

On the Nonexistence of Negative Quantifiers: The Case of Haitian Creole

Vincent Homer

vincenthomer@gmail.com



UNIVERSITÉ
PARIS8
VINCENNES-SAINT-DENIS

UMR 7023 “Structures Formelles du Langage”

October 7 2013

The big question

Natural languages have positive existential (*some*) and universal (*every*) quantifiers.

But do they have **negative quantifiers**?

Many researchers think they do, e.g. *no* is a negative universal.

Is that true? (I think **not**)

- **Haitian Creole** (HC) is a language where the point against the existence of negative quantifiers is (relatively) easy to make.

Overview of the language

- SVO;
- TAM particles;
- Postnominal definite articles.

(1) Li ap li Bib la.
he PROG read Bible the
'He is reading the Bible.'

Basics: Negation (1)

- (2) a. Li ri.
he laugh.3S
'He laughs.'
- b. Li **pa** ri.
he PA laugh.3S
'He does not laugh'.

- Hypothesis: the marker *pa* and **sentential negation** are one and the same thing. (to be verified)

Basics: Negation (2)

- *Pa* appears **higher than T** (it is linearized before the TAM particles):

(3) Jan **pa** t- av- ale nan mache.
Jan PA ANT IRREAL go in market
'Jan would not have gone to the market.' [DeGraff 1993, ex. 1]

Basics: Negation (3)

- **Constituent negation** does not seem to exist in HC (DeGraff 1993):

(4) *Men yon moun **pa** sot!
here's a fellow PA stupid
'There goes a man who is not stupid!'

- Compare with French:

(5) a. Je ne me souviens **pas** d' un seul étudiant.
I NE REFL remember PAS of one only student
'I don't remember any student.'
b. Je (*ne) me souviens de **pas** un seul étudiant.

- We will use this feature of HC as a **diagnostic** tool:

(6) **Principle:** If **pa** is present, then it marks sentential negation.

(7) **N-word:** An expression α is an n-word iff:

- α can provide a **negative fragment answer**; and
- α can be used in structures containing sentential negation or another α -expression yielding a reading equivalent to **one logical negation**.

[Giannakidou 2006]

Basics: N-words (2)

- *Pèsonn, anyen, janm, etc.* can be used as **fragmentary answers**:

- (8) —Kimoun ki wè ou? —**Pèsonn.**
who that see you anybody
—‘*Who saw you?*’ —‘*Nobody.*’
- (9) —Kisa ou manje? —**Anyen.**
what you eat? anything
—‘*What did you eat?*’ —‘*Nothing.*’

[DeGraff 1993, ex. 18]

Basics: N-words (3)

- When **two 'negative' words**, e.g. *pa* and *pèsonn*, co-occur in the same clause, **only one** negation is interpreted:

(10) **Pèsonn pa** vini.

anybody PA come

'Nobody came.' ($\neg\exists$)

Does **not** mean: 'Somebody came' ($\neg\neg\exists$)

Does **not** mean: 'Everybody came.' ($\neg\exists\neg$)

(11) Li **pa wè pèsonn**.

he PA see anybody

'He didn't see anybody.' ($\neg\exists$)

Does **not** mean: 'He saw someone.' ($\neg\neg\exists$)

Does **not** mean: 'He saw everyone.' ($\neg\exists\neg$)

- Notice that the single negation reading is **obligatory**.

Basics: N-words (4)

- Observe that any number of clausemate n-words still give rise to an **obligatory single negation reading (SN)**:

(12) **Pèsonn pa wè anyen.**

anybody PA see anything

'Nobody saw anything.' ($\neg\exists\exists$)

Does **not** mean: 'Everybody saw something.' ($\neg\exists\neg\exists$)

(13) **Pèsonn pa janm di pèsonn anyen.**

anybody PA ever say anybody anything

'No one ever says anything to anyone.' ($\neg\exists\exists\exists\exists$)

[Déprez 1999]

Basics: N-words (5)

- Notice also that *pa* is **obligatory**, whenever an n-word is present in the same clause:

- (14) a. **Pèsonn** *(**pa**) vini.
'Nobody came.'
- b. Li *(**pa**) wè **anyen**.
'He didn't see anyone.'

