Ne…que and Its Challenges

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1. Introduction

French has an exceptive construction, formed with the morphemes *ne* and *que*, for example:

(1) Paul (n') a   invité que Marie.
     Paul NE has invited QUE Marie
     'Paul only invited Marie.'

The goal of this paper is to offer a detailed description of sentences like (1), which I will label 'minimal *ne…que* realizations'. It is a description in the sense that I make explicit the makeup of this structure: it contains hidden material, and I show what this material is (Section 2). It is also a description of the many theoretical problems posed by *ne…que*: the core problem arises when one compares minimal realizations such as (1) and total realizations (the ones in which all hidden material is pronounced), for it seems that the felicity conditions of the two are not the same; the solution to this paradox is to be found in the structural ambiguity of total realizations; and I show how one can single out the total realizations that minimal realizations are based upon (Section 3). Lastly, I show how to exploit this finding to investigate the semantic contribution (assertoric and non-assertoric) of *ne…que*; I also present what I think are the main challenges that a proper semantic analysis of the construction has to meet (Section 4).

2. Hidden material in *ne…que*

First, I wish to show that so-called *ne…que* configurations always contain an n-word (on n-words, see Giannakidou 2006). I agree with Zeijlstra (2004) a.o. that n-words are existential indefinites (rather than negative quantifiers); furthermore there is clear evidence that they are NPIs in French (Homer & Thommen 2013). N-words are special in that they can stand alone as fragment answers, which run-of-the-mill NPIs cannot do. Besides, the presence of an even number of clausemate n-words (can) yield a single negation reading (in other words, n-words need not cancel each other out).

2.1. Evidence from ne

One important piece of evidence for the presence of an n-word in *ne…que* is the morpheme *ne* itself. Here, I am following Homer & Thommen (2013), who show that *ne* signals the presence of the silent negation NEG (in fact, the only one that French has):[1] when *ne* appears in a given clause, NEG

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[1] *Ne* is not itself negative, because the scope of an adverb like *souvent* 'often' w.r.t. negation unambiguously depends on its position relative to the *pas* morpheme; it doesn't depend on the relation with *ne*:

(1) a. Il ne m'   a   souvent NEG pas répondu.
        he NE to-me has often   NEG PAS answered
        'He often did not answer me.'   OFTEN≫NEG

     b. Il ne m'a NEG pas souvent répondu.
        'He did not often answer me.'   NEG≫OFTEN

is its clausemate.[2] Outside of *ne. . . que* configurations, *ne* is only licit in a given sentence if it co-occurs with a clausemate n-word, that is, no clause can contain NEG, the silent sentential negation, if it contains no n-word in the scope of NEG. This is Homer & Thommen's (2013) 'negative rule'. It is illustrated by the contrast between (2a) and the other four sentences:

(2) a. *Il ne boit.
         he NE drinks

     b. Il ne boit rien.
         'He doesn't drink anything.'

     c. Il ne boit jamais.
         'He never drinks.'

     d. Il ne boit pas.
         'He doesn't drink.'

     e. Il ne boit aucunement/nullement.
         'He doesn't drink.'

While *rien* and *jamais* are uncontroversial n-words, the reader might be surprised to see the word *pas* treated as one here: for researchers traditionally analyze it as being semantically negative, hence not an n-word. Homer & Thommen's (2013) claim that there is no overt negation in French, which means that neither *ne* nor *pas* is semantically negative, relies in particular on a fact that can be found in the above block of examples: just like *jamais* and *rien*, *nullement* and *aucunement* satisfy the requirement that *ne* co-occur with a clausemate n-word; in effect those are n-words, transparently derived from *nul* and *aucun* respectively, but importantly they intuitively make the same semantic contribution as *pas*, i.e. (2d) and (2e) are synonymous sentences. Hence there is reason to think that *pas* is not negative, that it is an n-word (see Homer & Thommen 2013 for further arguments). If the negative rule is right, then *ne* in *ne. . . que*, which signals the presence of NEG, has an n-word in its scope.

