**Metalinguistic Negation from an Informational perspective**

Pierre Larrivée (Caen)

The purpose of this talk is to contribute to the ongoing debate about the definition of metalinguistic negation (MLN), revived by recent proposals from Jacques Moeschler and collaborators. MLN is "a formally negative utterance which is used to object to a previous utterance on any grounds whatever, including the way it was pronounced" (Horn 1989: 374). It is found to correct the pronunciation of items, their sociolinguistic and axiological sugestions, and the implicatures they introduce.

(1) a. Bhutan is not going *nucular*, but nuclear.

b. I don’t want to buy *pants*, I want to buy *trousers.*

c. He isn’t a “proto-fascist demagogue”, he’s the POTUS.

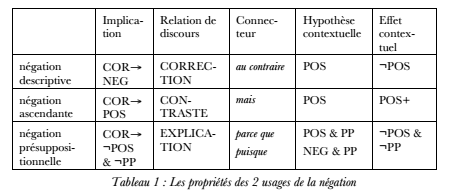
d. She hasn’t got two lovers, she’s got three.

The two stable criteria to establish MLN is the the propositional scope of the correcting negation and the type of connector introducing the correction; other alleged criteria do not have the categorical behaviour they are claimed to have (especially NPIs and PPIs, Larrivée 2011).

The diversity of MLN configurations is such that it has been proposed that there is no such general category as MLN (Geurts 1998). Everybody agrees that there is something special about the different MLN cases however, as they give way to garden path effects: if pronounced without the expected strong focus on the numeral, the sequence (1c) "She hasn’t got two lovers" is expected to convey a suggestion that there are fewer than two people involved, and maybe none at all, until the correction arises. Such markedness does not entail longer or more complicated processing however, as suggested by Grisot (2016) and Noh (2013).

Some have been arguing that the distinctive character of MLN comes from its lack of truth-conditional impact, as opposed to other uses of negation. Despite the numerous equivocations on the matter (see Pitts 2011 for an overview), this is an unsafe position to take, since at least some MLN cases bear some relation to truth (i.a. Foolen 1991), and at least some MLN can be expressed via *It’s not true that p*, making it akward to claim that truth is never involved at all*.*

All approaches agree however that MLN is a negative ranging over material that is understood as echoic (pretty much everybody), metarepresentational (Carston 1996 i.a.) or an instance of mention rather than use (Jiang 2015) (of one’s own words as much as those of others). Another point of general agreement is that MLN entails a corrective sequence to that echoic material. This is built in the latest attempt to define MLN by Jacques Moeschler. The definition of MLN as opposed to other uses of negation proposed through properties of connector and of positive or negative contextual outcome yields a particularly elegant comparative picture as shown by the table below.



(2) a. Abi n’est pas belle, malheureusement. (Elle est quelconque.) DN

b. Abi n’est pas belle, (\* mais) elle est superbe. MLN

b’. Abi n’est pas belle, \*(mais) superbe. MLN

c. Abi n’est pas belle, voyons ! (Mais elle est gentille.) CN

The characterisation of MLN as a corrective structure with a positive contextual outcome could explain the echoic/meta-representational nature of the use (since you can’t correct something that hasn’t or couldn’t have been used); the role of the connective and restrictions on connective structures; and possibly to some degree the propositional scope required for the MLN marker. However, Moeschler’s proposal still has to answer some outstanding questions about the syntactic mapping of MLN. Unexpectedly for the proposal, correction is not always explicitly required (Larrivée 2011). A further issue is that the correction introduced by *but* cannot be a full clause as per (2b); the idea proposed by Moeschler that the ML structure *Abi is not beautiful, but (\*she’s) drop dead gorgeous* is a single corrective speech-act and therefore cannot have the part after the connector expanded into a clause is in need of further explanations in view of the existence of *Abi isn’t beautiful, (\* but) she’s drop dead gorgeous*. Finally, scopal behaviour also calls for an explanation, and it is not clear why a ML negative taking scope over the whole sentence must be used in an assertive, or why it cannot range over the assertive speech-act value of that sentence (the sequence *Abi isn’t beautiful, Abi is beautiful!* that would negate the appropriateness of asserting in favour of that of exclaiming seems very strange indeed, as does even *Not “Abi is beautiful.*”, *but “Abi is beautiful!”*). Wider-ranging questions include

Q1. What is the relation between MLN in (1) and corrective structures in (3)?

(3) a.Bhutan is goingnotnucular*,* but *nuclear*. (see McCawley 1991)

b. - Bhutan is going nucular.

