Quantifier and free choice cycles – a reappraisal

1 / To distinguish a cycle from other diachronic changes, the last stage of the cycle should resemble the first stage in a non-trivial way. This is the case in the 'Jespersen Cycle', as illustrated with French *pas* 'not'.

(1)

NEG	…	NEG … NEG	…	NEG
ne V	…	*ne* V *pas*	...	V *pas*

(1) is a simplification: it does not show how the status of *pas* changed nor that stages can overlap. Most importantly, we see non-trivial similarity, marked by the arrow. There is no such similarity for the 'Quantifier Cycle' in its traditional representations, going back to Ladusaw (1993). (2) sketches the diachrony of French *rien* 'nothing' and the last stage is not very similar to the first one.

(2)

NEG … N	NEG … NPI	NEG … NCI	NI
ne … rien	*ne ... rien*	*ne ... rien*	*rien*

The constellation in (2) does not justify calling this diachrony a 'cycle'. But the diachrony deserves a different representation: *ne rien* 'NEG … N' is preceded by *nihil* (Lat.) 'nothing', itself preceded by *ne hilum* (Lat.) 'NEG …. N'. (3) shows two non-trivial similarities.

(3)

NEG …N	…	NI	…	NEG … N	NEG … NPI	NEG … NCI	NI
		nihil		*ne ...rien*	*ne ... rien*	*ne ... rien*	*rien*
ne ... hilum	...	*nihil*	...	*ne ...rien*			

The proposal for a 'Free Choice cycle' from FC to NPI and ultimately NI has to be 'remedied' in the same way.

2 / There is ample research on the intermediate stages of the Quantifier Cycle, but much less on those of the Free Choice cycle. For the latter, there are two types. One involves an interrogative-relative construction ('not matter who'), as in Dravidian, and marginally also in Slavic and French (illustrated in (4)).

(4) French
   a. Qui que ce soit peut venir.
      who that it be may come
      'Anybody may come'
   b. Il n'a jamais dit du bien de qui que ce soit.
      he NEG has never said of good of who that it be
      'He never said anything good about anybody.'

The second one uses a construction with a noun that means 'type, kind' – the idea being that when a kind of entity, like a human being (marked by *un* 'one' in (5)), can do something or was not seen, then all the exemplars of that kind can do it or were not seen.

(5) Welsh
   a. All unrhyw un neud hynna.
      can a.kind one do that
      'Anybody can do that.'
   b. Gwn na welodd Sioned unrhyw un.
      know NEG saw Sioned a.kind one
      'I know that Sioned didn't see anybody.'

Some of the details will be worked and we will unify the two cycles under a wide notion of 'free choice', which is the original one (Vendler 1967).

Abbreviations: FCI 'free choice item', 'N 'noun', NEG 'negation', NCI 'negative concord item', NI 'negative indefinite', NPI 'negative polarity item'. Glossing simplified. References omitted.