Negation and Negative Concord in Middle Dutch[1]

Jacob Hoeksema
University of Groningen

1. Developments in the Dutch negation system

1.1. The Jespersen Cycle

Medieval Dutch is interesting to students of negation, as well as historical syntax, because it underwent almost a full Jespersenian cycle of negation (cf. Jespersen 1917). Such cycles appear to reflect important tendencies of language change, and at the same time, they seem to be characteristic of systems of negation. Somewhat similar fluctuations from analytical to synthetic exponence in areas such as tense have of course been noted in the literature, but it is doubtful that they are as swift and comprehensive as the cyclic developments that many of the languages of Europe have encountered in the area of negation.

Another reason to draw attention to Middle Dutch is the fact that it exhibits multiple negation of the kind that Labov (1972) has referred to as Negative Concord. And negative concord is a central topic in current syntactic theory, especially since Raffaella Zanuttini's work on the negation system of Romance (Zanuttini 1991).

Let us first take a brief look at the Jespersen cycle, as it manifested itself in the history of Dutch. Earlier discussions can be found in Van der Horst and Van der Wal (1979), De Meersman (1983) and Burridge (1993), among others. For the sake of exposition, I cut up the historical development in three main stages: (1) clitic negation (involving a proclitic marker *en* or *ne* on the finite verb); (2) double negation (involving clitic negation and an additional negative adverb *niet* or other n-word[2]); (3) (nonclitic) negation expressed by *niet* or an n-word. A more fine-grained

---

[1] This paper was presented at the workshop on negation in Ottawa, May 1995 and has benefitted from the comments made by the audience. This research was supported by a grant from the Pionier programme of the Dutch Organization for Research (NWO), which is gratefully acknowledged.

[2] By the term `n-word' I refer to expressions such as *niemand, niets, negheen, nergens, nooit* etc. in Dutch, or *nobody, nothing, nowhere, none, never* in English, which are negative in force, and are morphologically characterized by the presence of the negative morpheme *n-* or *no*.

1

presentation would recognize more stages, including one in which *niet* is used as a noun phrase, meaning `nothing' and a later one where it has become an adverb, meaning `not'. These stages partially overlap. At the moment, not enough is known about the precise factors involved in the development from noun phrase to adverb, except that it appears to be a common one, exemplified, among others, by English *not*. With some simplification, then, the big picture looks like this:

(1)   *Jespersen Cycle in Dutch*

        Stage 1: Preverbal (clitic) negation: *ne/en* + Vf

                ic en was siec
                I neg was sick

        Stage 2: Embracing negation: ne+Vf + niet

                ic en was niet siec
                I neg was not sick

        Stage 3: Postverbal negation: Vf + niet

                ic was niet siec
                I was not sick

Stage 1 is what we suppose Old Dutch to have been like. Unfortunately, there is preciously little Old Dutch left. The east-lower-franconian psalm glosses known as the Wachtendonckse Psalmen conform to Stage 1, but since they are word-by- word translations from the Latin Vulgate-text, they cannot be used as evidence. The assumption that Old Dutch had clitic negation on the finite verb is plausible, given that this is the pattern of the oldest Middle Dutch texts, as well as that of Old English (cf. Traugott 1992: 267) and Old High German (cf. Paul 1959: 330).[3] Given the comparative Germanic evidence, the freer distribution of Old Dutch *ne* assumed by Burridge (1993) appears less plausible.

        Stage 2 is the Middle Dutch stage. Embracing negation comes in two flavors:

---

[3] One question that arises immediately is what Old Dutch did with negated infinitival clauses. Since *ne* (or its Germanic precursor *ni*) was restricted to finite clauses, negation of infinitival clauses (as in *I begged him not to do it*) was probably avoided, as it was in Old English (Traugott 1992: 271). In Middle Dutch, negation of nonfinite verbs is extremely rare.

there is *ne + niet*, the adverb of negation, and there is *ne* + N-WORD, where `N-WORD' stands for any one of a number of negative quantifiers, such as *niemen* 'nobody', *nemmermeer* 'nevermore', *niewers* 'nowhere' etc. Just as in modern West-Flemish (see Haegeman 1995), Old and Middle English (Haeberli and Haegeman (1995), and the Romance languages (Zanuttini 1991), the number of N-WORDS associated with the clitic *ne* is free, and correspond to one single negation per clause:

(2)   ic en sach niemen
        I neg saw nobody
        "I saw didn't see anybody"

(3)   niemen en had mi niet gesien
        nobody neg had me not seen
        "Nobody had seen me"

In Stage 3, embracing negation is replaced by single, nonclitic negation. This is the modern Dutch situation. Over a period of several centuries, the negative clitic gradually loses territory, until it finally disappears around the beginning of the 18th century. The disappearance of optional clitic negation appears to be part of the process of standardization which leads to modern standard Dutch. Flanders, which at that point is politically detached from the northern Netherlands, is not subject to the standardization process. Many archaic features of Dutch, such as verb projection raising and clitic negation remain present in Flemish dialects and are only now being pushed out of the system by the pressure of standardization.

