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INVOLUTION OF NEGATIVE CONCORD IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECT

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Abstract

The paper studies the history of multiple negation in English. The historical development of negation markers follows Jespersen's Cycle and includes five completed stages that cover the transfer from the [+NC] model in Old English via [-NC]/[+NC] in Middle English and Early Modern English to [+NC] in Present-Day English. The loss of negative concord in the Early Modern English period was due to a change in the deep structure of the propositional negation. Northern dialects, where contacts with the Scandinavian languages were the most intensive, are a possible source of accelerating the emergence of the rule for non-use of multiple negation in English. However, in the Early Modern English period there is a shift in the leaders of language change, the proponents of the rule being men occupied in professional activities at the royal court in London, especially those who tried to improve their social status, so the involution of multiple negation is a language change 'from above'. The process was completed in the newly created English standard before the end of the 17th century, although in some non-standard variants, multiple negation continues to be the norm even at present. Prescriptive grammars of the 18th century, therefore, required the use of forms that had already become the usual means for negation marking for the speakers of "standard" English in the previous two centuries.

Keywords: multiple negation, negative concord, Early Modern English, Jespersen's Cycle, language change 'from above'.

1. Introduction.

Modern English grammars consider negative concord, i.e. the use of two or more negative elements without change in the meaning (when the propositional negation is expressed by a single negative particle *not*), ungrammatical. It was the prescriptive grammars of the 18th century that first recorded this rule (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 1982). However, the changes in the grammatical rules for expressing negation have been ongoing from the earliest documented texts. Like any other Germanic language, Old English was characterized by the wide use of negative concord, it was possible to use (more than) two negative elements (Zeijlstra defining them as those that introduce a negative context (2004, p. 45)) in the same sentence, they did not exclude each other, but jointly conveyed the negative meaning.

The polynegativity of the Old English sentence was achieved by using the negative element *ne*. The etymology of this particle goes back to the Indo-European root **ne* ‘complete or partial negation’ (cf. Old Norwegian, Old Frisian, Old High German *ne*, Gothic *ni*). All negative words include morpheme **ne*, but the particle is not used independently, it is not separated from the word, since in the pan-Indo-European language system it was a root morpheme. Later, however, another emphatic negative particle *naht* (*noht*) derived from the former negative pronoun *nāwiht* ‘nothing’ that was reanalysed from the indefinite pronoun to a negative marker. By the end of the period, negation is more often expressed using a double negation construction *ne... naht* (*noht*). Emphasizing negative particles were added to the verb when there were no negative elements in the sentence other than the verb.

At the beginning of the Middle English period, the system for expressing propositional negation remains polynegative (multiple), and as in the Old English period includes several negative elements. In the Late Old English and Early Middle English period, the main negative element was the adverbial particle *ne*, but after *not* becomes the principle negation marker, the multiple negation gradually disappears, although previously particle *ne* was used with different negative elements (*nolde*, *nahwar*, etc.). So, the deep structure of negation undergoes a shift from Old English where NegP that was used to express sentential negation and the piling of negative operators at the level of NegP with head Neg led to the negative concord. By Middle English, *not* is becoming already a specifier of NegP and well-established both within bipartite negative structures and increasingly as a lone negator (Willis, 2016, p. 467). In other words, the modern standard is characterized by the [-NC] model, Old English is the language of [+NC], Middle English and Early Modern English allowed free variation of the two models, i.e. Middle English and Early Modern English were [-NC] / [+NC] languages.

2. Literature Review.

Despite the fact that multiple negation is one of the central problems in the history of the English language, repeatedly covered both within the framework of formal grammatical theories, beginning with Kroch (1989), including Haegeman’s account of sentential negation within the Government and Binding theory (1995) and Ingham minimalist approach to negative concord (2013), the work of Nevalainen and her colleagues within the variationist theory of linguistic change (Nevalainen, 2000, 2003; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003), and a comprehensive study of negation by Mazzon (2016), or recent studies in constituent negation (Mönkkönen, 2022), there is a need for an informed study of the factors that led to the disappearance of this phenomenon from the standard English language.

