

Negation in the history of German before 1350

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1 Introduction

1.1 Negation as a topic and the aim of this dissertation

Negation has been studied at many levels of linguistic analysis. It has been discussed on the morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels (Haegeman 1995: xi), and is associated with a number of related lexical and phonetic issues. It can be looked at both synchronically and diachronically.

The scope of this dissertation is restricted to sentential negation in the history of German, from the emergence of the earliest texts until 1350. Reasons for this choice of cut-off point will be presented in section 3. "Sentential negation" is the negation of a whole clause or statement. This must be distinguished from "constituent negation" where only one of its constituents is negated (Behaghel 1923: 67), as in "this coat is not red, it is orange". This may be differentiated again from the use of "negative indefinites" such as *niemand*, *nichts*, *nie*, which are arguably not negators at all, especially in languages (like Old High German) exhibiting Negative Concord, which will be discussed later (section 3.1, and see e.g. Zeijlstra 2004: 191-241).

The main focus of the dissertation is on the synchronic analysis of a corpus of negative clauses drawn from texts of this period. The composition of this corpus is discussed in section 2. In analysing this corpus my aim is to examine patterns in the variation of forms found in this period and to discuss their theoretical implications for the diachronic

changes that have taken place. The traditional literature on the subject has so far concluded that much of this variation is free, i.e. random, and accounts of patterns in the preference of one form over another have been limited and primarily based on possible lexical and semantic influences (e.g. Behaghel 1923, Paul 1975). It is my view that it is less random than previously thought.

This dissertation will be split into five sections. This introductory section will also look at linguistic theories influencing the analysis of negation. In the second section I will discuss the methodology used to assemble my corpus. The third section will present a brief overview of the accepted history of sentential negation in German, and section 4 will discuss the analysis of the corpus and of accounts of variation in the transitional period given in the literature and the theoretical implications of this analysis for the development of negation in German. In the final section a summary of the key findings will be presented and, insofar as is possible, conclusions will be drawn.

1.2 Typology and negation

Negation has developed in a parallel fashion in various languages, including German, English and French. In all these languages the original marker of sentential negation came to be strengthened by another item, which was then reanalysed as the marker of sentential negation itself, with the original marker disappearing. In many languages the shift has been from a basically preverbal marker to a basically postverbal one, although not always: in Greek and Latin the entire cycle happened

preverbally. Jespersen (1917) was the first to formalise this recognition, presenting it in terms of a cycle whereby negation repeatedly shifts from one position to the other over time. Modern English, where the negative particle is arguably primarily preverbal, is an example of a language that has come full circle. This cycle has also been observed in less well-studied languages such as Arabic and Berber (e.g. Lucas 2007). The variety of languages in which this change appears to have happened independently suggests that there are language-internal reasons for its occurrence, as it cannot be explained by mutual influence and structural borrowing.

Later typological work, such as that of Greenberg (1966), positing tentative observational universals, observed that Jespersen's finding correlated well with various other linguistic variables such as the positions of the subject, the object and the verb relative to each other (S[ubject]O[bject]V[erb], SVO, VSO etc.), and that languages could be classified according to these patterns. Dahl (1979) and Dryer (1988), on the basis of samples of hundreds of languages, were able to make various generalisations about the position of negative markers, e.g. that in SVO languages they most commonly occur between the subject and the verb (Dryer 1988: 95). Although they posited various principles to account for these tendencies, their conclusions remained tentative.

Lehmann (1974: 12) went further, simplifying most typological features of word order into a binary opposition (VO vs OV) governing other positional properties of languages. Vennemann (1974: 347) stated this as the Principle of Natural Serialisation: in a "consistent" language, operators will

either all precede or all follow their operands. He even made the claim that this basic “setting” is causal in the move from pre- to postverbal negation, as a change in this parameter will cause other features of the language to change in order to return to a typologically consistent state (ibid.: 370). These views remained controversial due to the large number of languages that did not fit the pattern, and were not widely accepted (see e.g. Dahl 1979: 91).

It is not the aim of this dissertation to examine the arguments for and against typological theories in detail. For our purposes it is sufficient to recognise that the diachronic study of negation has long been bound up with theories of typology in language change. It remains to be seen whether a typological explanation is most appropriate for the change(s) that took place in German.

2 Methodology

2.1 *The methods of this study*

The study is based on a corpus of negated clauses collected from the texts available in the Bibliotheca Augustana Germanica. This is a free online resource, provided by the University of Augsburg, which presents a selection of texts from the history of the German language. Due to practical constraints, the corpus has been limited to those negative clauses found in the first 500 lines of each author's output. This also helps to reduce the chances of a particular text or author exerting a disproportionate influence on the results. Where multiple texts are available by the same author, they have been used in chronological order if more than one was needed.

In my introduction I stated that this dissertation would focus on sentential negation only. For the sake of simplicity and safety, I have only included clauses that do not include a negative indefinite (reflexes of *niemand*, *nie*, *kein*, *nirgendwo* etc.); the corpus thus consists solely of clauses that are negated by *ni/en/ne* alone, by *niht* alone or by both in combination.