1.2. Functional pressures in the cycle of negation

The forces which are usually held responsible for the cycle of negation are mainly functional in character. Negation markers are highly frequent, and frequent signs tend to undergo phonological erosion. When negation is reduced to a weak clitic, a certain pressure builds up. Negation signs are crucial. If they are not well perceived, communication fails. Hence the desire to strengthen negation, for instance by the use of negative polarity items, which signal the presence of negation, and by virtue of their limited distribution, increase redundancy. The result is embracing negation. At this point, only the rules of grammar, and not the exigencies of communication, keep the clitic negation afloat. When embracing negation becomes the rule, nothing but the conventions of grammar keeps the language from dropping the clitic form. And this is, of course, often what happens. The clitic kicks the bucket, and the stage is set for another run of the cycle.

In the case of Middle Dutch, there are some additional functional pressures at work. Consider for instance how Stage 2 changed into Stage 3. In the literature, a number of factors have been identified which may have added speed to this transition. One such factor is haplology. The negative clitic *en* often does not occur right after the generic pronoun *men*.[4] It could be assumed in such cases that *en* is present at an underlying level, but phonologically contracted with *men* (cf. e.g. Van der Horst and Van der Wal 1979). In the electronic version of the Corpus Gysseling[5], a corpus consisting of all known texts before 1300, I found 15 noninverted main clauses with *men* as their subject, and none of them had enclitic *en*. In my own database of over 2000 Middle Dutch and early Modern Dutch negative clauses, which spans the entire Middle Dutch and early Modern Dutch period, I found the following distribution:[6]

MEN-clauses	Other V2 main clauses	
15	68	no clitic negation
5	399	clitic negation

Table 1: The effect of <u>men</u> on the presence of clitic negation

Again, we see a strong tendency to omit *en* after *men*, but it is not as absolute as the 13th century data from the Corpus Gysseling suggest. However, it is significant at the 0.00001 level according to Fisher's Exact Test as computed by SPSS 4.0.

A similar effect of adjacent verbal endings on the presence of negation has been suggested by Burridge (1993). The infinitival ending *-en* is claimed to have a similar effect on adjacent clitic negation as the pronoun *men*. I have not been able to ascertain this effect in my own data. On the contrary, when I checked clauses with the order *Vinf + en + Aux*, I found no difference whatsoever with the numbers found

---

[4] There is also an enclitic pronoun *-en* `him' which may be contracted with *men*.

[5] Cf. Gysseling (1979). The electronic version was kindly made available to me by the Dutch Institute of Lexicology (INL) in Leiden.

[6] This database contains texts from Holland, Brabant, Flanders, Limburg, Groningen and Gelderland, in declining order of importance. I included both literary texts (usually poetry) and nonliterary prose texts (usually legal documents) out of a desire to cover a broad range of styles. For reasons of space, I decided not to list all the texts from which the data were taken. Some are mentioned in connection with individual examples.

in subordinate clauses in general.[7] Compare the following figures:

Vinf + Aux sequences		Other subordinate clauses		
%	N	%	N	
25%	21	25%	165	no clitic negation
75%	64	75%	486	clitic negation

Table 2: No effect of infinitival endings on the presence of en.

It is possible that the effect of adjacent endings is highly variable and significant only in some texts.

There is another effect, however, to which I like to draw your attention. This effect concerns the transition of Stage 1 to Stage 2. Traditional grammars of Middle Dutch, such as that of Stoett (1923), point out that there is a class of verbs which retained single clitic negation long after the major pattern of negation had changed into embracing or double negation.

(4)Ic en weet wat penitencie kiesen[8]
       I neg know what penitence choose
`I do not know what penitence to choose'

(5)   Mi en ruect wat ic doe[9]
       me neg matters what I do
       `I don't care what I do'

Note that the examples given here are from the end of the Middle Dutch period. In fact, single clitic negation can be found with these verbs until well into the 17th century, up to the transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3, when clitic negation is lost. This makes our initial picture, with three stages, neatly corresponding to Old, Middle and

---

[7] The reason why I am using subordinate clause data only has to do with the fact that *Vinf + Aux* orders are restricted to subordinate clauses, and that main clauses are subject to other forces with affect the retention of clitic negation.

