

Sentential Negation in Middle High German: A Variationist Approach

In 1917 Jespersen developed a three-stage cycle which attempts to describe the diachronic evolution of negation in many languages of the world (Jespersen, 1917). Although the diachronic development of sentential negation in the history of the German language follows Jespersen's Cycle, all three stages simultaneously exist in Middle High German (ca. 1050-1350). Sentences can be negated through a preverbal mono-negative negation particle (*-n/-ne/en*) which can be cliticised to a host (either proclitically or enclitically) or can stand independently, as in (1). Sentences can be negated through the use of a bipartite negation particle consisting of both a preverbal and postverbal element (*ne/en...nicht*), as in (2), or sentences can also be negated through the use of a free (i.e., unbound) postverbal negator (*nicht*) as in (3).

- (1) (i) *Peter sprach, ich enweiz wer er ist* (Stage I: Preverbal Proclitic)
 'Peter said I NEG know' who he is'
- (ii) *in weiz* (Preverbal Enclitic)
 'I NEG know'
- (iii) *ich ne weiz wâ dîne brüdere sint* (Preverbal Indep.)
 'I NEG know where your brothers are'
- (2) *swez der menische nicht enweiz* (Stage II: Bipartite Particle)
 'Who(m)ever humans NEG know'
- (3) *des het er nicht gesprochen* (Stage III: Postverbal Neg.)
 'of that had he NEG spoken'

The present study seeks to answer whether this variability among different functionally equivalent negation variants can be explained by examining internal or external factors. Although some researchers have argued that these three negation types are in "freie Variation" 'free variation' (Müller 2001: 248), other researchers suggest that internal factors such as the type of verb used (e.g., *wizzen* 'to know, *mugen* 'to may') and the clause type (e.g., main vs embedded clause) may be explanatory factors (Behagel 1918: 231; Blatz 1970: 648; Bergmann, Moulin & Ruge 2011: 166). However, to date, no studies have carried out a variationist analysis of MHG negation using the appropriate inferential modelling.

Using the largest available MHG corpus (*Referenzkorpus Mittelhochdeutsch* Reference Corpus of Middle High German'), the present study employs variationist methods to comprehensively examine the factors (internal: verb and clause type) (external: MHG dialect and time) in attempt to systematically explain the linguistic variability. Given that the dependent variable (i.e., negation type) had three levels (stage I, II or III), a multinomial logistic regression analysis, which included the text/manuscript as a mixed/random effect, was run. Although the model found the predictors to have no significant effect, the data indicate that stage I (i.e., the mono-negative preverbal *ne*) was the most frequently used negation type.

Using the same explanatory factors, an additional multinomial regression analysis was run to examine the clitic variability regarding the realization of *ne* (proclisis vs enclisis vs independent). The preliminary analysis indicated that proclisis is more frequent than enclisis and that the free standing *ne* is more frequent than being encliticized. Moreover, enclisis of the negative particle was found to be more probable when a pronoun is used as the host, as in (1ii).

In short, the present study suggests that MHG sentential negation follows the diachrony of Jespersen's Cycle, while at the same time emphasizes that the shift from one stage to another does not happen instantaneously. The study also suggests that, assuming all linguistic variability does exhibit "orderly heterogeneity", better predictors need to be examined and incorporated into a statistical model if systematic structure is to be found.

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