The period I am investigating spans seven centuries, and a synchronic analysis of the whole is therefore hardly representative of any point in time. However, my analysis is primarily relative in focus, discussing and comparing the occurrence of certain forms within various subsets of the data to give a rough picture of tendencies over the whole transitional period. If we assume that the general direction of change is constantly *ni*

> *en ... niht* > *niht* over this period, a safe assumption to make (see section 3), it is reasonable to state that certain subsets of the data are more or less advanced along this pathway than others based on the figures obtained from a comparative synchronic analysis. However, I have provided data divided into centuries in order to illustrate this overall progression. A table listing the 47 texts used, their date of composition and region of origin and the number of clauses they contribute to the corpus is provided in Appendix 1.

2.2 Problems of corpus research in OHG and MHG texts

The study of the history of the German language through corpus research poses a number of problems that are difficult or impossible to overcome. I will briefly outline the most significant of these, along with the measures I have taken to alleviate them where possible.

2.2.1 Medium

Unlike in the modern period, the only records we have of German before 1350 are in written form. It is therefore impossible to study the patterns that were present in the spoken language, which is usually considered to be primary (Keller 1978: 17). This is likely to be less of an issue in older texts, before a tradition of literacy and the associated linguistic conservatism had emerged. These older texts are likely to be closer in form to speech. Later MHG texts, however, are influenced by existing orthographic and stylistic traditions, even when these may no longer accurately represent the spoken language. In addition, written texts, by their nature, tend to be more considered and exhibit different patterns of

sentence structure; for example, hypotactic, co-ordinated sentences are more common in writing, as opposed to the paratactic structures more commonly found in speech. For the purposes of the current study, therefore, any conclusions will be limited to written German. Nevertheless, it can be assumed with a reasonable degree of confidence that the trends observed in written German are following developments that had already taken place in the spoken language.

The versions of texts now available to us are often not the originals but copies by scribes, and in many cases a whole team of scribes worked on a single copy (Young/Gloning 2004: 46). Because no single system of orthography had been established in the period in question, considerable alterations were made in transcription. As well as wide dialectal variation, different house styles existed, and individual scribes often had their own preferences (Keller 1978: 244). These problems are clearly illustrated in texts such as *Iwein*, where multiple manuscripts exist, written using very different orthographic conventions. Sometimes these differences are visible even within a single manuscript. This problem is impossible to avoid, but can be taken into account; one scribe's *niht* may well represent the same spoken word as another's *nicht* or *nit*.

2.2.2 Text selection and genre

When studying the earliest recorded periods of the German language, we do not have the luxury of being able to select from a wide range of texts. Often only one or two texts survive from the earliest centuries.

Furthermore, these texts are quite homogeneous in nature, mostly verse rather than prose and sacred rather than secular (Keller 1978: 149-50).

It is generally preferable to use prose texts; poetic/verse texts are problematic because of considerations of metre and rhyme (Betten 1987: 4). Scribes and authors may have favoured certain forms in certain situations because of these prosodic considerations. For example, *niht* was a stressed syllable whereas *ne/en* was not, and the two occupied different positions in the clause in relation to other elements. Rhymes are also found using *niht* that would have been impossible with *ne/en*. In Ulrich von Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet*, for example, we find the following (lines 345-6):

*der junge sprach "des hab ich nît.
bereitent mich, dêst an der zît ...*

This is clearly only possible with *nît* (*niht*), and at a time (~1200) when it is by no means dominant. A further problem is a general tendency towards conservatism in poetic texts: in the *Buch von guter Speise*, for example, the older form *en/ne* is only found accompanying *niht* in the poetic introduction; in the prose body of the text, *niht* is used alone.

The ideal solution to these problems would be to exclude poetic texts from consideration; however, this would eliminate the majority of available early German texts. The only viable prospect is therefore to include such

texts but to watch for the possibility that sentence construction is conservative or has been influenced by metre or rhyme.

2.2.3 Edition

The language in many modern editions of Middle High German texts has been normalised. This normalisation is not restricted to orthography; it also affects morphology and even syntax. This is largely due to Karl Lachmann and his followers, who developed a standard language based on the works of a few writers of the period on the assumption that there existed a "*Dichtersprache*" which has been obscured in transcription (Young/Gloning 2004: 114-9). One of the things this affects is the expression of negation: Leitzmann, for example, in his edition of Hartmann's *Erec*, chose to include the preverbal *en/ne* in all cases (Lehmann 1978: 102). Regardless of whether the *Dichtersprache* these editors were trying to create actually existed, it presents corpus researchers with a problem by confronting us with texts that are one step further removed from the originals. For the present study, seeking patterns, it is particularly problematic because of the possibility of circularity. Normalised texts have been altered to conform to the stipulations of a standardised MHG grammar which is itself based on empirical analysis, and this has probably made certain patterns more pronounced while concealing others.

The editors of Old High German have generally also been selective: the original manuscripts of OHG texts did not usually include spaces between words (Saenger 1997: 9), but modern editions do so for convenience of

reading. This is less problematic than normalised MHG editions, but can still be misleading; for example, it creates the (possibly false) impression that OHG *ni* was an independent word or at least a clitic rather than an affix (see section 3.1 for discussion).

Where the Bibliotheca presents more than one version of a text, direct transcriptions of manuscripts have been used in preference to normalised editions. In all other cases it has been considered a necessary evil, as the scope of this dissertation makes further selectivity difficult to achieve.

