

Re: Origins of French partitive, pas, etc.

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- *From:* "wugi" <bro1@xxxxxxxxxxx>
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"kj" :

I'm learning French and I'm mystified by several syntactic features of French that have no counterpart in any other language I know (not that I know that many, but still), certainly not in any other Romance language I know.

I am most intrigued by the French so-called "partitive article" (J'ai bu DU vin. Literally "I drank OF THE wine."), as well as

This occurs in that other Romance language, Italian, too.

the use in French of particles like "pas", "plus", "personne", "rien", etc. in negative constructions (Elle ne supporte PAS le brocoli), which has become essentially mandatory.

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What prompts this particular line of inquiry is having read long ago that the evolution of French phonology had necessitated compensatory changes in other areas of spoken usage.

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(e.g. The sentence "Il est las" (He is tired) began to sound too much like "Il est la" (He is here/there)).

Surely I'd say "lass" for las? But then I'm not entirely native:—)

I wonder if the origins of the partitive and the negative particles like "pas" can be traced to similar compensations of phonetic developments in the evolution of French.

Re: Origins of French partitive, pas, etc.

I myself wouldn't attribute this to sound, but rather to accent (emphasis).
As you pointed out, "ne" evolved to a dull syllable which, as a consequence,
would nOt (:) be able to take an accent (*). Nor would it take a key
position in the sentence.
So there was the need of a fellow particle taking accent and key position.
Compare "no(n)" in the other Romance languages.

Sometimes being non-dull or in key position has to suffice, as other parts
of the sentence may take the emphasis:

Sp: NO vengo. But: YO no vengo.

NL: Ik kOm niet. But: IK kom niet. Ik kom nIEt!

HAPPY 2008 !

guido

<http://home.scarlet.be/~pin12499>

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