Basics: N-words (6)

- *pèsonn* 'any'/'anyone',
- *anyen* 'anything',
- *okenn* 'any',
- *pyès* 'any',
- *janm/jamè/janmen* 'ever',
- more?

The plan

Show that negation needs an n-word.

Roadmap

- 1 N-words are **NPI indefinites** (not negative quantifiers);
- 2 There is **no overt negation** in HC.

The idea



Negation **requires** an n-word in its scope.

Part 1: N-words are NPI indefinites

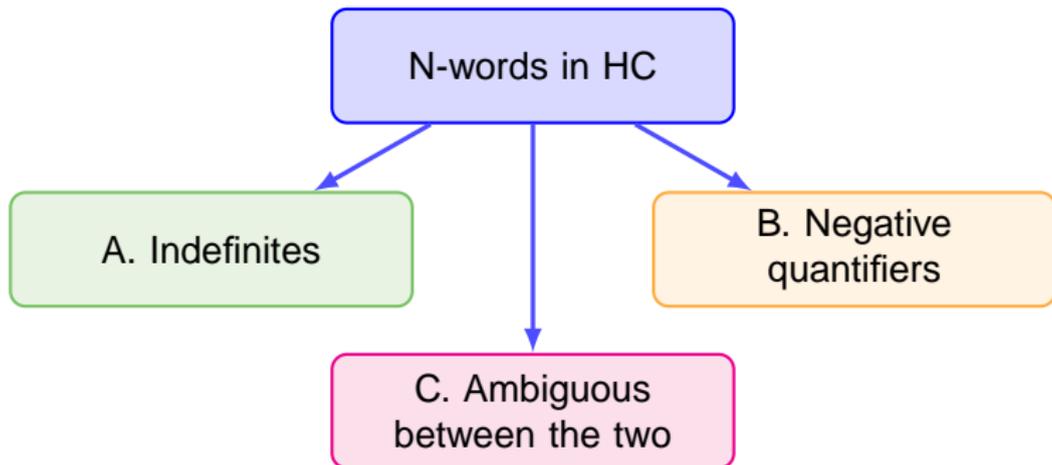
The problem: The nature of n-words

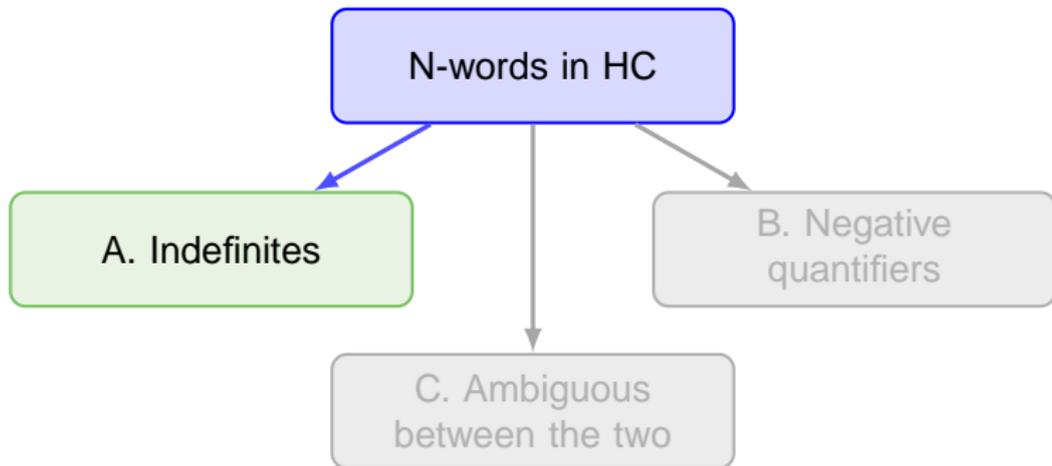
- (15) a. **Pèsonn pa** vini. (= (14a))
b. Li **pa wè anyen**. (= (14b))
c. **Pèsonn pa wè anyen**. (= (12))
- (16) ***Pèsonn** vini.
Does **not** mean: 'Somebody came.'