2.2. Further evidence that there is an n-word

N-words are characterized by the fact that they can be used as fragment answers. This is only possible because of the existence of NEG, the abstract negation, which licenses n-words (recall that those are existential NPIs). The 'negative rule' ensures that NEG can only occur if there is an n-word in its scope; we therefore do not expect NEG to appear freely in just any clause, which would of course lead to overgeneration. Minimal *ne. . . que* configurations are acceptable in fragments, they pass this test for n-words:[3]

(3) –A: Qui est venu ? ('Who came?')   –B': Que Pierre ('Only Pierre').
     –B: Personne ('No one').

Second, the presence of an NPI (recall that n-words are NPIs) can be evidenced using an intervention effect caused by a universal quantifier, such as *tout* 'all' (see also von Fintel & Iatridou (2007) for the same argument): notice first that subject *tout* can be (is actually preferentially) interpreted with narrow scope w.r.t. a clausemate negation:

(4) Tout le monde n' aime pas le chocolat.
     all   the people NE likes PAS the chocolate
     'Not everyone likes chocolate.' Or: 'No one likes chocolate.'

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[2] One can easily show this using a modal, which creates a biclausal structure:

(1) a. Il peut [ne NEG rien   dire.
         he can   NE NEG anything say
         'He can abstain from saying anything.'   CAN≫NEG

     b. Il ne peut NEG [rien dire.
         'He cannot say anything.'   NEG≫CAN

[3] The *ne* morpheme is not acceptable in a fragment.

The inverse scope reading vanishes with an object n-word, and also with *ne. . . que*, due to intervention:

(5) a. Tout le monde n'aime rien.
         'Everyone likes nothing.' Doesn't mean: 'Not everyone likes something.'

                                                          *NEG≫TOUT≫RIEN

     b. Tout le monde n'aime que le chocolat.
         'Everyone only likes chocolate.'
         Doesn't mean: 'Not everyone likes something other than chocolate.' *NEG≫TOUT≫QUE

Third, a sentence with two n-words can have either a single (SN) or a double (DN) negation reading in French; the same ambiguity arises when *ne. . . que* co-occurs with an overt n-word:

(6) Personne (n') aime personne.   (7) Personne (n') aime que Paul.
     anyone   NE likes anyone   anyone   NE likes QUE Paul
     'No one likes anyone.'   *(SN)*   'Everyone likes only Paul.'   *(SN)*
     Or: 'Everyone likes someone.' *(DN)*   Or: 'No one only likes Paul.'   *(DN)*

Besides, the presence of the marker *pas* blocks a single negation reading (8) (in European French at least); similarly, (9) only has one reading, which corresponds to a double negation.

(8) Il (n') a pas invité personne.   (9) Il (n') a pas invité que Paul.
     he NE has PAS invited anyone   he NE has PAS invited QUE Paul
     'He invited someone.'   *([ok]DN; *SN)*   'He didn't invite only Paul.'   *(DN)*

Granted, all we have shown is that there is an n-word, we have not shown what it is. It might well be that *que* itself (or the *que*-phrase) is the n-word. This is probably not the case, though: to see that the n-word is (can be) silent, observe that while n-words are perfectly acceptable in the position of subjects (due to reconstruction under NEG), a *que*-phrase is ungrammatical in that same position:

(10) a. Personne n'est NEG venu. ('Nobody   c. ?Personne que Marie n'est venu. ('No-
          came')   body came but Marie')

      b. *Que Marie (n') est NEG venu.   d. Il n'est venu que Marie. ('There came
          Intended: 'Only Marie came.'   no one but Marie')

So *que* cannot be an n-word; there must be one however in (10b); the sentence is ungrammatical, perhaps because of a violation of the EPP, assuming that the EPP is not satisfied by silent subjects like silent *personne* (notice the grammaticality of (10c), with an overt *personne*, and of (10d), with an expletive subject).