2.2.4 Language contact

The courtly tradition of MHG chivalric texts borrows heavily from French, and to a lesser extent Dutch. This is true of syntax as well as the lexis, and is particularly relevant because a parallel change was occurring in negation in French. Texts that are direct translations, such as the *Rolandslied*, from the French *Chanson de Roland* via Latin, are likely to be more susceptible to this influence. For example, postnominal adjectives are found in the *Rolandslied* instead of the prenominal adjectives normally found in German: *er was ein helt lobesam* “he was a praiseworthy hero” and *er was ein helt guote* “he was a good hero” (lines 120, 124). Although it is likely that this was used for stylistic reasons and does not represent a widespread popular development, it is still structural borrowing from French, where adjectives most often follow the noun they modify. Classical Latin itself, in which negation was preverbal, is also a possible conservative influence, especially in academic and ecclesiastical texts. Contact can thus interfere with the expression of negation in two ways:

Latin may have a conservative influence, and Old French has the potential to cause either conservatism or progression, although the change to bipartite negation that took place in French occurs later than in German and so conservatism is more likely.

As with the problem of genre, language contact can and must be taken into account when analysing the corpus.

3 An overview of sentential negation in German

3.1 Old High German

In early OHG texts, such as the *Hildebrandslied*, sentential negation is always marked by a clitic particle, *ni* (Jäger 2005: 227). In other Germanic languages, there are examples of clauses where the cognate particle is clause-initial and separate from the verb, e.g. in Old English:

- 1) *Nō hē wiht fram mē flōdypum feor fleotan meahte*
 NEG he thing from me waves-DAT-PL far swim could
 “He could not swim very far at all away from me on the waves”
 (Beowulf, ~750 AD, lines 541-543; Klaeber 1922)

And in Gothic:

- 2) *ni bi allans izwis qipa*
 NEG to all you-GEN speak
 “I do not speak to all of you”
 (Wulfila’s Bible, ~348-383 AD, John 13:18; Streitberg 1919)

Since the change from independent item to clitic is far more common cross-linguistically than vice versa (Hopper & Traugott 1993), these examples suggest that the particle was not yet a clitic in Proto-Germanic; however, there are no such attestations in OHG, and it can therefore be unambiguously categorised as a clitic.

This particle is used in all instances of negation, sentential or non-sentential, and even when accompanying a negative indefinite such as *nohhein* (equivalent to modern German *kein*) or *nîoman* (*niemand*). In this respect German was a language exhibiting Negative Concord (Jäger 2006: 41). For sentential negation *ni* is used alone, although it is sometimes accompanied by an item such as *uuht* “a small, inconsequential thing”, cognate with English “whit” and “wight” (OED). *Niuuiht* is also increasingly found in this function, and represents the result of a process of univerbation: it derives from *ni* + *io* + *uuht* (“not + ever + thing”). An early example of this, from the *Wessobrunner Gebet* (~790), line 6:

- 3) *Do dar niuuiht ni uuas enteo ni uuenteo*
 When there NEG-ever-thing NEG was end NEG limits
 “When there was (nothing,) no ending and no limits”

The (*ni*)*uuht* item followed the same syntactic pattern as modern German *nicht* in terms of where it could appear in the clause, although it is never attested as being used alone to mark sentential negation in the earliest texts; it always co-occurs with *ni*. Its role is thought to have been primarily “strengthening” (Lockwood 1968: 207), adding emphasis to the negation of the clause as a negative polarity item, although in the very earliest texts it is only used with transitive verbs and can therefore be viewed as an argument of the verb. Until as late as ENHG it can also be used in the sense of modern German *nichts* (“nothing”), and, as in example 3, there is often ambiguity. The situation in most of the OHG

period thus corresponds to Stage I of Jespersen's Cycle (Jespersen 1917: 4).

In all OHG texts, the co-occurrence of *ni* and *niuuiht* is definitely the exception rather than the rule, with the rule being *ni* alone. Other forms, such as *nalles* (< *ni alles*), are also found (Behaghel 1923: 70), but this is generally used in specific contexts to mean "but not, and not, not at all" (Schützeichel 1995: 220¹). Other "strengtheners" such as *drof* can be found in the same role as *(ni)uuiht*, but rarely: *drof* was only used occasionally, and only in the writings of Otfrid (Lockwood 1968: 208).

Towards the end of the OHG period, in the writings of Notker, the presence of the emphatic *nieht* (< *niuuiht*) is noticeably more common. Furthermore, it is used in contexts where it would have been impossible earlier, such as with intransitive verbs where the *uuiht* element cannot possibly have retained its original semantic value. One example from the 11th-century *Memento mori*:

- 4) *ir* *ne* *mugen* *is* *niewit uber* *werden*
 you NEG can it NEG over become
 "you cannot escape it"

In such contexts it is no longer an argument of the verb, but is a negative polarity item or (increasingly) an unmarked negator. This indicates that its reanalysis and grammaticalisation were complete.

¹ In Jäger 2006: 62.

At the same time, *ni* has become *ne*, indicating a phonetic weakening, perhaps to schwa (Lockwood 1968: 207). Furthermore, this particle no longer occurs as an independent word; instead it is generally found as a verbal proclitic in words like *neuuâren* “were not”, *nehâbet* “has not/does not have”. As will be argued in section 4, this clitic may also be analysed as an affix; in any case, it is difficult to draw firm boundaries between the two (Hopper/Traugott 1993: 7). This apparent difference between periods, however, may be partly due to a decision on the part of editors of OHG texts to include a spatium between the particle and the verb; in the earliest manuscripts, word spacing in general is often unclear or non-existent, as recognition of syllables for oral reading was considered more important than recognition of words (Saenger 1997: 9).

