Regional variation in Jespersen’s Cycle in Early Middle English

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Introduction

• In this talk we investigate the onset of a change in negation patterns in the history of English.

• We carried out an exhaustive corpus study of texts from this period.

• Based on the regional variation we find, we ascribe the very early stage of the change to Scandinavian influence.
Jespersen’s Cycle

• Named by Dahl (1979).

“The history of negative expressions in various languages makes us witness the following curious fluctuation: the original negative adverb is first weakened, then found insufficient and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional word, and this in its turn may be felt as the negative proper and may then in course of time be subject to the same development as the original word.” (Jespersen 1917: 4)
JC in French

- Stage 1: Old French *jeo ne dis* ‘I don’t say’

- Stage 2: Standard French *je ne dis pas* *(pas < ‘a step’)*

- Stage 3: Colloquial French *je dis pas*
JC in English: **Stage 1**

- Stage 1: Verb is preceded by negative particle *ne* – the pattern inherited from OE.

(1) **swettore ping ne mizte be**

‘there could be no sweeter thing’

(corp145selt.tag)
Stage 2: *Ne* is reinforced – optionally at first – by a form such as *nawt, noht, naʒt* < OE *náwiht* ‘nothing’, normally placed after the verb.

(2) *he ne mai noʒte loke tilward her lyʒt*

‘he may not look toward her light’

(edincmct.tag)
JC in English: Stage 3

- Stage 3: Ne is lost, leaving *nawt/noht/naʒt* as the sole default marker of negation (> MnE *not*).

(3) *for godd aght noght gif yam mercy*

‘for God ought not to give them mercy’

(cotvespcmat.tag)
Regional variation?

- All three stages co-exist in Early ME.

- Wallage shows (2005, 2008) that the change from stage 2 to stage 3 (i.e. loss of *ne*) takes place during the ME period – but difficult to draw conclusions on regional variation using the PPCME2 (Kroch & Taylor 2000a) (2005: 68, 208).

- Ingham (2006: 90) shows for Late ME that *ne* is retained later in Southern and Midland texts than Northern texts.

- Iyeiri (1992: 78–85) mentions possible bias towards Stage III in Northern texts, on the basis of verse.

- Will we find similar regional variation by looking at Early ME?
LAEME

• LAEME (Laing 2013–) = A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English 1150–1325 (but contains a few texts 1325–1350).

• A 650,000-word lexico-grammatically tagged corpus of texts spanning the Early ME period.

• Approximate date and place of origin has been assigned to most texts.
Investigating JC

• Our search included all texts that (a) were dateable, (b) were localisable and (c) contained relevant tokens.

• Occurrences of stages 1, 2 and 3 in each text were counted.

• We are only interested in clausal negation, in which negation carries scope over the entire clause, rather than constituent negation using negative pronouns, negative adverbs, negative quantifiers, or constituent *not*. 
The development of constituent negation differs from that of clausal negation, in accordance with Jack’s law:

A general rule, common to all the texts that I have examined, is that [stage 2] is not normally used in clauses containing other negative forms [...]. The group of negative forms normally incompatible with [stage 2] does not, however, include the conjunction ne ‘nor’, for [stage 2] is freely used in clauses introduced by or containing this conjunction [...]. (Jack 1978: 299)

We counted contexts with ‘nor’ separately, in case it had any effect.
Contraction

• In stages 1 and 2, instead of *ne* one may find contracted prefix *n*- on some common verbs with initial V, /h/, /w/: 

(4) *hy nuste ware hy were*

‘they didn’t know where they were’

(corp145selt.tag)

• Contracted tokens were also counted separately.
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1150-1199</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200-1249</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1250-1299</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1300-1350</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A line graph shows the percentage change over time, with markers indicating different stages and periods.
Maps

STAGE 1

STAGE 2

STAGE 3

1150–1199
Analysis

• Stage 3 is virtually non-existent during the first three time periods.

• When stage 3 appears in the fourth time period, it is mostly in the North and the East Midlands – areas with little or no representation in earlier periods.

• Therefore, the dramatic increase in stage 3 between the last two periods may not be real, as the change may have happened far earlier in these areas.

• Either way, it is clear that by the end of the Early ME period the North and the East Midlands were far more advanced in the change from stage 2 to stage 3 than the rest of England.
Results: Jack’s Law

• Recall Jack’s Law:

A general rule, common to all the texts that I have examined, is that [stage 2] is not normally used in clauses containing other negative forms [...]. The group of negative forms normally incompatible with [stage 2] does not, however, include the conjunction *ne* ‘nor’, for [stage 2] is freely used in clauses introduced by or containing this conjunction [...]. (Jack 1978: 299)

• We find that not only stage 2, but also stage 3, are significantly less common \( (p < 0.01 \) for the three later periods) in clauses introduced by or containing ‘nor’.