Direct evidence for the silent n-word comes from cases where it is realized, e.g. (10c) above and (11a) below (I call these 'partial' configurations, by which I really mean partial, non-minimal realizations). I claim that these two sentences contain a silent AUTRE (throughout I use capitals for hidden material), which can in turn be realized as in (11b), so that a minimal configuration like (11c) contains a hidden n-word and a hidden AUTRE:

(11) a. Paul n'a NEG invité personne AUTRE que Marie. | Partial |

      b. Paul n'a NEG invité personne *d'autre* que Marie. | Total |

      c. Paul n'a NEG invité PERSONNE AUTRE que Marie. | Minimal |

N-words are indefinites. So another reason to postulate an n-word in *ne. . . que* is that (12d) patterns with sentences containing an indefinite in the following paradigm about the definiteness effect (see Belletti (1988) about the effect in Romance):

(12) a. *Il est venu le roi.
          it is come the king
          'The king came.'

      b. *Il n'est pas venu le roi.

      c. Il n'est venu personne.

      d. Il n'est venu que le roi.

      e. Il n'est venu personne d'autre que le roi.

2.3. Evidence for AUTRE

In what I call total realizations, the adjective *autre* is present; it is also present, albeit silently, in minimal and in partial realizations. When silent, it manifests itself through what I propose to call an inclusion inference: what is expressed with *other than* goes beyond non-identity: e.g. in the following sentence, the 'complement' of *que*, the newspaper, has to be included in the set of people:

(13) #Personne d' autre n' est arrivé que le journal.
      anybody   of other NE is arrived QUE the newspaper
      '#Nobody but the newspaper has arrived.'   *Inference*: The newspaper is a person.

In partial *ne. . . que* configurations, the inclusion inference obtains as well, which testifies to the presence of AUTRE:

(14) #Personne AUTRE n'est arrivé que le journal.
      '#Nobody but the newspaper has arrived.'   *Inference*: The newspaper is a person.

Autre bears resemblance to comparative adjectives: like them, it comes with a *than*-clause (a *que*-clause in French). I submit that *que* is the comparative complementizer introduced by *autre*/AUTRE (it does not mean 'other than' per se, *pace* von Fintel & Iatridou (2007)). I refer to the comparison class that the complement of *que* is contrasted with as the 'associate'. The associate is 'local' when it is provided by the NP modified by *autre* (inclusion of the complement of *que* in the restrictor set obtains).

In sum, minimal *ne. . . que* contains a silent n-word and the silent counterpart of *autre* (I thus agree with O'Neill (2011); I have provided additional arguments to the case she made, such as the interpretive effects of the presence of an overt n-word). Those silent elements are not elliptical; they are akin to Kayne's (2003) silent 'grammatical' or 'semi-lexical' elements. Note further that it is not just any quantifier that can be silent: only n-words can; also, silent AUTRE is only possible in the presence of negation.

3. The problem

Now that we have provided reasons to believe (i.) that *ne. . . que* configurations contain silent material, and (ii.) that this silent material can also be realized overtly, we can ask the following question: does silence make a difference? In other words, are there syntactic or semantic properties that distinguish a fully realized configuration (i.e., a configuration in which all elements are pronounced) from a configuration in which some elements are silent? As we will see shortly, there are indeed a number of differences. And let me say right off the bat that the existence of differences is disconcerting at first sight: for the argument that *ne. . . que* configurations contain silent material rests in part on identity with overtly realized counterparts: many think, rightly so in my opinion, that it is acceptable to postulate invisible elements when we can, at least sometimes, see them in the same position, or when distinctive properties of certain elements can be detected even though those elements do not appear. I have resorted to this line of reasoning myself, and I think it is valid; in fact, the differences in my data do not challenge the argument, for minimal realizations do not exhibit essentially different properties than total realizations, they only exhibit a proper subset of their properties. What happens then when visible elements are substituted with invisible ones in a *ne. . . que* configuration is that some syntactic options and, consequently, some semantic options, go missing.

3.1. The prejacent

(15) a. Paul (n') a   invité NEG PERSONNE AUTRE que Marie.
          Paul NE has invited NEG anyone   other   than Marie

b. Paul (n')a invité personne d'autre que Marie.

On the semantic side, there is a subtle yet real difference between (15a) and (15b) (in the latter all the putative hidden elements that can be realized are pronounced; NEG has no phonological realization): only in the former is the *prejacent* (a term used in the analysis of *only*) inferred:

(16) *I don't know if Paul invited Marie but I'm sure that. . .*

    a. #. . . il n'a invité que Marie (=15a).   *Inference*: Paul invited Marie.

    b. . . . il n'a invité personne d'autre que Marie (=15b).