- Just focusing on sentences like (15) and (16), we could conclude that n-words in HC are just existential indefinites, which need a negation to be licensed, i.e. **they are NPIs**.
- I claim that this conclusion is actually **correct**.

Three hypotheses:

- A.** N-words are indefinites and negation is covert.
- B.** N-words are inherently negative and there is (obligatory) negative concord.
- C.** N-words are ambiguous (either indefinites or negative quantifiers).





Two issues

- 1 There are subject n-words: those don't appear to be in the scope of negation, as they **precede** *pa*;
- 2 DeGraff: N-words can be used as **fragment answers!**

About the first issue (scope) (1)

- N-words can be linearized **before** *pa*, which seems to suggest that they are not in the scope of negation;
- Now, we seem to be assuming that sentential negation and *pa* are necessarily identical; we have not proven this (yet);
- But even if we assume that this is the case, **reconstruction** is an option;
- And it does happen in HC:

(17) Tout ti moun yo **pa** vini.
all children the PA come
'Not all the children came.' ($\neg\forall$)

About the first issue (scope) (2)

- But, some say that subject NPIs do not reconstruct:

(18) *Anyone didn't come to the party.

- We do not know under **what conditions** certain subject quantifiers can be reconstructed and others cannot:

- (19) a. Tous les enfants ne sont pas venus. ($\checkmark \neg \forall$) (French)
b. Chaque enfant n'est pas venu. ($*\neg \forall$)
c. Chak jou pa Dimanch. (HC)
lit.: 'Not everyday is Sunday.' ($\checkmark \neg \forall$)

- And in fact, the equivalent of (18) is grammatical in some languages, e.g. Hindi.
- So the first issue is **not serious**.

About the second issue (fragments) (1)

- The argument (found virtually everywhere in the literature) relies on the premise:

(20) **Premise:** If a standalone word has a negative meaning, then it is **intrinsically negative**.

- This logic is immediately flawed: negation could be **silent**. We'll come back to this.

About the second issue (fragments) (2)

- But first, let me show you that the proposal is inconsistent:
- The proponents of the negative quantifier approach say that n-words are intrinsically negative;
- But in full clauses in HC, n-words **need a negation** (marked by *pa*) (so the inconsistency of the traditional reasoning is even more visible in HC than in any other language);

(21) **Pèsonn** *(**pa**) vini. (=(14a))

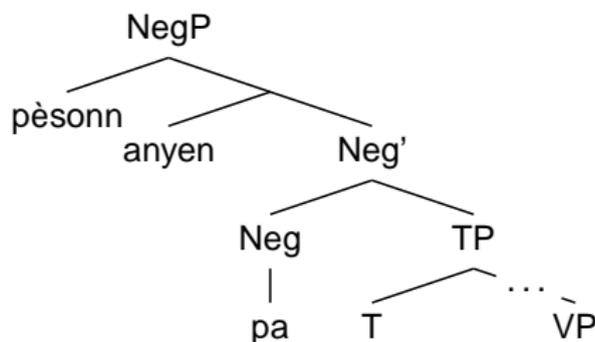
- And there is **obligatory concord** with this negation;
- All this makes for a very **uneconomical** system, built on a possibly false premise (20).