3.2 Middle High German

The developments in late OHG foreshadow what is to come in the MHG period. Here *ne* is not always presented as an affix. However, its occurrence as a standalone particle is very rare after 1200. Other common forms include *en* and simply *n*, and this range of forms are often found as enclitics as well as verbal proclitics, cliticising especially to the ends of subject pronouns (*ichn mag* “I-NEG can”) and adverbs (*sône var ich* “So-NEG go I”). As in OHG, their position in the clause is invariably directly before the verb.

The co-occurrence of *ne* and *niht*, bipartite negation corresponding to Stage II of Jespersen’s Cycle (Jespersen 1917: 4), is more common in MHG than in OHG, although Jäger (2006: 93) claims that many traditional

accounts (e.g. Behaghel 1923: 71) overstate its prevalence. In my corpus (see section 4) it accounts for roughly a quarter of all negated clauses. Its more frequent incidence indicates that *niht* had lost its emphatic value and had become fully grammaticalised as a negative particle (Lockwood 1968: 207). This conclusion is supported by the fact that in MHG *niht* and its variants are found bearing negation alone, i.e. without *en/ne*. This is attested as early as *Der Ältere Physiologus* (~1070):

- 5) *daz ter fient nihet uerstunde, daz er gotes sun uuare*
 that the enemy NEG understood that he God's son was
 "that the Devil did not understand that he was God's son"

From here it gradually gains ground. The use of *ne* alone to mark sentential negation had virtually disappeared by 1300 (Dal 1966: 164); in the *Mainauer Naturlehre* (~1300) only bipartite negation and negation with *niht* alone are to be found.

3.3 Early New High German and beyond

By 1350, widely considered to be the start of the ENHG period (e.g. in Young/Gloning 2004: 161), negation with *ni(c)ht* alone is almost ubiquitous. Texts such as *Das Buch von guter Speise* and *Meister Albertus' Lehre* preserve only a few instances of bipartite negation and none (in my corpus) without *ni(c)ht*. The *Ackermann aus Böhmen* (1401) contains no instances of *ne/en* at all (Valentin 1977). During the 16th century, *ne/en* disappeared entirely except in a few dialects (Ebert *et al.* 1993: 426). In modern standard German, sentential negation is always marked by *nicht*.

3.4 The transitional period

The most interesting period is the transitional period between the very earliest texts (almost exclusively with *ni*) and texts from 1350 onwards (almost exclusively with *nicht*). During this intermediate period both of these forms were used, as well as the bipartite form. Few attempts have been made to analyse the patterns of usage found during this period. The most notable of these are found in Behaghel's *Deutsche Syntax* (1923) and Paul's *Mittelhochdeutsche Grammatik* (1975), both of which present a number of conditions/constraints governing the cases in which more conservative forms are likely to occur rather than *ni(c)ht* alone. This conditioning is presented as primarily lexical and semantic, involving co-occurrence with certain verbs and clauses carrying certain meanings. Both accounts, however, concede that the variation found in texts of the transitional period is to a large extent free.

The importance of such patterns is clear. If it can be established in which contexts the bipartite construction initially became grammaticalised and in which contexts conservatism was more likely, this will provide evidence for theories of the cause of the change that may compete with the general and unsatisfying concept of typological consistency or "drift" (e.g. Vennemann 1974) as a motivating factor in itself.

4 Analysis of the variation in the transitional period

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous section, traditional accounts (e.g. Paul 1975, Behaghel 1923) have presented a part of the picture as regards the variation found during the transitional period, both describing a series of contexts in which more conservative forms are more likely to be found. I shall concentrate on some of the most significant of these (4.2 to 4.6), then consider an example of the opposite tendency: a context in which *en/ne* is frequently absent and *ni(c)ht* alone more common than in the bulk of the data (4.7).

The corpus consists of 777 clauses. The table below, displaying the distributions in each 100-year period in my corpus, gives a clear overview of the development through the transitional period: the preverbal particle declines and disappears as *nicht* emerges and becomes predominant, with the bipartite form enjoying its highest popularity around 1200.

	Stage I (<i>ni</i>)	Stage II	Stage III (<i>nicht</i>)
750-850	90.0%	10.0%	0.0%
850-950	88.2%	11.8%	0.0%
950-1050	81.5%	18.5%	0.0%
1050-1150	45.7%	38.3%	16.0%
1150-1250	10.2%	30.0%	59.8%
1250-1350	0.9%	13.5%	85.6%
Overall	16.3%	25.0%	58.7%

The overall figures in the bottom row of this table will be used as a benchmark against which to compare the results for various subsets of the data.

4.2 In clauses with the meaning 'unless'

Subjunctive clauses giving the sense "unless" are highly characteristic of MHG (Keller 1978: 308). These clauses usually have V1 or V2 word order, with the finite verb negated and in the subjunctive, and are not introduced by a conjunction. An example:

- 6) *ern* *wære* *dâ* *ze* *stete* *mort*
 he-NEG were there to spot dead

"unless he wanted to be dead where he stood" (*Lanzelet*, 60)

In the literature it is often stated that such clauses tend to be conservative as regards the form of sentential negation used (e.g. Dal 1966: 164, Lockwood 1968: 208, Behaghel 1923: 73, Jäger 2006: 91).