Only in (16a) is the continuation infelicitous, which is an indication that the inference that Paul invited Marie (the prejacent) is necessarily drawn in (16a), but is not, or is not necessarily, in (16b). One could then conclude that unlike minimal realizations (16a), total realizations (16b) do not yield the inference. However it might be, and this is the line I actually wish to pursue, that (16b) is in fact ambiguous between two LFs, one of which yields that inference while the other doesn't, and the above test just fails to detect the former because of the concomitant availability of the latter.

For the time being, I want to remain very cautious about the nature of this inference: it might be that it is a presupposition, or that it is the result of the combination of the truth conditions with some presupposition. In fact the test used in (16) is rather coarse: it can be interpreted as showing that (16a) entails that Paul invited Marie (which contradicts the lead-in) or that this is presupposed (in which case the lead-in fails to support the presupposition). There are well-known debates about the meaning and the felicity conditions of *only*, which lead me to exercise caution with a seemingly close equivalent. The nature of the inference triggered by *ne. . . que* cannot be simply assumed; it will only become known after a comprehensive and thorough examination of the syntactic and semantic properties of *ne. . . que*.

It bears saying though that there is a strong feeling that the prejacent holds, even in total realizations that pass the continuation test. I feel that the following dialogue is coherent, which I take to indicate that the inference can be drawn even in total configurations:

(17) –A: Paul n'a invité personne d'autre que Marie.

    –B: Attends une minute, je ne savais pas qu'il l'avait invitée ! ('Wait a minute, I didn't know he had invited her!')

This is just an instance of the *Hey, wait a minute!* test for presuppositions, and as such it could indicate that with a total configuration one can (but need not) access a representation that carries the presupposition that Paul invited Marie. By contrast this other dialogue, where the first sentence crucially does not contain *autre* (and thus departs from *ne. . . que*), feels odd (suggesting that no presupposition is triggered):

(18) –A: Paul n'a invité personne de ceux qui ne sont pas Marie. ('Paul invited none of the people who are not Marie')

    –B: #Attends une minute, je ne savais pas qu'il l'avait invitée !

Assuming that inferences depend on logical forms and on their makeup, what one could call the optionality of the inference of the prejacent makes sense, if there is a structural ambiguity in total realizations. Minimal realizations would then only be possible with the structure(s) to which the inference of the prejacent is attached. Notice in closing that partial configurations pattern with minimal ones in passing the test of obligatory inference, which indicates that they too rely on a particular structure to which the inference is attached:

(19) *I don't know if Paul invited Marie but I'm sure that. . .*

    a. #Paul n'a NEG invité aucun AUTRE chirurgien que Marie.

    b. #Paul n'a NEG invité personne AUTRE que Marie.

Alongside those facts of a semantic nature, the hypothesis of a structural ambiguity finds more direct support in the existence of constraints on the complement of *que*.

3.2. Locality of association

Total and minimal configurations also differ in the interpretation of the complement of *autre*/AUTRE. Only in fully realized sentences can the complement of *que* belong to a comparison class other than the one provided by the constituent directly modified by *autre*/AUTRE. In other words, only in fully realized sentences can association be non-local. That this option does exist in total configurations is shown in the following example, where the only plausible meaning is one in which *toi* 'you' denotes an Agent, while the DP containing *autre* denotes a Theme (in my translation, I do not try to deal with the inference of the prejacent):

(20) Il n' a   rien   dit d' autre que toi.
      he NE has anything said of other than you
      'He didn't say anything other than what you said.'

With a verb like *inviter* 'invite', *toi* (the apparent complement of *que*) can denote either a Patient (local association) or an Agent (non-local association), hence the ambiguity of (21):

(21) Il n' a   invité personne d' autre que toi.
      he NE has invited anybody of other than you
      'He didn't invite anybody other than who you invited.' Or: 'He didn't invite anybody but you.'

The ambiguity vanishes in minimal realizations; I show this with *manger* 'eat', a verb which, on pragmatic grounds, requires the missing interpretation:

(22) a. Il n' a   rien   mangé d' autre que moi.
         he NE has anything eaten   of other than me
         '#He didn't eat anything but me.' Or: 'He didn't eat anything other than what I ate.'
      b. # Il n'a RIEN mangé AUTRE que moi.
         '#He didn't eat anything but me.'