About the second issue (fragments) (3)

- In addition, the concord mechanism is standardly seen as **agreement**; in this case the bearer of an uninterpretable feature should be *pèsonn*;
- If it agrees, i.e. its negative 'feature' is checked, then we need a **special absorption rule** (Higginbotham & May 1981, Zanuttini 1991) to determine what its meaning is after agreement:

$$\forall x\neg, \forall y\neg, \forall z\neg \longrightarrow \forall x,y,z\neg$$

(22)



About the second issue (fragments) (4)

- Premise (20) does not hold up to closer scrutiny:
- The underlying logic is that fragment answers are **structurally simple**, and do not involve either ellipsis or silent material (what you see is what you get);
- In fact, this cannot be the case, because there is **no constituent negation** in HC, while *pa* is fine in fragment answers:

- (23) a. *Men yon moun **pa** sot! (=(4))
b. —Li bèl? —**Pa** ditou.
he handsome? PA at-all
'Is he handsome? Not at all.'

- Per (6), negation has to be **sentential** in fragment answers.

About the second issue (fragments) (5)

- With **n-words**, we observe the **same contrast**:

- (24) a. *Li vini pou **anyen**.
he come for anything
Intended: *'He came for nothing.'*
- b. *Li kontante li de **anyen**.
he content REFL of anything
Intended: *'He's happy not having anything.'*
- (25) —Kisa ou manje? —**Anyen**. (=9))

This suggests that:

- 1 Fragment answers are not DPs (from the contrast);
- 2 N-words are not intrinsically negative (from (24));
- 3 Conclusion: In fragment answers, negation (which is sentential) is **distinct** from n-words: therefore it has to be **silent**.

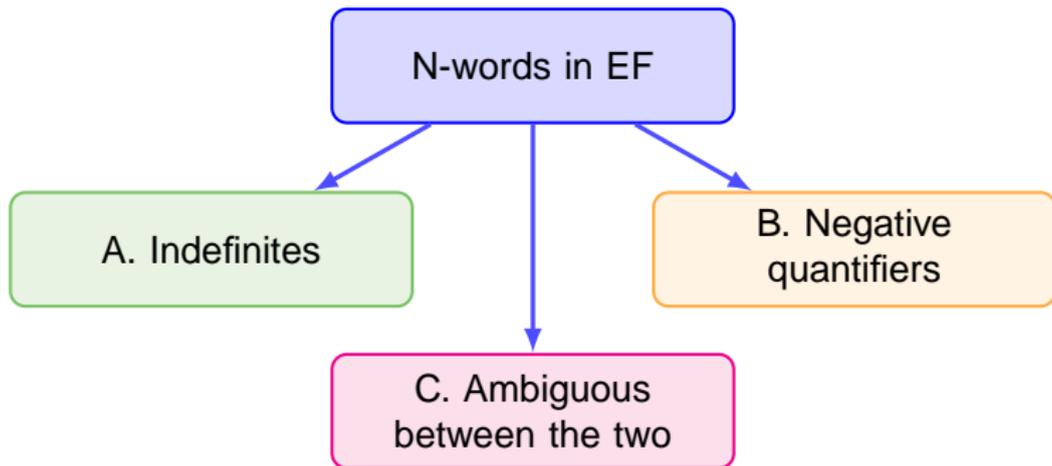
About the second issue (fragments) (6)