This is also true of the data in my corpus:

	Stage I (<i>ni</i>)	Stage II	Stage III (<i>nicht</i>)
"Unless"-clauses	75.0%	15.0%	10.0%
Overall	16.3%	25.0%	58.7%

The figures for this subset are considerably different from the pattern exhibited by the corpus as a whole. However, it can be argued that this context, which is extremely specialised, does not in fact represent

sentential negation; indeed, in modern German the meaning “unless” is expressed by the conjunction *es sei denn*, and it is not obligatory for the verb in the “unless”-clause to be negated. As it does not develop into an instance of modern German *nicht*, this context is not relevant to the general development under investigation. It is likely that during the transitional period *en/ne* was specifically used to differentiate “unless”-clauses from ordinary V1/V2 subjunctive clauses and did not mark sentential negation in this context.

We must in any case be cautious with these figures; Keller also states that the decline in these “unless”-clauses so characteristic of MHG paralleled the decline of the *en/ne* particle (1978: 310), and it is true that the majority of my examples of such clauses date from 1200 or earlier. In its place, variants of *es (ne) sei denn* began to emerge to introduce “unless”-clauses. If the construction with *ne* alone is rarer towards the later end of the period covered by my corpus, then it stands to reason that the figures in the table will be skewed towards conservatism.

4.3 With noch

Behaghel (1923: 71) suggests *noch* (meaning “nor”) as another context where a more conservative form of negation is common. This is supported by the data in my corpus: this subset shows a significantly more conservative distribution than is found in the corpus as a whole.

	Stage I (<i>ni</i>)	Stage II	Stage III (<i>nicht</i>)
With <i>noch</i>	51.9%	25.9%	22.2%
Overall	16.3%	25.0%	58.7%

A difficulty with *noch* is that it can serve to conjoin clauses but can also serve to conjoin clause constituents (as with Modern German *weder ... noch ...* “neither ... nor ...”). It is therefore particularly difficult to tell whether we are dealing with sentential or constituent negation.

- 7) *ich enkán iu niht gezeigen diu lêhen noch diu eigen*
 I NEG-can you NEG show the loan nor the own
 “I can show you neither what is borrowed nor what is owned”
 (*Spervogel I/Herger*, VII.I.1.3)

In the above example it is unclear. This is mainly due to the nature of items meaning “nor”, which leave a part of the sentence not overtly expressed. Only where the verb is different in the two conjoined segments can we be sure we are dealing with sentential negation:

- 8) *die ich vermîden niht wil noch enmac*
 which I avoid NEG want-to nor NEG-can
 “which I neither want to nor am able to avoid”
 (*Heinrich VI/Minnelieder*, III.2)

This can be expressed more paratactically as “which I do not want to avoid and which I cannot avoid”, just as (7) can be expressed as “I cannot

show you what is borrowed and I cannot show you what is owned”.

Because of their ambiguous status, then, conclusions about sentences including *noch* can be tentative at best.

(8), incidentally, is a rarity: an example of a clause in which both Stage I and Stage III forms are used. In such cases it is more normal for the form to be the same for both verbs. The disparity in this example may be due to prosodic considerations.

4.4 With specific verbs

One of the most frequently suggested contexts for conservatism is with the modal verbs *mügen*, *können*, *dürfen*, *suln*, *wellen*, *türren* and *lân* (Dal 1966: 164, Ebert *et al.* 1993: 426). Since modal verbs as a class often differ from other verbs in significant ways – in German and English, for example, their paradigms are highly irregular, and in English they do not require an auxiliary “do” for negation – this prediction seems to be a reasonable one. However, it is not borne out by the results from my corpus.

	Stage I (<i>ni</i>)	Stage II	Stage III (<i>nicht</i>)
With modals	11.8%	26.6%	61.6%
Overall	16.3%	25.0%	58.7%

The pattern for this subset is not significantly different from the overall distribution, and, if anything, seems less conservative. Jäger (2006: 91)

comes to a similar conclusion on the basis of her own data: “there is no clear preference for modals to occur with simple *en/ne*”.

Another individual verb that is often mentioned as being negated in a conservative fashion is *wissen*, and my corpus supports this assertion:

	Stage I (<i>ni</i>)	Stage II	Stage III (<i>nicht</i>)
With <i>wissen</i>	56.5%	26.1%	17.4%
Overall	16.3%	25.0%	58.7%

Why this should be is uncertain. It may simply be a preference for phonetic simplicity acting with this verb, as with the English collocation “dunno” for “don’t know” and the Dutch *kweenie* for *Ik weet het niet*. In any case, the number of instances of this verb in my corpus is small (only 23 of 777) and so it is unlikely to be representative of, or have had a significant influence on, the general development.

4.5 In subjunctive clauses

Paul (1975: 144) states that dependent subjunctive clauses not introduced by a conjunction will tend to use a more conservative form of negation. However, Behaghel (1923: 73) challenges this, stating that *niht* is often found, and that the cases where it is not are usually fixed collocations such as *entaete*, *enwaere*. In my analysis of the data I have not chosen to distinguish clauses containing these partly lexicalised fixed collocations from other clause types, as they still constitute a subset of the data and occur extremely frequently. Furthermore, as section 4.4

shows, I found few clear correlations between verbs used and forms of negation used and thus little evidence to support Behaghel's challenge.

In my corpus there is a slight tendency towards conservatism in subjunctive clauses in general. However, one factor influencing this result is the inclusion of the "unless"-clauses mentioned above in this subset; the distribution without including these is presented below.