[8] From the miracle play *Mariken van Nieumeghen*, written around 1500 by an anonymous author.

[9] Ibidem.

Modern Dutch, a bit misleading. There is some lexically- governed irregularity in the negation system which allows an old system to coexist with a new system. How can this be?

To get an answer to this question, we must first take a look at the class of verbs involved here. Burridge (1993: 180) discusses examples similar to the ones given here, and notes that they involve high frequency verbs such as modals and verbs like `to say' or `to know'. This characterization is on the right track, but not entirely accurate. The verb *roeken*, an impersonal psych-verb meaning `to matter (to someone)' certainly belongs in the class of verbs that tend to occur with single clitic negation. Yet it is by no means a common usage verb. It is rare and has disappeared from the modern language. However, *roeken* is a verb which occurred predominantly in negative clauses, much like its English counterparts `to matter' and `to care', which tend to occur in statements of indifference, either within the scope of negation, of as the predicate of a rhetorical question.[10] `Who cares?' `Why should it matter?' In a corpus of modern English texts, I picked all occurrences of the verbs *care* and *matter*, and counted the environments in which they occur. I found the following distribution:

[10] In the case of Middle Dutch *roeken*, about 60% of the 34 occurrences in the Corpus Gysseling are in negative clauses. When used as an impersonal verb, or with a wh-complement, the percentage of negated uses is even higher. It is an interesting, but little-understood fact that the complementation structure also appears to play a role: in the case of *weten* `to know', a strikingly large number of single negation clauses contains *weten* with an interrogative complement.

	CARE (N=792)	MATTER (N=406)
negative clauses	53%	64%
questions	15%	13%
other negative environments	12%	3%
positive statements	20%	20%

Table 3: The distribution of the English verbs CARE and MATTER

As I noted in Hoeksema (1994), psychological verbs such as *care* or *matter* are polarity-sensitive in a statistical, rather than an absolute sense. Moreover, we frequently find polarity items with the same general meaning, such as the English family of expressions consisting of *give a damn*, *give a shit*, *give a fuck* and related items. In Dutch, there is a whole slew of polarity items in this semantic domain. In a study of negation in 18th century English, Tieken-Boon van Ostade (1987) noted that the verbs which retained postverbal negation long after the default system of negation had changed into the present system with do-support and negated auxiliaries were precisely the verbs which are most likely to appear in negative or interrogative contexts. These include such verbs as *know* as in `I knew her not', *care* as in `I care not what you think' and *matter*, as in `It matters not'. The same tendencies were noted for Shakespeare's use of negation in De Jong (1991). The correspondence of this set of verbs with the set of verbs which retained clitic negation the longest in Dutch is too striking to overlook. Polarity sensitivity, whether it is of the strict, categorical kind, or a marked tendency in usage, appears to play a special role in the expression of negation. This special role is well-known in the case of polarity- sensitive nominals which change into the main sign of negation, such as PAS and POINT in French, but it is less well-known that the *predicate* may also be polarity sensitive and as such exercise influence on the expression of negation. For those who like to think of the expression problem in terms of licensing conditions, it should be kept in mind that licensing may have to involve more than concord between a negative head and other n-words, and may involve, as a third party, the main predicate.

Looking at the transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3, we note that it does not start in all environments at the same time. Rather, there are certain contexts in which single postverbal negation first gains a foothold. In Middle Dutch, V1 contexts have been identified by Burridge as leading the way to single negation. She argued that as V1-order is fixed, clitic negation is felt to be in the way, and removed.

In my own data, there is some interesting support for this claim. V1 clauses come in three flavors: (1) imperatives (2) yes/no questions and (3) conditional

clauses. Of three clause types, only conditional clauses are strictly verb-initial. Middle Dutch imperatives were often verb-second due to topicalization. In Modern Dutch, topicalization is no longer allowed in imperatives (cf. Gerritsen 1982 for discussion of this change). Yes/no questions are mostly verb-initial, but also allowed some modest amount of topicalization. In my data set, I found the following figures regarding the use of clitic negation:

clause type	N	% without clitic negation
imperatives	69	9%
yes/no questions	49	47%
conditionals	48	52%

Table 4: Loss of clitic negation in three types of V1 clauses

Note how the percentage of clauses without clitic negation is higher for clause types where verb-initial order is generally stricter.