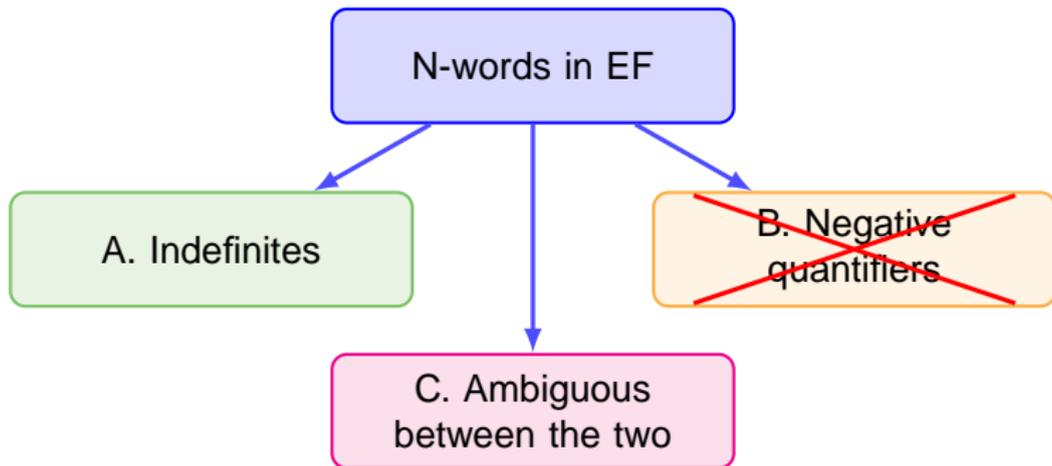
- Compatible with the claims (i.) that n-words are not intrinsically negative and (ii.) that they are NPIs is their **acceptability as complements of the preposition *san*** ‘without’ (and their unacceptability as complements of non ‘negative’ prepositions):

(26) San **anyen**, nou pa-p ka fè anyen.
without anything we PA-FUT able do anything
‘Without anything, we will not be able to do anything.’

Taking stock

- The availability of n-words in fragments does not show that they are intrinsically negative;
- N-words can be NPI indefinites;
- HC must have a silent (sentential) negation.





To do

- Show more evidence that n-words can be indefinites;
- Show that they cannot be negative quantifiers.

Indefinite readings (1)

- There are cases where n-words can clearly behave as **indefinites**:

(27) San **anyen**... (=(26))

(28) a. Èske **okenn** moun rele m?

'Did anyone call me?'

b. Èske ou te wè **anyen**?

'Did you see anything?'

c. M ap mande si **okenn** moun ap vini.
'I wonder whether anyone will come.'

[Déprez 1999]

Indefinite readings (2)

- **N.B.:** Not all n-words are good in questions, and there might be speaker variation w.r.t. (28);
- Moreover, n-words are not acceptable in all the environments in which *any* is good:

- (29)
- *Si ou touye **pèsonn**, ou pral nan prison.
'If you kill anyone, you will go to jail.'
 - *Bouki pi wo pase **pèsonn**.
'Bouki is taller than anyone.'
 - Tout timoun ki wè ***anyen**/yon bagay dwe di'm.
'Every child who sees anything must tell me.' [DeGraff 1993]

But this is not a serious problem for the claim that n-words are NPIs; we know that NPIs vary in strength within and across languages. This means that the distribution of NPIs **varies** a lot.

Indefinite readings (3)

More evidence that n-words are indefinites comes from modalized sentences.

- In (30), negation is interpreted in the **matrix** (above the modal), and the n-word appears to contribute an indefinite:

(30) Li **pa** ka li **anyen**.
he PA able read anything
'He can't read anything'. ($\neg\Diamond\exists$)

- **Caveat:** The same reading would obtain if n-words were wide scope universals. But they are not. . .

Indefinite readings (4)

- (31) Li pa oblije li **anyen**.
he PA obliged read anything
'He doesn't have to read anything.' ($\neg\Box\exists$)

- The following is **contradictory**, showing that the n-word does not take scope in the matrix:

- (32) #(31), men li oblije li yon bagay.
but he obliged read something
'#He doesn't have to read anything, but he has to read something.'

Does **not** mean: *'There is no (specific) thing that he has read, but he has to read something.'*

Novel observation

There is **no movement of n-words** (contra the negative concord theories which hold that there is movement to NegP).

Indefinite readings (5)

More evidence that n-words are **NPI** indefinites comes from **intervention effects**.

- First, observe the intervention created by the adverb *always* on NPIs:

(33) *He doesn't always understand anything.

- Then, consider the following sentence:

(34) Li **pa** toujou konprann kou a.
he PA always understand class the
'He doesn't always understand the class.'