3. *Aim and Objectives.*

Thus, we consider it relevant to study the development path of negative concord in the Early Modern English period as a linguistic change initiated by internal, structurally motivated factors. The *aim* of the paper is to study the interaction of internal, external, and extralinguistic factors replacing the main model of negation actualization in the Early Modern English sentence.

The *objectives* include:

- to recap the historical development of negative concord in English;
- to analyse sociolinguistic information about the leaders of language change in Late Middle English and Early Modern English;
- to define the role of the mobile middle class in adapting the new negation model in the southern standard.

4. *Methodology.*

A mixed methodological approach to historical data is used. The texts studied for this research are taken from the Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence that contains 4970 personal letters by 666 writers running text from the years 1410–1681. The letters present to the extent possible a wide picture of the literate social ranks of the time (PCEEC, 2006).

5. *Results.*

The idea of cyclic realization of negation in the sentence was first put forward by Jespersen in 1917. The Jespersen cycle is based on the idea of slow diachronic changes in the form and position of the main negation marker in the sentence and includes a series of stages common to most languages (1917). Out of the six such stages highlighted by Jespersen, the development of negation in the English sentence includes the completed five stages and the unfinished stage 6. In the period between the second and fourth stages that lasted from Late Old English through Early Modern English, multiple negation was allowed in the language [+NC]. It is worth noting that multiple negation is not only a binomial structure of propositional negation, the existence of which in English was relatively short-lived. Multiple negation is closely related to the syntax of non-affirmative indefinite pronouns and adverbs in a negative sentence (also known as negative polarity elements). Jespersen believed that the existence of multiple negation is associated with the cycle of changes in the realization of negation (1917), in other words in a language, multiple negation is possible provided that the main negative element is phonetically short; multiple negation is lost if the main negative marker is phonetically significant.

In terms of modern syntactic theory, the relationship between multiple negation and a phonetically brief negative element is explained using X'-theory. In a language, multiple negation is allowed only when the propositional negative element is the head of a Negative Phrase (NegP). If the negative element is used in the position of the NegP Specifier (Spec NegP), multiple negation is not used (Rowlett, 1998, pp. 87–89), that is, multiple negation is inherent in languages where there are so-called pre-finite negative elements like the Russian *net*. When, according to the Jespersen cycle, such an element is lost, multiple negation gradually emerges. The development of propositional negation in English and German fully confirms this theory: both languages now use post-finite elements *not* and *nicht*.

In the Middle English period, the nature of negation corresponds to the third stage of the Jespersen cycle, a typical model for actualization of negation having the following structure Neg + V + Neg. Multiple negation, however, is not mandatory. In addition, there

are examples of the use of negative polarity elements already in the Middle English period, for example:

(1) *These iij. supposiciouns or reulis ben so openli trewe, that no man hauyng eny quantite of resoun mai deneie hem (Recock, CMRPV).*

Prose and poetry of the 14th century show significant variation between the northern and southern dialects. Multiple negation is gradually losing ground after the loss of the *ne* pre-finite particle, and in the north this process began earlier than in the south, which may be due to the close and prolonged linguistic contacts with the Scandinavian languages. The use of negative polarity elements in the northern texts of the 14th–15th centuries is 30% of all contexts (Ingham, 2006, p. 90), for example:

(2) *Yef any be of grete herte and wyl noht be buxum, ouþir prud, ouþir ani greuching make aigain haly religiun, ouþir þe cumandement (The Rule of St. Benet., CMRPV).*

In the texts of southern dialects, the use of such elements is only 3%, multiple negation prevails (Ingham, 2006, p. 90). The language of the settlers from Scandinavia was characterized by the gradual elimination of multiple negation, or they may have already lost it at a time when there were no prerequisites for the loss of a negative *ne* particle or multiple negation in the Old English language. Communicating in English, these settlers extrapolated grammatical structures from the Scandinavian languages where negation was expressed by an adverbial element rather than a Negative Phrase with the *ne*-head. This situation has contributed to a corresponding linguistic change in the area of intensive linguistic contacts.