It is perhaps interesting to ask in what kind of grammatical theory such data make sense. Suppose we view language as being subject to a system of ranked, perhaps weighted, constraints which can in principle be violated. One such constraint could be a leftness constraint on the verb which applies with variable force in each clause type, because other constraints, specific to each clause type might pre-empt it. The gradual decrease of clitic negation could be seen as the result of a steady strengthening of the leftness constraint. Optimality theory (Prince and Smolensky 1993) might seem like a plausible theory in this connection, were it not for the fact that it focusses on situations were the winner takes all, and the optimal form or forms are the only ones selected by the system. Preferable would be a theory in which less optimal forms are viewed as being somehow less fit, and hence less likely to occur, but in which the unlikely does not collapse into the impossible.

2. Remarks on the formal treatment of Middle Dutch double negation

2.1. Haegeman's (1995) proposal

The formal treatment of clauses with multiple exponence of negation is one of the most interesting problems that Middle Dutch confronts us with. There are several proposals around in the literature for dealing with the general issue, none of which have so far been concerned with Middle Dutch.

Haegeman's monograph on West-Flemish negation (Haegeman 1995, see also Haegeman and Zanuttini 1991) proposes that sentential negation is associated with a functional projection, NegP. Clitic negation is the head of NegP, and all other negative elements in the clause move to the specifier position of Neg, either at surface structure or at the level of Logical Form. The frequently attested pattern of negation attaching itself to the finite verb and following its every move can then be modelled using head movement. At some point, the verb picks up the negative morpheme, which then attaches to it in much the same way that tense or agreement morphology does. N-words adjoin to the Spec of Neg, and stand in an agreement relation to the negative head. This negative concord is required by a filter called the Neg-Criterion:

(6)   *NEG-criterion*

a. A NEG-operator must be in a Spec-Head configuration with a X^0 [Neg].
b. A X^0 [Neg] must be in a Spec-Head configuration with a Neg-operator.

This is modelled after a similar requirement due to Rizzi (1995) and May (1985), called the wh-criterion. NegP occurs in the vertical sequence of functional projections between AgrP and TP, as follows:

(7)   CP > AgrP > NegP > TP > VP

Here's a West-Flemish example, parsed according to Haegeman's assumptions:

(8) da Valère woarschijnlijk nie nor us en-goat
       that Valere probably not to house neg-goes
[_CP da [_AgrP Valère woarschijnlijk [_NegP [_Spec nie] [_Neg' t1 [_TP [_VP   [_PP nor us] t1] t1]]]
       [en-goat]]]

Note that the negative adverb *nie* "not" is treated as a specifier of the negative head *en*. As a specifier, it is given the status of an XP, a full phrase, in spite of the fact that it is just a single word. The main reason for not treating it as a head is that is does not move along with the verb, unlike the proclitic element *en*. In West-Flemish, the clitic element is actually optional. When it is not pronounced, Haegeman assumes that there is a zero-variant of *en* at work.

The negative expressions in the Spec of Neg form a negative `blob' which is treated as a branching quantifier, following the earlier treatment of multiple wh-questions by Higginbotham and May (1981). This means that none of the expressions in this specifier position will be within the scope of any of the others. The fact that negative concord statements can be analyzed in terms of branching

quantifiers was made earlier on in Van Benthem (1983). Semantically, this proposal makes a lot of sense. It provides us with the right sort of truth conditions. Syntactically, the proposal may be more difficult to defend, depending on the other assumptions that one is willing to make.

For West-Flemish, Haegeman assumes that the negative quantifiers must be in Spec of Neg at the level of surface structure.[11] This assumption is aimed at ruling out negative concord with elements in extraposition and elements in the verb projection raising configuration, and at predicting that negative concord is clause-bound. Since all elements standing in the concord relation must occupy the same Spec position at surface structure, concord across clause boundaries is ruled out.

For Middle Dutch, these assumptions are problematic. Negative concord in Middle Dutch can be long-distance, as the following examples illustrate:

(9)   Ic en wane niet dat te Bonivente / Ne geen so goet was tenegen tiden[12]
        I neg think not that at Bonivente /no one so good was at any time
        "I do not think that anyone was so good at Bonivente at any time"

(10) Ende wij Jan hertoghe vorghenoemt en willen niet [..] dat daer omme dese
        letteren hare cracht verliesen in neghenen van haren pointen [..][13]
"And we Jan, duke aforementioned, do not wish that therefore these texts lose their
        force in none [=any] of their points [..]"

There is also evidence that topicalization may create long-distance contexts for negative concord. Thus in the following example, the negative element causing the negative concord on the verb in the subordinate clause is topicalized. Note that the matrix verb does not bear evidence of negative concord.

(11) Ander bejach no ander ghewin/ So wanic wel dat hine hevet[14]
        other gain nor other income / so think-I that he-neg has
"Other gain nor other profit do I suppose he has"

In this respect, Middle Dutch negative concord differs from the patterns attested in many other languages, such as Serbocroatian, as described in Progovac (1994) and

---

[11] Or else to the left of Spec of Neg by an extension of the licensing scheme.