Indefinite readings (6)

Novel observation

- This low adverb creates an **intervention effect** on **object** n-words, e.g. *anyen*:

*LF: PA... TOUJOU... n-word

(35) *Li **pa** toujou konprann **anyen**.

Does **not** mean: *'He doesn't always understand something.'*

Does **not** mean: *'He always understands nothing.'*

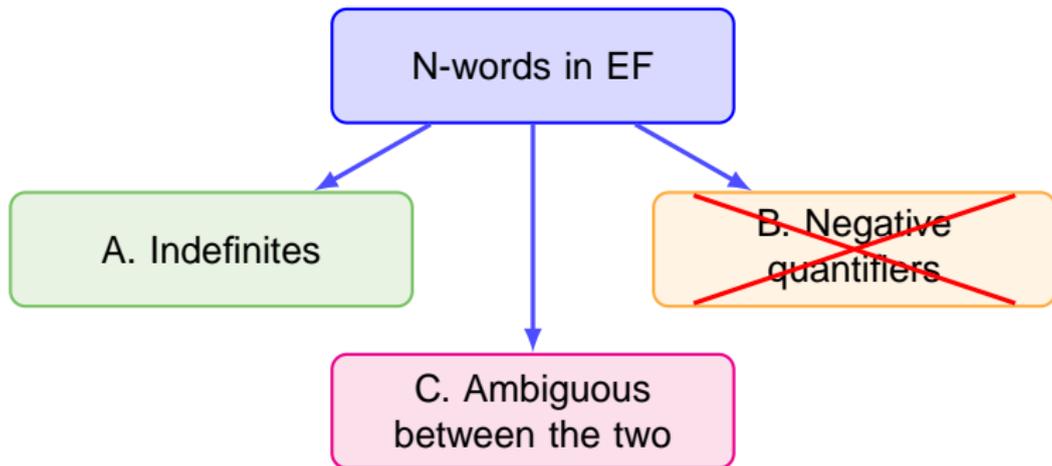
Does **not** mean: *'There is nothing that he always understands.'*

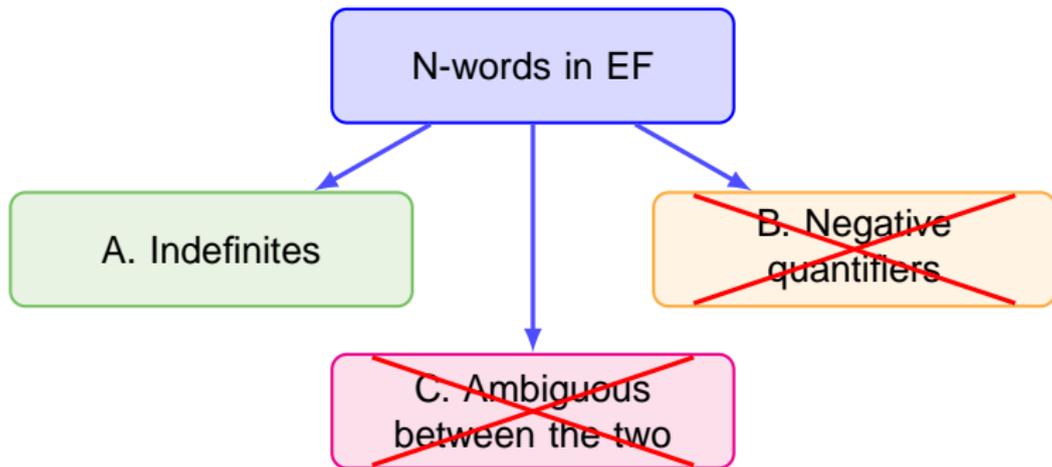
The unavailability of the third reading is a problem for any theory in which n-words are **negative quantifiers** that move to NegP.

Indefinite readings (7)

- The claim that HC does not have negative quantifiers is straightforwardly corroborated by the unavailability of sentences like:

(36) *Li vini pou **anyen**. (=(24a))





Taking stock

- N-words must be NPI indefinites in HC;
- HC has no negative quantifiers.

