



Prof. Maj-Britt Mosegaard Hansen (University of Manchester)

**“On the evolution of negative markers:
the case of the French temporal(-aspectual) n-words”**

**Vortrag am 23.01.13 um 18 Uhr c.t.
Raum S 227 (!), Schellingstraße 3 (Vordergebäude)**

This talk addresses two salient theoretical issues raised by recent studies of the diachronic evolution of negative markers more generally and in French more specifically: (i) whether the evolution of polarity indefinites is unidirectional or rather subject to a “random diachronic walk”; (ii) whether the evolution of the French n-words can be described in terms of a general cyclical development parallel to that of the standard clause negator (commonly known as Jespersen’s Cycle).

Most research on French n-words has concentrated on those items that fulfill argument functions, and the hypotheses put forward are not always immediately applicable to n-words with adverbial functions. In my talk, I will trace the diachronic evolution in Medieval French of adverbial n-words with temporal(-aspectual) meaning. The principal items investigated are the markers *jamais* (< Lat. IAM MAGIS lit. ‘as of now more’), equivalent to English (*n*)*ever*, and *plus* (< Lat. PLUS ‘more’), equivalent to English *no more/no longer*, *anymore/any longer*, but some consideration will be given to the competition, in Medieval French, between *jamais* and *onques* (< Lat. UMQUAM ‘ever’), on the one hand, and between *plus* and *mais* (< Lat. MAGIS ‘more/to a greater degree’) on the other.

I will argue that the evolution of the temporal n-words support the random walk hypothesis, and weakens the case for a quantifier cycle in French. Moreover, the results suggest that functional categories, or paradigms, should be seen as pragmatic, rather than linguistic, entities, one consequence of which is that paradigmatic pressures must be appealed to with some caution when attempting to explain diachronic change.