[12] From the Arthurian epic poem *Ferguut*, vss. 4608-4609.

[13] From *Oorkondenboek van Noord-Brabant tot 1312*, vol. I, p. 1079.

[14] From the animal epic *Reynaert*, vss 276-278.

West-Flemish, as described in Haegeman (1995).

Another difference between Middle Dutch and West-Flemish concerns the status of extraposed negative constituents. In West-Flemish, these may not engage in negative concord; they are restricted to cases with constituent negation. Middle Dutch however allows for concord between preverbal and postverbal material.[15] Consider the following example:

(12)   Si het oc so dat si nehebben no wif no kind: so sin si sculdech te bringhene met hem al dat si hebben[16]
be it also so that they neg-have neither wife nor child: then are they required to bring with them all that they have
"If it be the case that they have neither wife nor child, then they are required to bring along all their belongings"

In this example, the negative phrase that the negative clitic *ne* agrees with is the extraposed negative object *no wif no kind*.

Extraposed phrases are not the only problem that we face. There is also the problem of the conjoined verbs in the following example:

(13)   In sal moghen scriven no lesen[17]
I-neg will can write nor read
"I will be able to write nor read"

The verbs are conjoined by the negative conjunction *no* `nor'. Assuming that the conjunction sign cannot move by itself to Spec of Neg, we must suppose that the conjunction *scriven no lesen* has to move as a whole. But if this were actually the case, then we would expect it to occur to the left of the modal *moghen*, rather than to its right. Again we see that if such movement were to take place, it cannot be at surface structure, and only at logical form, if at all. Note by the way, that it would not help in the least to appeal to conjunction reduction here, since that would still not yield any negative phrase we could plausibly put in Spec of Neg. Indeed, full sentential coordination with *no* may give rise to negative concord as well, and does

---

[15] The same is true for Old English, cf. Haeberli and Haegeman (1995: 92). Haeberli and Haegeman assume that Old English satisfies the Neg-Criterion at LF, rather than surface structure. A similar assumption could be made for Middle Dutch.

[16] From the Statutes of the Leperhouse at Ghent, 1236, published in Gysseling 1979.

[17] From Diederic van Assenede's *Floris ende Blancefloer*, a romantic epic dating back to the 13th century.

not, as far as I can see, receive a reasonable account in any version of Haegeman's negative concord story, whether we assume movement of negative phrases at surface structure, or at logical form. Thus consider the following example from the *Diatessaron Leodiense*:

(14)   Noch sine pinen, noch sine spinnen
        nor they-neg toil, nor they-neg spin
        "They neither toil, nor do they spin"

I assume that the structure of this sentence is something like

(15)   [s noch [s sine pinen] noch [s sine spinnen]]

with NegP internal to S and S being my cover symbol for any functional projection that is desired, be it CP or AgrP or IP. There is no obvious way to move the negative conjunctions down to Spec of Neg.

      I would also like to point out that there is some direct evidence in Middle Dutch against the idea that there is an X-bar opposition between the two negative markers *niet* and *en*. In Haegeman's account, *nie*, being an occupant of the Specifier position, is a full XP, whereas the clitic element *en* is a head, Neg-0. In Middle-Dutch, however, we sometimes see that *niet* tags along with *en*, as if the two elements were adjoined.

      First of all, *niet* and *en* may merge into one word, *nin*, as we see in the following examples:

(16)   Ende alse sijs daer nin vonden, so kerden si weder te Iherusalem[18]
And when they-him there not-neg found, so returned they again to Jerusalem
        "And when they did not find him there, they returned to Jerusalem"

(17)   so lijde hi dat hi nin ware Christus[19]
        so confessed he that he not-neg were Christ
        "Thus he confessed that he wasn't Christ"

Second, besides the regular subordinate clause word order ... *niet... Verb   en-Vf...*, which is the West-Flemish pattern for complex structures in which the finite verb is preceded by a nonfinite one, and which is also the most common pattern in

---

[18] From the *Diatessaron Leodiense*, ed. C.C. de Bruin, p. 24

[19] ibidem, p 28.

Middle-Dutch, we also find the order *Verb niet en-Vf*. Recall that for such structures, Haegeman assumes that the finite verb has moved into a sentence-final Agr position, after having picked up the clitic negation. The second order shown here can only be accounted for if the verb may pick up not only the clitic negation, but also the adverb *niet*. If the adverb and the clitic may be attached to each other first by means of adjunction, we could explain the second order.