- Nucular ?

c. - Bhutan is going nucular.

- Nuclear.

What relation holds with MLN and ML uses in interrogatives and conditionals? (see Dancygier 1992 i.a.)

(4) a. If you think Bhutan is going *nucular*, you must be an admirer of George Bush.

b. Is Bhutan really going *nucular*?

Q2. Why is it felt that MLN is marked?

My proposal is that the defining, characteristic of the correction offered by MLN relates to its Informational Structure. MLN ranges over a discourse-old sequence, and turns the part it objects to into new information that defines focus. This is what is suggested by languages where focus is morphologically marked such as e.g. Yoruba. Turning old information into new is what distinguished it both from Descriptive Negation and Contrastive Negation. It is what brings together the different ML corrective structures (3), and the metalinguistic uses in questions and conditionals. In other words, MN upsets the expected old/new information dynamics: it ranges over discourse-old material, and transforms a discourse-old information into a discourse-new focus. Modifying the expected flow of IS is why MLN gives rise to garden-path effects, and why more generally it is marked, as I have demonstrated for a variety of historical and synchronic phenomena (e.g. double negation).

The question I want to explore at the end of this talk is whether the informational partition induced by MLN can be mapped onto a cartographic analysis. Foreseeable difficulties include whether there always is an item that is objected to that can be raised in a Focus position, whether it is meaningful to effect such raising when correction of pronunciation or other formal dimensions are involved, and why this type of raising would escape island effects. Different options for such a cartographic analysis are considered, concerning the position of negation, that of the focused corrected item, and that of the echoic sequence as a whole.

**References**

Albu E. (2015). Description versus Rejection in the Analysis of Negation: Evidence from Romanian and English. Ms.

Burton-Roberts, N. 1989a. On Horn's dilemma: presupposition and negation. Journal of Linguistics 25. 95-125.

Carston, Robyn.1996. Metalinguistic negation and echoic use. Journal of Pragmatics 25(3):309-330

Dancygier, Barbara. 1992.Two Metatextual Operators: Negation and Conditionality in English and Polish. *BSL*, 61-75.

Fehrmann, D. 2004. Prosody in contrast: Prosodic distinction of contrast and correction readings of Polish adversative coordinate structures. A. Steube (Ed.). Information Structure. Theoretical and empirical aspects. Berlin: de Gruyter. 307- 343.

Foolen, Ad. 1991. Metalinguistic negation and pragmatic ambiguity: Some comments on a proposa lby Laurence Horn. Pragmatics 1(2), 217-237

Fintel, K. von. 2004. Would You Believe It ? The King of France is back. A. Bezuidenout and M. Reimer (eds). *Descriptions and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Geurts, B. 1998. The mechanisms of denial. Language 74, 274-307.

Horn, L. R. 1989. A Natural History of Negation. Chicago: The Chicago University Press.

Horn, L. R. 1985. Metalinguistic negation and pragmatic ambiguity. Language 61,1, 121-174.

Larrivée, Pierre. 2011. La définition de la négation métalinguistique. Jacqueline Bacha, Ammar Azouzi and Khaled Salddem (Eds)*. La négation en discours*. Sousse. 53-69.

Lee, C. 2016. Metalinguistically negated versus descriptively negated adverbials: ERP and other evidence. P. Larrivée and C. Lee (Eds). Negation and polarity: Experimental perspectives. Cham: Springer. 229-255.

McCawley, J. 1991. Contrastive negation and metalinguistic negation. *Chicago Linguistic Society 27: The parasession on negation*. 189-206.

Moeschler, J. 2016. A criterion for descriptive vs. metalinguistic negation. Presentation, SLE 2016, Naples.

Moeschler, J. 2015. Qu'y a-t-il de représentationnel dans la négation métalinguistique? *Nouveaux cahiers de linguistique française* 32, 11-26

Noh, E.-J., H. Choo and S. Koh. 2013. Processing metalinguistic negation: Evidence from eyetracking experiments. Journal of Pragmatics, 57, 1–18.

Pitts, Alyson. 2011. Exploring a 'Pragmatic Ambiguity' of Negation. Language 87,2, 346-368.

Seuren, P. 1988. Presupposition and negation. *Journal of Semantics* 6, 175-226.

Van der sandt, R. 2003. Denial and presupposition. P. Kühnlein, H. Rieser and H. Zeevat (eds). *Perspectives on Dialogue in the New Millennium*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins. 59-78.