These facts point to a syntactic difference between total and minimal *ne... que* configurations if we trust that, as in comparative constructions, constraints on the complement of *que* 'than' are syntactic in nature (for example, 'more people read the book that John wrote than Mary' is ill-formed because the only plausible associate of *Mary*, *John*, is not accessible, due to the ban on movement out of an island; this idea is defended in Bhatt & Takahashi 2011 a.o.).

(23) is partial, and it is as odd as (22b), which is minimal:

(23)   # Il n'a rien mangé AUTRE que moi.
       '#He didn't eat anything but me.'

The link between the presence of silent elements and the options available in the complement of *que* is an important part of the puzzle of *ne... que* and any complete theory will need to have an account for it; in all fairness, I do not understand this link at the moment.

Summarizing, there are two noticeable differences between total and minimal realizations: (i.) the inference of the prejacent is possible but not necessary in total realizations, while it is necessary in minimal ones; and (ii.) local association is forced only in minimal realizations. In view of these facts I suggested that total realizations were structurally ambiguous and that silent elements were not compatible with certain structures. That partial configurations pattern here with minimal ones corroborates this claim. If this is on the right track, minimal realizations don't offer new options, they just realize with hidden material the construal(s) that come(s) with obligatory inference of the prejacent and with locality of association.

3.3. Complications

So far we haven't considered sentences in which *que* is followed by a preposition; such cases arise whenever the associate is denoted neither by the subject nor by the direct object of the verb; in those cases, a preposition must appear in minimal configurations. For concreteness, let's examine the verb *parler à* 'talk to', and a sentence in which the associate is denoted by the indirect object of the verb. In total configurations the presence of a preposition under *que* appears to be optional:

(24) a. Il n' a   parlé à personne d' autre qu' à Marie.
          he NE has talked to anyone   of other than to Marie

      b. Il n'a parlé à personne d'autre que Marie.

      'He didn't talk to anyone other than Marie.'

In minimal configurations on the other hand, the preposition is mandatory:

(25) a. Il n'a parlé qu'à Marie.   b. *Il n'a parlé que Marie.
          'He only talked to Marie.'

The structural ambiguity that I invoked in the previous subsection now becomes visible: judging from the pair in (24), there are at least two possible total configurations. A minimal configuration can be viewed as being the realization, where silent material is substituted for overt material, of one of several possible structures built around *autre*/AUTRE. And I submit that we can unequivocally track the structure that minimal configurations realize in cases that make the presence of a preposition possible: in the case of (25a) then, it is the structure that emerges in its fullest form with a preposition, namely (24a). Given my assumption that minimal configurations are formally identical to some total configurations, being able to track the corresponding total configurations is important. As expected, we observe that a total realization with a preposition does give rise to an obligatory inference, just like a minimal realization:

(26) *I don't know if he talked to Marie but I'm sure that...*

      a. # Il n'a parlé qu'à Marie.   *Inference*: He talked to Marie.

      b. # Il n'a parlé à personne d'autre qu'à Marie.   *Inference*: He talked to Marie.

      c.   Il n'a parlé à personne d'autre que Marie.

(26c), in which the preposition is missing, does not pass the test, but can in fact give rise to the inference of the prejacent, as shown using the *'Hey, wait a minute'* test:

(27) –A: Paul n'a parlé à personne d'autre que Marie (=(26c)).
      –B: Attends une minute, je ne savais pas qu'il lui avait parlé ! ('Wait a minute, I didn't know he had talked to her!')

Putting together the obvious structural difference between (24a) and (24b) and the optionality of the inference drawn from (24b), we are led to conclude, if we are to pursue the logic adopted so far, that we should postulate at least three, rather than two, structures built upon *autre*/AUTRE: for according to this logic, structural ambiguity is what gives rise to the optional character of the inference (and of local association). This by itself suffices to show the complexity of the syntax of *ne...que*.