Note that in general, nothing may intervene in Dutch or in Middle Dutch between a Verb and a finite verb following it. The interruption effects which we see in Verb Projection Raising are restricted to cases where the finite verb precedes the nonfinite verbs. Given that no interruption appears to be allowed, for whatever reason, the possibility of interruption by the string *niet en* strongly suggests that they are actually adjoined to the verb, and therefore do not count as intervenors, having become part of the verb. Examples illustrating this pattern can be found in texts from all areas and periods:

(18)   Dat ics vergheten niet ne mach[20]
        That I-it forget   not neg may
        "That I may not forget it"

(19)   Dat si keren niet en mochten[21]
        That they turn not neg could
        "That they could not turn"

(20)   Dat hijt in desen leuene / Verdienen nyet en mochte te vollen[22]
        That he it in this life / Earn not neg could fully
        "That he could not earn it fully in this life"

(21)   Dat mens verbeteren niet en mocht[23]
        that one-it improve not neg-could
        "That one could not improve on it"

But if we suppose that *niet* and *en* may attach to the finite verb, we predict that they may move along with the verb to the front in verb second constructions. This

---

[20] *Reynaert*, vs. 2666. Flanders, 13th century.

[21] Melis Stoke, Rhymed Chronicle. Holland, early 14th century.

[22] Heinric van Veldeke, Sint Servaes legend. Limburg, late 12th century.

[23] Willem van Hildegaersberch, *Van den X gheboeden*. Holland, early 15th century.

prediction appears to be correct. While the usual pattern in Middle Dutch verb second constructions is like the West-Flemish pattern, namely *XP en Vf .. niet ..*, we sporadically also find the pattern *XP niet en Vf ...*, for example in

(22)   des niet en fael ic[24]
         that not neg fail I
         "I won't fail in that"

I assume that this is sufficient evidence to support the claim that *niet* may optionally attach to the finite verb, presumably as a result of an earlier adjunction to the negative clitic *en*. The idea that *niet* and *en* are maximal and minimal projections respectively is not directly compatible with this possibility, assuming with Chomsky that maximal adjoins to maximal, and minimal to minimal, and never the twain shall meet. I might add that if we abandon the idea that *niet* is a maximal projection, we may also shed some light on another interesting property that it has, namely that it does not topicalize. In this respect, it patterns with other heads, not with phrasal categories. Note that other adverbs may topicalize, whether they be temporal, local, or focus adverbs such as *ook* or *zelfs*.

2.2. N-words as Polarity Items: A Hybrid Theory

There is a currently popular alternative to the Haegeman-Zanuttini approach to negative concord which proceeds from the assumption that the negative expressions of negative concord structures are negative polarity items, with existential import, akin to indefinite polarity items such as *anything* or *anybody*. As a matter of fact, there are several proposals which in some way incorporate this idea.

There is the Laka-Progovac proposal (Laka Mugarza 1990, Progovac 1994), which assumes that there is one negation operator, with negative force, and that all other negative words are merely formally negative, but actually negative polarity items dependent on that operator. This proposal requires a certain amount of abstractness for sentences with n-words but no word meaning *not*: sentences like *Nobody did nothing*. The idea here is that licensing may proceed through an empty operator. The presence of this operator is signalled by the n-words, which could be said to license it. This yields a perfectly circular licensing relation.

Related to this is Ladusaw's (1992) idea that negation is not necessarily an operator, but a feature of clauses, which is licensed by the presence of n-words. The n-words are again thought of as polarity sensitive indefinite existentials, which by

---

[24] From *Mariken van Nieumeghen*.

14

virtue of licensing a Neg feature, license themselves. Ladusaw's theory is more powerful than the Laka-Progovac theory, in that it does not rely on a localisable, albeit zero, operator. Sentential coordination with *nor*-type conjunctions could be handled in terms of a feature springing forth from the conjunction, in a GPSG-type account, but would almost certainly run into difficulties with negative operators, which, whether they be in COMP or INFL, or some dedicated Neg-position, would be too low to c-command the
conjunctions.