• But effect size (Cramér’s \( V \)) is low – never above 0.25.
Results: Contraction

- Contracted tokens were counted separately.

- When these are included, the picture changes (a bit).

- Contraction favours stage 1 over stage 2; $p < 0.05$ for the three later periods.

- But effect size (Cramér’s $V$) is again low – never above 0.12.
## Results

*(incl. contraction)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Stage 1 (Uncontracted)</th>
<th>Stage 2 (Uncontracted)</th>
<th>Total n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1150–1199</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200–1249</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1250–1299</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1300–1350</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>523</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Graphical Representation

The graph shows the percentage of examples across different stages and periods, with distinct markers for each stage (Stage I, Stage II, Stage III). The y-axis represents the percentage of examples, and the x-axis denotes the year range from 1150 to 1300.
Scandinavian influence

• Hypothesis: the change from stage 2 to stage 3 was catalysed by Scandinavian influence.

• Rationale: the area where Stage 3 is found first and most corresponds to the 9th–10th century Danelaw.

Map of Danelaw by Hel-hama, from Wikimedia Commons:
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:England_878.svg
Sociolinguistic situation

• Norse speakers and (Old) English speakers co-existed at the community level.
• Townend (2002): Norse and Old English were mutually intelligible. Situation of “receptive multilingualism” (Braunmüller 2007).
• 11th-12th centuries see shift from Norse to English, with imposition (Townend 2002: 202-210) in the sense of Winford (2005).
  – Evidence: transfer of core vocabulary without phonological assimilation.
Negation in Old Norse

• Eyþórsson (2002):
  – JC stage 1 is prehistoric: earliest records have both preverbal *ni/ne* and postverbal -a(t) (stage 2)
  – *ni/ne* became optional and disappeared between C7\(^{th}\)-C9\(^{th}\) (stage 3)
  – C9\(^{th}\)-C11\(^{th}\): postverbal *eigi* is innovated (stage 3)
  – Generally, -a(t) is only common in Old Icelandic, not Old Norwegian or Old East Norse, and only ever used with finite verbs, and lost by C14th.
• Stage 3 transferred to English via imposition?
What type of contact?

• Breitbarth & Walkden (2013): in general, short-term contact involving adult L2 acquisition is likely to lead to Stage 2 > 3 of Jespersen’s Cycle (‘simplification’ in the terms of Trudgill 2011).
  – Evidence from Low German, French, and Dutch.
• Trudgill (2011: chapter 2) argues that contact between Norse and English was not the right type to lead to simplification.
• We don’t need simplification for English, but…
Time lag?

• Objection: isn’t this period too late to be positing Scandinavian influence?
  – Townend (2002): shift occurred in C11th-C12th

• Answer: Yes, but we have almost no texts from the relevant area for the period preceding this.
The spread of Norsified English

• Thomason & Kaufman (1988): Norse features spread from Lindsey to Fourboroughs and Norfolk, then north

• Map from Thomason & Kaufman (1988: 338)
### Specific texts (early)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peterborough Chronicle</td>
<td>1100-1149</td>
<td>Norfolk</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ormulum</td>
<td>1150-1199</td>
<td>Fourboroughs</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- From areas with early and (comparatively) heavy Scandinavian settlement
- Literature on Scandinavian features in Ormulum is extensive
  - Other Norse-derived features (e.g. new third-person pronouns) used, but not categorically
## Specific texts (late)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merton 248 Hand C</td>
<td>1300-1350</td>
<td>Lindsey</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interludium de Clerico …</td>
<td>1300-1350</td>
<td>Lindsey</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cursor Mundi Hand B</td>
<td>1300-1350</td>
<td>Yorkshire</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballad on Scottish Wars</td>
<td>1300-1350</td>
<td>Co. Durham</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- *Interludium* localized to Axholme, NW Lincs (Laing 1997), and Merton 248 Hand C is close
- Cursor Mundi already discussed by Iyeiri (though different MS) – all above 50% Stage 3
In the Early Middle English period, Jespersen’s Cycle was more advanced in Northern and East Anglian than in Southern and West Midlands texts. This may be due to contact with Scandinavian – specifically, imposition of Stage 3 through acquisition of English by Norse speakers during the process of language shift.
Thank you for listening!

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  – Ans van Kemenade
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  – The creators of LAEME
References