Insofar as we can test partial realizations, the preposition is possible but not mandatory there:

(28) a. Il n'a parlé à aucun AUTRE chirurgien {que Marie/qu'à Marie.}
      b. Il n'a parlé à personne AUTRE {que Marie/qu'à Marie.}

Therefore, and this is yet another complication, partial realizations depart from minimal ones, in which the preposition is mandatory (25b) (the two types patterned together in the previous subsection). And yet, whether a preposition is present or not, the inference is obligatory with partial configurations, just like with minimal ones:

(29) *I don't know if he talked to Marie but I'm sure that...*
      #Il n'a parlé à personne AUTRE {que Marie/qu'à Marie.}   *Inference*: He talked to Marie.

Therefore it appears that there are two sufficient conditions for the inference of the prejacent in *ne...que*: (i.) the presence of silent material and (ii.) the presence of the preposition under *que*. Not all structures that can contain silent material can be used to form minimal realizations. To track the ones that are used for minimal configurations, we will from now on restrict our attention to cases where a preposition appears under *que*.

4. What inference?

Having discovered the means to effectively unpack minimal *ne...que* configurations has one interesting consequence. We are now in a position to study the total realizations they correspond to, and this gives us a vantage point to investigate the so-called prejacent inference. All we need to do is consider total realizations in which a preposition appears under *que*.

What is more, precisely because we can manipulate sentences without silent material, we need not limit ourselves to negative sentences: minimal realizations are only possible in the presence of negation, but this does not, of course, hold of total realizations. Consider the simplex positive sentence below (30):

(30) Paul a   parlé à quelqu'un d' autre qu' à Marie.
      Paul has talked to somebody of other than to Marie
      'Paul talked to somebody other than Marie.'   *Inference:* Paul didn't talk to Marie.

What is remarkable about (30) is that it yields the inference that Marie is excluded from the set of people that Paul talked to, which can be evidenced by the following contradiction test (notice that no contradiction arises with the form that lacks a preposition):

(31) *Paul just hung up the phone...*

      Paul a   parlé à Marie et à quelqu'un d' autre que Marie/#qu' à Marie.
      Paul has talked to Marie and to somebody of other than Marie/than to Marie
      Intended: 'Paul talked to Marie and to somebody other than Marie.'

So now the problem is the following. We need to understand how exclusion works: we want to predict that the denotation of the object of *que* is excluded in a simplex positive sentence, while it is the complement of Marie relative to the set of people which is excluded in the negative equivalent of that sentence, e.g. (32):

(32) Il n'a parlé à personne d'autre qu'à Marie.
      'He didn't talk to anyone other than Marie.'   *Inference*: He talked to Marie.

And we need to predict that (32) yields that he did talk to someone, namely Marie. Here is an attempt: I propose that the inferences drawn from (30) and (32) arise from the combination of the truth-conditional meaning of those sentences, which happens to be fairly transparent, with a non-truth-conditional meaning, specifically a presupposition (the reason for calling it a presupposition being that the non-assertoric content remains constant whether the sentence is positive or negative). The presupposition I propose is quite complex:

(33) Il a parlé à quelqu'un d'autre qu'à Marie (=(30)).
      Assertion: There is some *x* who is not Marie such that he talked to *x*.
      Presupposition: He talked to someone and if he talked to Marie then he talked to no one who is not Marie.
      ∴ He didn't talk to Marie.

The second part of the presupposition together with the assertion is what ensures that Marie is excluded, as desired; the first conjunct (an existential presupposition reminiscent of the weak presuppositions proposed by Horn 1996 and Geurts & van der Sandt 2004 for *only*, e.g. *only John came* presupposes that somebody came) does not appear to do anything, but it is in fact necessary in negative sentences:

(34)   Il n'a parlé à personne d'autre qu'à Marie (=(32)).
  Assertion: There is no *x* who is not Marie such that he talked to *x*.
  Presupposition: As in (33).
  ∴ He talked to Marie.

So it seems that the presupposition that we need is not as weak as the weak presupposition proposed for *only*, and also not as strong as the strong presupposition proposed by Horn (1969) (e.g. *only John came* presupposes that John came). We seem to have successfully identified the components of the meaning of a *ne. . . que* sentence, in a way that would not have been possible if we had only considered minimal configurations (i.e. negative sentences). However, this analysis has two shortcomings, at least. First of all, the existential part of the presupposition is too strong in at least one case, that is, in answers to questions that bear on existence:

(35)   –A: Est-ce que Paul a parlé à quelqu'un ? ('Did Paul talk to someone?')
  –B: Qu'à Marie.
  –B': À personne d'autre qu'à Marie.