Another proposal, due to Van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993), as well as David Dowty (1994), assumes that n-words are ambiguous between a negative meaning and an existential interpretation. A sentence like *Nobody did nothing* is analyzed on a par with *Nobody did anything*. The leftmost n-word is negative in force, and licenses the polarity sensitive use of the other n-words.[25]

Ladusaw (1992) argued against the ambiguity thesis by observing that the class of n-words tends to behave as a homogeneous group. If we postulate lexical ambiguity, shouldn't we find languages where some n-words happen to only have negative meanings, and others only existential meanings? I do not know whether there are such languages or not. Middle Dutch isn't one. But Middle Dutch has some unusual properties which lend support to the thesis that n-words might be polarity items. Negative concord usually involves a morphologically defined class of n-words. But in Middle Dutch, n-words may appear in downward- entailing contexts that are not defined by n-words. For instance, they may appear in a relative clause restricting a universal quantifier just as negative polarity items such as *any* or *ever*:

(23)   God die makere es alre dinc / Dat nie was of lijf ontfinc[26]
        God who maker is of everything /That (n)ever was or received life
        "God who is the creator of all things that ever were or sprung to life"

They may also appear in relatives restricting superlative expressions, again just as many negative polarity items.

(24)   Dat hi die beste ridder was / Die noit quam in sconinx hof[27]
        That he the best knight was /That never came in the kings court
        "That he was the best knight that ever came to the king's court"

---

[25] Another version of the ambiguity thesis can be found in Zanuttini (1991), where it is argued that Italian *nessuno* is a negative quantifier meaning `nobody' in declarative clauses, but a polarity item meaning `anybody' in questions.

[26] From the *Lancelot*-compilation.

[27] From *Ferguut.*

We may find them in clauses introduced by *zonder* "without":

(25)   sonder nemmermeer daer jeghen te comene[28]
         without never   there against to come
         "without ever coming against that"

and in clauses introduced by *eer* "before", as well as comparative clauses:

(26)   Ic sal mi doden met enen knive / Eer ic nemmer doe sconinx wille[29]
         I will me kill with one knife / ere I never do the-king's wish
         "I will kill myself before I do the wish of the king"

(27)   Ick belove u [..] meer dan ghi noyt hadt van vrienden oft magen[30]
         I promise thee more than thou never hadst from friends or relatives
         "I promise you more than you ever had from friends or relatives"

In all of these cases, we would not want to say that the n-words license the expression of negation in any way. The proper translation of *noyt* in the above example, for instance, is *ever*, not *never*. This would seem to rule out Ladusaw's theory, at least for Middle Dutch, and indeed any theory which links n-words directly and necessarily to the expression of negation.

In connection with this observation, let us take note of the fact that in the above examples of triggered polarity-sensitive n-words, we do not have the clitic element *ne/en*. This is to be expected if the n-words in this examples are not negative expressions themselves, but nonnegative polarity items instead. Had they been negative quantifiers, we would expect the presence of a clitic, but if they are synonyms of *ever* or *any*, a negative clitic would not, of course, be expected. The absence of clitics, then, is an extremely valuable criterion in determining the proper status of n-words.

The situation is complicated somewhat when we consider the situation in Romance. In Italian, negative-polarity status of *nessuno* `nobody', which is restricted to interrogative clauses, goes hand in hand with the absence of clitic negation (Zanuttini 1991: 115ff.), just as we would expect:

---

[28] Oorkondenboek Noord-Brabant tot 1312, Vol. I, p 1076.

[29] From *Ferguut.*

[30] From: *Mariken van Nieumeghen.*

(28) Non ha telefonato nessuno
      neg has called   n-body
      "Nobody called"

(29) Ha telefonato nessuno?
      has called   n-body
      "Did anybody call?"

but in Spanish, the clitic negation marker *no* may be present regardless of whether *ninguno* has negative or existential force (Victor Sánchez Valencia, personal communication):

(30) No llamó ninguno
      neg called n-body
      "Nobody called"

(31) ¿No llamó ninguno?
      neg called n-body
      "Did anybody/nobody call?"

I take this as evidence that we should consider the status of n-words in questions as an issue which is in principle separate from the status of n-words in other polarity sensitive domains.

Another problem which I have nothing to say about is why it is that in Middle Dutch, as far as I have been able to ascertain, the negative-polarity use of n-words is not found in questions, but only in subordinate clauses.

One final remark: As negative concord disappeared in standard Dutch, the n-words emerged as bearers of negation, but no other polarity items did. If n-words are viewed as polarity items, not directly associated with negation, this is not necessarily what you would expect to occur. Why the n-words? At this point the ambiguity thesis may help: If n-words were ambiguous in the Middle Dutch period between negative quantifiers and existential quantifiers, the disappearance of concord would leave the negative-quantifier use intact.

3. Conclusion

There are a great many systems of negative concord, all showing numerous family resemblances, but also showing variation in almost every corner. By collecting more and more data on the various systems we can try to eliminate theoretical possibilities, and this is what I have been trying to do. Every new piece of data will allow us to

wipe the slate a little cleaner.

The Middle Dutch facts suggest that n-words may be ambiguous between a negative-existential and an existential reading. This leads us to the conclusion that negative concord is sometimes the same phenomenon as polarity sensitivity and sometimes a different phenomenon.