	Stage I (<i>ni</i>)	Stage II	Stage III (<i>nicht</i>)
With subjunctive	10.8%	16.9%	72.3%
Overall	16.3%	25.0%	58.7%

This pattern is in fact more modern than that of the data as a whole. So even including Behaghel's fixed collocations in my analysis there is no particular tendency towards conservatism with verbs in the subjunctive.

4.6 Ni(c)ht preceding en/ne + verb

Behaghel (1923: 84-5) states that there is a tendency for *en/ne* to be retained when *niht* precedes the verb (typically in VFinal clauses), as in clauses such as the following example from my corpus:

9) *und* *warumbe* *siz* *nicht* *entuont*

and why they-it NEG NEG-do

"and why they do not do it" (*Der wälsche Gast*, 320)

However, in my corpus, *en/ne* is present in 35.2% of such clauses and omitted in the remaining 64.7%. This ratio of roughly one clause including *ne/en* to two without is similar to that present in the bulk of the corpus. In addition, Jäger (2006: 94) found no evidence for this assertion in her own data, a corpus of three MHG texts written relatively close to one another in time, finding that there were more examples where *en/ne* was dropped than where it was retained.

Jäger (2006: 91-3) does, however, find a correlation between increased use of *ni(c)ht* and VFinal word order. In my corpus this correlation also exists, albeit to a very limited extent, without any great difference from the distribution found in the corpus overall:

	Stage I (<i>ni</i>)	Stage II	Stage III (<i>nicht</i>)
VFinal clauses	14.2%	24.6%	61.2%
Overall	16.3%	25.0%	58.7%

Jäger suggests that this preference may be due to Negative Attraction (Jespersen 1917: 58) or Neg-First (Horn 1989, Haspelmath 1997)², a principle according to which sentential negation should be marked as early in the clause as possible for reasons of parsing. This does not explain the preference for *niht* in VFinal clauses, however, as the usual position for this particle is directly before the verb (and thus directly before *en/ne*), not any earlier in the clause. The principle itself is also at odds with what actually happened to sentential negation in German – it moved from

² In Jäger 2006.

preverbal to postverbal position, causing a definite delay in parsing in most sentences – and therefore, in my view, its influence should not be overestimated. Furthermore, Dahl (1979: 93), in his typological study of negation across 240 languages, is critical of the existence of such a principle: “if this is to be interpreted as being independent of [a general tendency for negatives to precede the verb], there is little support for such a thing.”

4.7 With prefixed verbs

As we have seen, most of the traditional accounts of negation during the transitional period have focused on contexts in which older forms were likely to be found. However, this teleological viewpoint (which assumes that *niht* was already the predominant, unmarked form, or on its way there) gives us little insight into possible reasons for the change from *ni/ne/en* to *niht* alone; to understand this change we need to find consistent contexts in which *niht* was favoured or in which *ni* could no longer be used.

One example of the latter is briefly mentioned in Behaghel (1923: 84). He notes that *en* is only rarely found where it would appear next to a presyllable/prefix. However, he does not elaborate on this. The phenomenon is picked up again in Lehmann (1978: 101) where he states that preverbal *en/ne* was first omitted in environments where it would co-occur with a weakly stressed prefix (such as *ge*, *be*, *ver*, *zer*, *er* and *ent*). He claims this as evidence for Jespersen’s statement ascribing loss of preverbal negation to weak stress of the negative particle and states that

“the syntactic change leading to relocation of the negative marker can be attributed to a phonetic cause”.

Jäger (2005: 239) is critical of this. She cites a number of examples in which the prefix and the negative marker do co-occur (glosses are my own):

- 10) *Inti nigileitest unsih in costunga*
 And NEG-lead us into temptation
 “And lead us not into temptation” (*Tatian* 68, 13)

- 11) *Mêr ne-bedarf er*
 He NEG-needs more
 “He does not need more” (Notker’s Psalms 9, 35).

My corpus also has such examples:

- 12) *poum ni kistentit ênîhc in erdu*
 tree NEG stands any in earth-DAT
 “Not a single tree in the world stands” (*Muspilli* 51)

- 13) *wir ne verlazen diu ettelichiu zit*
 we NEG leave you any-DAT time
 “we will not leave you at any time” (*Memento mori*)

Otfrid's writings contain a particularly high proportion of such examples, and seem to exhibit the opposite tendency: the particle *ni* is actually contracted when occurring with the prefixes *int-* and *ir-* to *nint-*, *nir-*, e.g. *nintneinent* (Coombs 1976: 79).

However, the statistical distribution of examples over the whole corpus speaks for itself.

	Stage I (<i>ni</i>)	Stage II	Stage III (<i>nicht</i>)
With prefixed V	14.3%	8.3%	77.6%
Overall	16.3%	25.0%	58.7%

A significant divergence in favour of more modern forms can thus be seen in this subset. Moreover, to claim disproof by counter-example is unreasonable, as due to all the factors mentioned in section 2 (from regional preferences to confusion on the part of individual scribes) a variety of forms is inevitable. During this transitional period we can therefore only speak of tendencies and not hard-and-fast rules. In addition, most counter-examples stem from earlier texts: the four given above are from before 1200. Otfrid's apparent tendency to contract the negative particle with certain prefixes may be a phonetic one: the other instance of contraction found is with *ist*, producing *nist* (Coombs 1976: 79), and since all these instances are before <i> this suggests that Otfrid may have used contraction to represent a phonetic assimilation and reduction of two consecutive <i> allophones. Since the inclusion of the

spatium in OHG manuscripts was generally rare, the apparent absence of one in these instances is not significant.