The answer, whether it takes the form of a minimal or of a total realization, is felicitous, and this suggests that it does not in fact presuppose that Paul talked to someone. This is a problem for the weak (as well as the strong) presupposition analysis, as rightly pointed out by Ippolito (2007) about *only*. Second, a new puzzle, and a difficult one, awaits us now. To begin, notice that we can apply our semantics to the following complex sentence, by computing its global meaning at the root level. The sentence yields the inference that he talked to Marie, and we capture that:

(36)   Il est impossible qu' il ait parlé à quelqu'un/qui que ce soit/personne d' autre qu' à Marie.
  it is impossible that he has talked to somebody/anybody/anybody of other than to Marie
  'It is impossible that he talked to someone/anyone other than Marie.'
  Assertion: There is no *x* who is not Marie such that he talked to *x*.
  Presupposition: As in (33).
  ∴ He talked to Marie.

Now, when we add a negation in the subordinate clause, we still have three options for the indefinite: *quelqu'un* 'someone', *qui que ce soit* 'anyone', or *personne* 'anybody':

(37)   Il est impossible qu'il n'ait pas parlé à quelqu'un d'autre qu'à Marie.
  ≈ He talked to someone who is not Marie but not to Marie.

(38)   a. Il est impossible qu'il n'ait pas parlé à qui que ce soit d'autre qu'à Marie.
  b. Il est impossible qu'il n'ait NEG parlé à personne d'autre qu'à Marie.
  c. Il est impossible qu'il n'ait parlé qu'à Marie.

  ≈ He talked to someone who is not Marie and to Marie.

The truth-conditional meaning of the three sentences ((37), (38a) and (38b)) appears to be the same, i.e. the sentence says that he talked to someone who is not Marie, and we assume that the presupposition is also the same. And yet, the *quelqu'un* version yields the inference that he didn't talk to Marie, while the *qui que ce soit* and the *personne* versions yield the inference that he did talk to her (the minimal version (38c) does too). Given our semantics, we only make the right prediction for the first sentence (we wrongly predict that the other three have the same global meaning). I suppose that the key to this puzzle lies in the polarity of the three indefinites: *quelqu'un* is a PPI (as such it is acceptable in the scope of a superordinate negation, as in (36); it is also acceptable in (37) where it is rescued from the clausemate negation by the superordinate one), the other two are NPIs. At this point, I fail to see how this difference operates on the global meaning. Interestingly, the global meaning that obtains for the sentences in (38) is the same as that of a *not only* sentence in English, which leads me to think that solving the challenge posed by negated *ne. . . que* (double negation) could further our understanding of *only* itself. As far as I can tell, the felicity conditions of a sentence with negated *only* are not fully understood: it is not often observed that a *not only* sentence used as a reply gives rise to what looks like a presupposition failure when the question bears on existence, while an *only* sentence does not:

(39) –A: Did Paul talk to someone?
      –B: Only to Marie.
      –B': #Not only to Marie.   *Presupposition*: He talked to Marie.

The second reply feels very deviant in the context of the question, as if it presupposed that Paul talked to Marie. I do not know of any account that captures both the felicity of the first reply and the infelicity of the second. The strong presupposition analysis fares well with the latter, not with the former. And not even Ippolito's (2007) account, which is designed to explain other differences between *only A is B* and *not only A is B*, appears to be accurate. In her account, *only* in *only A is B* triggers the conditional presupposition *if something is B, A is B*; the presupposition is the same in *not only A is B*; in the latter, the prejacent is entailed by any context that satisfies the presupposition and to which the assertion is added. So under this view in the reply of B' in (39), that he talked to Marie is not presupposed, it is just an entailment.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have laid the groundwork for an in-depth analysis of minimal *ne. . . que*. First, I have identified the silent elements it contains, namely, an n-word and the covert counterpart of *autre*. Second, I have put forth the structural ambiguity of total *ne. . . que* realizations and found a way of tracking the total realizations that minimal realizations are based upon. Third, I have singled out what I think are the problems that any account of the non-assertoric content of *ne. . . que* (then possibly of *only* as well) has to solve.

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