

Book review to appear in *Journal of French Language Studies* 13.1: 150–2.

Larrivée, Pierre, *L'interprétation des séquences négatives: portée et foyer des négations en français*. (Champs linguistiques.) Brussels: Duculot, 2001, 213 pp. 2 8011 1283 6. ISSN 1374 089 x. DOI: 10.1017/S0959269503311056

This is a revised 1998 Laval thesis, covering scope and focus in French sentential negation. Its main chapters are preceded by an introduction, followed by a conclusion, glossary and appendix of data discussed in the text. As well as contextualising his work, Larrivée sensibly spends much of the Introduction (pp. 11–18) making clear the distinction between the two notions. While in (1) negation has wide scope (*ne* is available), in (2) it has narrow scope (over *pour rien* alone):

- (1) Il ne congédierait ses employés pour rien au monde.
- (2) Il congédie ses employés pour rien.

In (3) negation has wide scope, over the embedded clause in (3b), over the main clause in (3a):

- (3) a. Je ne te forcerai à épouser personne.
- b. Je te forcerai à n'épouser personne.

In (4) negation again has wide scope, yet it differs from (1) in that it focuses specifically on *tous* in (4a) and *frivolement* in (4b):

- (4) a. Elle ne congédierait jamais tous les employés.
- b. Elle ne dépenserait jamais frivolement son argent.

The examples in (4) imply that *some* employees might be dismissed (but not all) and that her money might be spent (but not frivolously). Thus, while negation in (4) has wide scope, it has narrow focus. The notion of focus relates therefore to such semantic-pragmatic concepts as conversational implicature.

Chapter 1 ('Portée des négations', pp. 19–34) sets out the notion of scope. He shows that wide negative scope in French is characterised by the availability of: (a) *ne* (in relevant varieties), with the position of *ne* sometimes distinguishing between extents of wide scope (see (3)); (b) clitic inversion (cf. (5a, b)); and, (c) negative polarity items like *lever le petit doigt* (compare (6a, b) with (6c)):

- (5) a. Pour rien au monde Henri ne croirait-il que tous ses employés sont paresseux.
- b. Absolument pour rien, Henri (*ne*) croit-il que tous ses employés sont paresseux.

- (6) a. Mario n'a pas vu Paul lever le petit doigt pour travailler.
- b. Mario a vu Paul ne pas lever le petit doigt pour travailler.
- c. Mario a vu Paul lever le petit doigt pour ne pas travailler.

Finally, Larrivée contrasts negative concord (7a) and double negation ((7a) versus (7b)):

- (7) a. Il semble que personne n'en sache rien.
- b. Personne ne semble n'en savoir rien.

Surprisingly, Larrivée attributes double negation in (7b) to the position of *personne* and *rien* in different clauses. However, in (8) *personne* and *rien* are again non-clausemates, yet negative concord is possible; the sentence is synonymous with (7a):

- (8) Personne ne semble en savoir rien.

Significant in (7b) is the presence of *ne* in both clauses, indicating, from a generative perspective (see Rowlett 1998), two full NegP projections.

Chapter 2 'Le fonctionnement de la portée' (pp. 35–58) addresses the structural basis of scope, firstly within a strictly syntactic (i.e. generative) perspective, whereby scopal properties are directly read

off the order of relevant operators in an appropriate representation (cf. the scope-marking role of *ne*). Where this falls down, for Larrivé, is with respect to certain scopal ambiguities, clitic dislocation, topicalisation, subject–object asymmetries and pre-/postposed sentence adverbials.

Chapter 3 ‘Focalisation des négations’ (pp. 59–92) turns to focus, a pragmatic concept realised by various devices, both syntactic (e.g. clefting) and phonological (e.g. stress), and not only in the context of negation. Wide and narrow focus are contrasted; the notion of implicature associated with (the residue of) narrow focus is considered. Chapter 4 ‘Le fonctionnement de la focalisation’ (pp. 93–127) relates to chapter 3 as chapter 2 relates to chapter 1, investigating the structural basis of focus. It again starts from a generative syntactic perspective. Unsurprisingly, Larrivé again finds such formalist approaches wanting, failing to see in them any general explanatory principles. However, no more clarity is achieved by the functional perspective, e.g., Talmy Givón’s view that ‘negation tends to apply to the asserted portion of sentences, leaving the presupposed/backgrounded portion outside its scope’. For example, stress patterns are not always predictable on the basis of the new/old-information contrast, and vary cross-linguistically.

The next two chapters consider classes of constituent subject to focus. In chapter 5 (‘Focalisation des compléments’, pp. 129–47) Larrivé considers the focusing of a wide range of VP-internal units, from the verb itself to complements and adjuncts, via complement/adjunct-internal constituents. He discusses contrasts such as the one between (9a) and (9b, c):

- (9) a. Il ne présentera pas un exposé historique/complet.
- b. Il ne présentera pas d'exposé historique.
- c. Il n'a pas présenté cet exposé complet tant attendu.

In (9a) *historique/complet* is focused, whence the implication that a different kind of *exposé* was given; in (9b, c), in contrast, there is no such implication. The picture which emerges is one of an interplay of the lexicon, subcategorisation and syntax in generating or blocking focus. Chapter 6 (‘Focalisation des quantifieurs’, pp. 149–65) deals with the interplay of negation and universal/existential quantification. In both chapters, Larrivé brings out the importance of the notion of complementarity: the availability of a complement (e.g. *froid* is the complement of *chaud*) is often crucial to the acceptability of a focused reading.

The book is rounded off with a Conclusion (pp. 167–72), a brief *Glossaire* (pp. 173–4) and, unusually, an *Annexe empirique* (pp. 175–86) which will no doubt prove to be a useful source of data for future research. There is much one could find to criticise in this rather narrow study. Yet, it is quite possibly its sharp focus that makes the book work. Personally, I was often frustrated at the amount of exemplification given for straightforward empirical facts, and the number of occasions where Larrivé avoids sticky issues by promising to return to them in future research. What is clear is that the undoubted value of the book will be empirical rather than theoretical.

#### Reference

Rowlett, Paul (1998). *Sentential negation in French*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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