It is my view that the tendency to drop the preverbal particle with prefixed verbs is not necessarily a purely phonetic one as suggested by Lehmann (1978); there is probably a significant systemic/morphological component involved. Specifically, over the course of time the OHG clitic *ni* was reanalysed as a prefix, probably because of a combination of its phonetic “weakening” and its consistently preverbal placement. This theory is supported by the data in that, as mentioned in section 1, the vast majority of the examples of *en/ne* found in the MHG period are attached to the verb without an intervening spatium. Also in its favour is the fact that the clitic > prefix development is common cross-linguistically (Hopper/Traugott 1993). Once prefixal, this element was perceived as competing with the prefixes *be*, *ge*, *ver* etc. This is in line with the situation in Modern German, where such elements never co-occur even when there is a reason to do so in terms of grammatical consistency, e.g. when forming past participles: **gebesiegt* is ungrammatical. Since only one of these items could be prefixed to a verb, and speakers had recourse to an alternative means of negating clauses (*niht*), they naturally chose the latter strategy in cases where there would otherwise be conflict.

As mentioned in 3.1, it is difficult to form a clear definition of the clitic-prefix distinction. However, for this purpose the important distinguishing criterion is that the clitic was not perceived as a prefix and therefore not in competition with other prefixal elements, whereas the prefix was.

This context for the preference of *niht* may also have had consequences for the development of negation in general, since prefixed verbs constitute an important percentage of my corpus as a whole (10.8%). It is a reasonable assumption that, when confronted with two (or possibly three) ways of doing the same thing, speakers will naturally opt (consciously or subconsciously) for one which is universally applicable rather than one which is ungrammatical in certain contexts, all other things being equal. This subset of the data may therefore have had an important influence in the preference of *niht* alone over bipartite negation and *ne/en* alone.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the analysis

The analysis of my data has produced results that differ from what would be expected on the basis of such accounts as Behaghel (1923) and Paul (1975). In particular, I found little support for the assertion that the type of verb used affects the form of negation; the distribution of the three possible forms of negation in modal verbs was in line with that found in the data as a whole (see 4.4), and only *wissen* exhibited a distinctly different pattern. Certain other suggestions made in the literature, such as a preference for *en/ne* alone in “unless”-clauses (4.2) and with *noch* (4.3), have corresponded to tendencies in my data, but I have argued that in these two cases we may not be dealing with sentential negation at all. This conclusion is supported by the fact that modern German clauses introduced by *es sei denn* and clauses including *weder ... noch ...* constructions do not necessarily include *nicht*. These peripheral cases cannot, therefore, be taken as representative of the general development evident in the history of German negation.

In section 4.6 I also found no clear support for the tendency suggested in more modern accounts such as Jäger (2006), where a correlation between verb position and form of negation was suggested, with VFinal clauses likely to be negated by *nicht* and V1/V2 clauses by *en/ne*. However, as her finding was based on a narrower time period and a more detailed analysis of a few prose texts than mine, the two studies may not be directly comparable.

The most significant tendency in my data was for *en/ne* to be omitted in clauses with a prefixed active verb. In section 4.7 I have argued that this is due not only to a phonetic preference for avoiding two consecutive unstressed syllables, as suggested in Lehmann (1978), but also to a morphological conflict between the preverbal negative marker *en/ne* and the prefixes themselves, arising from the reanalysis of *en/ne* as a prefix rather than a clitic. I have tentatively suggested that the preference for *niht* alone with such verbs may have contributed to a general overall preference for *niht* alone as marker of sentential negation, given the high frequency of prefixed verbs.

5.2 Limitations and areas for further study

As I have mentioned, this corpus analysis can be used only for a limited, specific purpose. Since it covers seven centuries and at least two recognised periods of the history of the language (OHG and MHG), it cannot be taken to represent the synchronic state of German at any given point in time. Studies such as Jäger (2006), which focus specifically on individual periods and in greater detail, are more appropriate for that purpose. My analysis only illustrates general tendencies over the entire transitional period and is teleological in focus: it assumes the starting point to be preverbal *ni* and the end point to be modern German *nicht*.

I have also chosen to focus specifically on certain statements made in the literature, and have not investigated all such claims. One suggestion not investigated, for instance, is that clauses containing *ander*, *anders*, *mêre*, *baz* or *fürbaz* may omit *niht*. The number and specificity of these claims

means that covering all of them is outside the scope of a dissertation such as this one. I have instead selected a few commonly occurring statements to analyse.

Furthermore, I have chosen to leave out of consideration a few properties of *ni* and *niht* that might influence the choice between them. In examples such as *Daz elliu dinch ir nature und orden behaltent und der man niht* ("that all things keep their nature and order except man", *Der wälsche Gast*, line 158), the whole predicate is omitted in the second, conjoined clause. Such a contrastive sentence is not possible using *ni*, as *ni* is a clitic and cannot occur without the verb; with *ni* expressing sentential negation, this sentence would have to be constructed in another way.

