

## Step by Step: The Jespersen Cycle and the Emergence of the Partitive of Negation in Old French and Middle High German

The partitive of negation (PartNeg) is a construction whereby the partitive marker (PM) is used in a negative sentence to mark the negated argument *vis-à-vis* its affirmative counterpart (Miestamo 2014). In Middle High German (MHG), the construction can occur with the partitive-genitive case marker with both direct objects (1a) and subjects (1b). It is a rather frequent construction, as it involves 50-70% of all negated direct objects and 50% of all negated subjects, as observed from a dataset of 500 examples from the 13<sup>th</sup> c. (Bucci 2025: Ch. 6).

- 1) a. *ne heuet her des huses niht*  
 NEG have.3.SG.PRES he.NOM DET.GEN.SG house.GEN.SG NEG  
 ‘He doesn’t have the house’, MHG 51, I.51.080.08 (CAO)
- b. *vnd wær des Pyscholfes von Chimse niht*  
 and be.SUBJ.3SG DET.GEN.SG bishop.GEN.SG of Chimsee NEG  
 ‘And if the bishop of Chimsee is not there...’, MHG II.869.212.02-03 (CAO)

In some Romance varieties, including Occitan (Jensen 1986: 81), Francoprovençal (Stark and Gerards 2021: 324), and several northern Italian dialects (Garzonio and Poletto 2020), both bare partitives and partitive articles, the latter formed by the univerbation of the bare partitive and the definite article, can be found in co-expression with the sentential negator (cf. Carlier 2007). The starting point of their PMs is the Latin Ablative Preposition *de*, which gradually transitioned from being a spatial marker indicating motion from a place into expressing a partitive relation already in Biblical Latin (Carlier and Lamiroy 2014). In French, in particular, the bipartite negative expression *ne...pas* followed by the bare PM *de* has been suggested to be a late development (Foulet 1928: 73–76, 270–271), although there are attestations for partitive-marked arguments under negation already from the 9<sup>th</sup> c. (Mosegaard Hansen 2018: 285ff.). In modern French, the PartNeg is mostly limited to indefinite non-referential NPs under the scope of negation (Heyd 2003: 114–202), albeit it has also been observed with indefinite generic ones (cf. Arkadiev & Kozhanov 2025: 552-553), as in *Jean n’a pas acheté de vin* ‘Jean didn’t buy any wine’ (Dobrovie-Sorin 2021: 188)

Foulet (1928) proposed that the French PartNeg must have started from consumption verbs, but this kind of development does not take into account a clear discontinuity in the passage from Late Latin to Old French: while, in the former, the use of the partitive preposition *de* was frequent with consumption verbs in both affirmative and negative contexts (Carlier and Lamiroy 2014), one corpus study on 10/11<sup>th</sup> c. French has in fact observed that *pas* was followed by *de* in for only 0.1% (!) of all negated sentences (Mosegaard Hansen 2018: 286), suggesting that the phenomenon, which was in any case absent in Late Latin, was not inherited from a previous language stage.

Did the French PartNeg followed the trajectory proposed by Foulet (1928) or did it follow a pathway akin to the one observed in MHG and other Romance varieties? When did the quantifier properties of *pas* emerged and how do they correlate with the partitive-marked attribute?

In this presentation, I will attempt to provide the first systematic and evidence-based analysis for or against each pathway in the development of the PartNeg in French and shine a light on its interactions with the Jespersen Cycle from a language-internal and comparative perspective.

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