy Madame, Non Madame, il ne fe voit rien &c*]
(Claude Favre de Vaugelas, 1647, *Remarques sur la langue françoise utiles à ceux qui veulent bien parler et bien escrire*)

« *Nenny*, eft vn mot vulgaire; & jamais on ne s'en fert en écriuant; tant il eft de bas alloy. »

[*nenny* no is a vulgar word and is only used in writing because it has little value]

(Claude Mauger, 1659, *Grammaire françoise avec des augmentations*)

My results will support the conclusions of other authors on the date of transition from Pre-Classical to Classical French between 1620 and 1630. The study of pragmatic phenomena is innovative in the sense that periodization research generally analyses phonetic and/or morphosyntactic changes, at least for French. Also, this study of a corpus of grammars, remarks and treatises of the French language of the period complements other quantitative works.

References

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