Whether *ni(c)ht* in fact has any intrinsic advantage over *ni* is a question that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Later commentators didn't seem to think that it did: "*Die freie beweglichkeit welche der früheren sprache durch das flüssige ne eigen war, ist uns jetzt abhanden gekommen. Die schwerfällige, dem verbum nachschleppende nicht, das die verneinung erst nachträglich bringt, wäre uns besser gesparen.*" (Dittmar 1874: 220³) This statement echoes statements made more recently about a universal typological preference for Neg-First (see section 4.6), a principle that German seems to have contravened, and this is another possible avenue of study.

³ In Lehmann 1974: 106-7.

5.3 Final conclusion

The tendencies I have found in analysing my data are just that: tendencies. I observed no absolute rules of distribution, and indeed the literature on the subject has never yet been able to find any such rules. Müller (2001: 246-248⁴), for example, carried out a thorough examination of negated modal verb constructions in the MHG prose *Lancelot* and came to the following conclusion on the subject of the use or lack of *en/ne*: “*Man wird ihr Auftreten als freie Variation akzeptieren müssen, auch wenn es das Linguistenherz schmerzt.*” Given the myriad of house styles, personal preferences, copyings and recopyings of manuscripts and probably even individual confusion over which form to use, it is not surprising that there is a considerable degree of variation.

Despite this, a number of tendencies are apparent. Chief among these in my data is the omission of *en/ne* when negating prefixed verbs. I have suggested that *en/ne* came to be analysed as a prefix itself and was felt to be in competition with other prefixes, thus encouraging the preference of the alternative form of negation with *niht* alone and contributing to causing the overall shift from *ni/ne/en* to *niht*.

I make no claim, of course, that this is the sole cause of the whole cycle; for one thing, it does not help to explain how *niht* became grammatically acceptable as a marker of negation in itself, nor does it give us any clue as to why *ni* changed to *en/ne* or why its function changed from independent item to prefix. However, it does provide us with part of an

⁴ In Jäger 2006: 95.

alternative to the view that the change was motivated by typological consistency alone (Vennemann 1974), which seems improbable as it is not adequately empirically supported (see for example Dahl 1979). In my view, it is most likely that the change that occurred in the marking of sentential negation, from preverbal *ni* to Modern German *nicht*, was in fact caused by the co-occurrence of several such factors. According to this view, the change that took place was a multifactorial phenomenon.

7977 words (including appendix)

Appendix 1: Texts used and corpus composition

All texts used are from the Bibliotheca Augustana Germanica, available online at <http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana/> (last accessed 25th August 2007). Dialects are given for texts before 1150; in these texts, at least in the online versions, dialectal features tend to be more pronounced and are therefore more relevant to my analysis.

Name	Date	Dialect	No. of clauses
Hildebrandslied	770-80	Bav.*	4
Wessobrunner Gebet	~790	Bav.	2
Kasseler Gespräche	~810	Bav.	2
Straßburger Eide	~841	RFr.	2
Muspilli	~870	Bav.	12
Georgslied	~880	Alem.	2
Ludwigslied	~881-2	RFr.	3
Boethius (Notker)	950-1022	Alem.	10
Psalms (Notker)	950-1022	Alem.	17
Der Ältere Physiologus	~1070	Alem.	10
Memento mori	~1070	Alem.	14
Annolied	~1080	MFr.	17
Himmel und Hölle	~1090	Alem.	8
Namenlose Lieder	c12th	Bav.	4
Das Jüngste Gericht	1060-1127	Alem.	11
Tobias (Pfaffe Lamprecht)	~1140	MFr.	17
Alexander (Pfaffe Lamprecht)	~1150	MFr.	9

Name	Date	Dialect	No. of clauses
Kaiserchronik	~1150	Bav.	15
Lieder (Der von Kurenberg)	~1150-70	Bav.	7
Rolandslied	~1170	-	15
Tristrant (Eilhart)	~1170-80	-	17
Spervogel 1	~1180	-	14
Spervogel 2	~1190	-	27
Minnelieder (Hartmann)	<1188-96	-	11
Kreuzzugslieder (Hartmann)	~1188-97	-	11
Iweinlieder (Hartmann)	~1200	-	10
Der heimliche Bote	~1180	-	9
Minnelieder (Heinrich VI)	~1184-86	-	6
Nibelungenlied	1190-1200	-	32
Lanzelet	~1200	-	29
Tristan (G. v. Strassburg)	~1205-10	-	22
Lieder (W. v. d. Vogelweide)	~1198-1205	-	30
Parzival (W. v. Eschenbach)	~1200-1210	-	26
Der wälsche Gast	1215-16	-	103
Carmina Burana	~1230	-	15
Roßarzneibuch	~1240	-	5
Vrowen dienst	1255	-	20
Lieder (K. v. Würzburg)	1225-87	-	3
Sprüche (K. v. Würzburg)	1225-87	-	9
Welt Lohn (K. v. Würzburg)	<1260	-	4
Meier Helmbrecht	<1282	-	20

Name	Date	Dialect	No. of clauses
Welt Chronik	>1272	-	27
Sangsprüche (Süezkint)	~1280	-	18
Mainauer Naturlehre	~1300	-	18
Nonne von Engelthal	~1340-46	-	51
Das Buch von guter Speise	~1350	-	23
Meister Albertus' Lehre	~1350	-	36

Key

Alem.	Alemannic
Bav.	Bavarian/Austrian
EFr.	East Franconian
MFr.	Middle Franconian
RFr.	Rhenish Franconian

* Although preserved only in a manuscript in Old Saxon, it is thought that the original was in Bavarian.

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