References

Benthem, Johan van. 1983. "Five easy pieces." *Studies in Modeltheoretic Semantics*, ed. by Alice G.B. ter Meulen, 1-17. Dordrecht: Foris.

Burridge, Kate. 1993. *Syntactic Change in Germanic. Aspects of Language Change in Germanic with Particular Reference to Middle Dutch.* Amsterdam & Philadelphia: Benjamins.

Dowty, David R. 1994. "The Role of Negative Polarity and Concord Marking in Natural Language Reasoning." *Proceedings from Semantics and Linguistic Theory IV*, ed. by Mandy Harvey & Lynn Santelmann, 114-144. Ithaca: Cornell University Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics.

Gerritsen, Marinel. 1982. "Word Order Change in Dutch Imperative Clauses: The Interaction Between Contextual and Syntactic Factors." *Papers from the 5th International Conference on Historical Linguistics*, ed. by A. Ahlquist, 62-73. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Gysseling, Maurits. ed. 1977. *Corpus van Middelnederlandse teksten (tot en met het jaar 1300). Reeks I: Ambtelijke bescheiden.* 's Gravenhage.

Haeberli, Eric and Liliane Haegeman. 1995. "Clause Structure in Old English: Evidence from Negative Concord." *JoL* 31.81-108.

Haegeman, Liliane. 1995. *The Syntax of Negation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Haegeman, Liliane & Raffaella Zanuttini. 1991. "Negative Heads and the Neg Criterion." *TLR* 8.233-252.

Higginbotham, James & Robert May. 1981, "Questions, Quantifiers and Crossing." *TLR* 1.41-79.

Hoeksema, Jacob. 1994. "On the grammaticalization of negative polarity items." *Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, ed. by S. Gahl, A. Dolbey & C. Johnson, 273-282. Berkeley: Berkeley Linguistics Society.

Horst, Joop M. van der & Marijke J. van der Wal. 1979. "Negatie-verschijnselen en woordvolgorde in de geschiedenis van het Nederlands." *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* XCV.6-37.

Jespersen, Otto. 1917. *Negation in English and other Languages.* Copenhagen: A.F. Host.

Jong, Halbe de. 1991. "Het hulpwerkwoord `Do' in Shakespeare's oeuvre." Unpublished paper, University of Groningen.

Meersman. A. de. 1983. *De structuur van de bijzin in de 'Grote Enqueste' (1389). Woordvolgorde en andere syntactische verschijnselen in 14de-eeuws Brabants.* Dissertation, University of Ghent.

Labov, William. 1972. "Negative Attraction and Negative Concord in English Grammar." *Lg* 48.773-818.

Ladusaw, William A. 1992. "Expressing Negation." *Proceedings of the Second Conference on Semantics and Linguistic Theory*, ed. by Chris Barker and David Dowty, 237-259. Columbus: The Ohio State University.

Laka Mugarza, M. Itziar. 1990. *Negation in Syntax: On the Nature of Functional Categories and Projections.* Dissertation, MIT.

May, Robert. 1985. *Logical Form, its Structure and Derivation*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT-Press.

Paul, Hermann. 1959. *Deutsche Grammatik.* Band IV. 5th pr. Halle: VEB Max Niemeyer Verlag.

Prince, Alan & Paul Smolensky. 1993. *Optimality Theory. Constraint Interaction in Generative Grammar*. Unpublished manuscript, Rutgers University.

Progovac, Ljiljana. 1994. *Negative and Positive Polarity: a Binding Approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rizzi, Luigi. 1995. "Residual Verb Second and the Wh-criterion." *Parameters and Functional Heads. Essays in Comparative Syntax,* ed. by Adriana Belletti & Luigi Rizzi. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stoett, F.A. 1923. *Middelnederlandsche spraakkunst. Syntaxis.* 5th printing of the 3rd revised edition of 1923. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Tieken-Boon van Ostade, Ingrid. 1987. *The Auxiliary* Do *in Eighteenth-Century English. A Sociohistorical-linguistic Approach.* Dordrecht: Foris.

Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. 1992. "Syntax." *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol. 1, *The Beginnings to 1066*. ed. by Richard M. Hogg, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wouden, Ton van der & Frans Zwarts. 1993. "A Semantic Analysis of Negative Concord." *Proceedings from Semantics and Linguistic Theory III*, ed. by Utpal Lahiri and Adam Zachary Wyner, 202-219. Ithaca: Cornell University Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics.

Zanuttini, Raffaella. 1991. *Syntactic Properties of Sentential Negation.* Dissertation. University of Pennsylvania.