- 1 N-words are NPI indefinites
- 2 No overt negation in HC

Part 2: No overt negation in HC

Overgeneration?

- We said that HC has a silent sentential negation that appears in fragments;
- But this seems to **overgenerate!**

(37) —Kimoun ki wè ou? —Jan.
The answer does **not** mean: *'Not Jan.'*

(38) Li ri.
Does **not** mean: *'He does not laugh.'*

▶ Hypothesis: Negation is **always silent** in HC, and this NEG **requires an n-word in its scope**; *pa* is itself an n-word.

The idea: A negative rule (Homer & Thommen 2013)



Negative rule:

No clause can contain NEG, the silent sentential negation, if it contains no n-word in the scope of NEG.

- Evidence that *pa* is not intrinsically negative:

Novel observation

- (39) Li pati san li *(pa) di orevwa.
he leave without he PA say goodbye
'He left without saying goodbye.'

A few puzzles (1)

Outstanding questions

- 1 *Pa* is possible in fragment answers (*—Pa ditou*), but it is **incompatible** with other n-words:

(40) —Kimoun ki wè ou? —(***Pa**) **pèsonn** (***pa**).

- 2 Also, In full clauses, it seems that *pa* is the only n-word that can satisfy this negative rule (**Pèsonn vini*). **Why?**

A few puzzles (2)

- This is puzzling, but. . .
- The incompatibility of *pa* with other n-words is **reminiscent** of other similar facts (subject n-words in Italian and Québec French);
- The second puzzle points to a solution which requires a better understanding of (i.) the structure of **fragments**, and of (ii.) the **locality conditions** that restrict the negative rule (to explain why *pa* has a special status).

A few puzzles (3)

Effects of locality in European French

- Although I don't have an account for those facts, I notice that in EF, which also has a negative rule (Homer & Thommen 2013), the n-word that satisfies the negative rule cannot be too far away from NEG:

- (41) Je ne peux NEG aider **personne**.
I NE can NEG help anyone
'I can't help anyone.'

A few puzzles (4)

Effects of locality in European French

- (42) a. *Je ne pense NEG que **personne** soit venu.
I NE think NEG that anybody is come
Intended: *'I don't think that anybody came.'*
- b. *Je n' essaie NEG de **jamais** l' aider.
I NE try NEG to ever him help
Intended: *'I don't try to ever help him.'*

► Hypothesis: In HC, the negative rule must be satisfied **very locally**, and *pa* is the closest possible n-word to NEG.

An interesting consequence

- The fact that HC does not have constituent negation (remember that negation is always silent), together with the assumption that there is only one sentential negation per clause, explains why **double negation** readings (DN) are not available in HC:

- (43) **Pèsonn** NEG **pa** wè **anyen**. (= (12))
'Nobody saw anything.' ($\neg\exists\exists$)
Does **not** mean: *'Everybody saw something.'* ($\neg\exists\neg\exists$)

- EF has (silent) constituent negations, and as a consequence, it has DN readings:

- (44) **Personne** n' aime NEG **personne**.
anybody NE likes NEG anybody
'Nobody likes anybody.' ($\neg\exists\exists$)
Or: *'Everybody likes someone.'* ($\neg\exists\neg\exists$)

Conclusions

- N-words are NPI indefinites.
- No clause can contain NEG, the silent sentential negation, if it contains no n-word in the scope of NEG (negative rule).
- So n-words **require** a licensing environment and **are required** to satisfy the negative rule.
- Hypothesis: *pa* is itself an n-word: HC has no overt negation.

Implications for Haitian Creole

- There is no negative concord;
- There are no negative quantifiers.

Comparing HC and EF

	HC	EF
Height of <i>pa/pas</i>	Above T	Below T
Obligatory <i>pa/pas</i> in full clauses	Yes	No
Constituent negations	No	Yes
Availability of DN readings	No	Yes

Table: Key differences in the negative systems

Thank you!