In the 15th century, the gradual loss of multiple negation began, the adverbial element being enough to label the sentence as negative. Thus, multiple negation in the 15th century in the letters of the Paston family is 20% or less, except for the letters of William I, where the share of sentences with two or more negative elements is 60%, which gives grounds to consider his speech archaic: the number of sentences with multiple negation in his letters is significant even in comparison with the texts of the Early Middle English period (Iyeiri, 2007, p. 259).

Until the end of the 16th century, the marking of propositional negation using several negative elements falls out of use in the speech of the educated people, instead the elements of negative polarity, for example, *any* or *ever*, become the norm in negative sentences. Long before this, the main propositional negative element *ne* almost disappeared and in the 15th century, it is hardly used without additional negative elements. In the Late Middle English period, one or more negative quantifiers may mark a sentence as negative in the absence of *ne*.

Rowlett (1998) associates the elimination of multiple negation with the transition from a language with a negative element as the Head of a Phrase to a language with a negative element in the Spec position. As for the preservation of *ne*, the proportion of sentences with this negative element does not exceed 30%, the highest percentage being recorded in the southern and central dialects. This is 4 times higher than the proportion of sentences with *ne* in the north, thus confirming the conclusions of Frisch that *ne* was an obsolete form already in the second half of the 14th century (Frisch, 1997). Consequently, it is possible that there is relationship between the loss of *ne* and the rise of elements of negative polarity that supports Rowlett's theoretical calculations.

In the Early Modern English period, the elimination of multiple negation continues, and in parallel a model of propositional negation with one negative element and, if necessary, several negative polarity elements develop. Multiple negation lasts the longest in writing in constructions like *neither... nor*, e.g.:

(3) *...I trust I nether haue, nor neuer shall, make fraction of in the lest scruple (Elizabeth Tudor, 1566, PCEEC).*

Multiple negation disappears from simple sentences in the 16th century, but persists much longer in composite connecting structures (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2003). Until the end of the 17th century, almost all simple sentences are used with elements of negative polarity, while more than 20% of connecting structures continue to be used with multiple negations.

Most authors of the 16th century use both models of negation, for example:

(4) ... *and the olde proverbe ys not for nought which sayeth, 'Youe maie lye longe ...'* (Paget 1505, PCEEC)

(5) ... *and hereupon haue appointed commissioners to mete with the French who shall not conclude any thing preiudicial to the treaties* (Paget 1505, PCEEC).

Elements of negative polarity in negative sentences in the 15th century are rare. However, Nevalainen (2003) recorded in the first half of the 16th century a statistically significant difference between the speech of courtiers, residents of London and the population of the rest of England: the royal family and courtiers use the model of negation with one negative element most of all during the 16th century, but the difference gradually levelled off by 1600. Thus, there is a change in the leaders of linguistic change in comparison with the Middle English period.

Consequently, at the beginning of the 16th century, when the change only starts in the London dialect in the speech of courtiers the process is in the middle phase, and in the future, it is the royal court that leads the change by the middle of the 16th century. However, this is relevant for male speakers only. Interestingly, Queen Elizabeth I's preferences for forms of negation are exactly the same as those of her courtiers. In 90% of cases, the Queen prefers the new form, which meets the tendency to reduce the number of double negation forms by the members of the royal court back in the days of her father, King Henry VIII.

The disappearance of multiple negation may also be related to the level of education of the speakers, and not just the social status or the fact of living at the court. Sir Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth I's minister, for example, uses the old form more often than any courtier in the Queen's immediate circle (Nevalainen, 2003, p. 138).

There is a significant difference between the rate of double negation disappearance from the speech of men and women. In addition, another important sociolinguistic variable in the process of eliminating double negation is the social class of speakers. Thus, by the 17th century, the change was fully completed in the speech of men, but remained incomplete in the speech of women.

6. Discussion.

A comparison in the use of negative concord by men and women in the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (PCEEC, 2006) from the second half of the 15th century to the beginning of the 18th century shows that from the very beginning, the leaders of the change were men. At the end of the 15th century, when multiple negation prevails, the difference between men and women is insignificant, but in subsequent periods this difference reaches 1% (Nevalainen, 2003, p. 50). The gender difference in the rates of multiple negation disappearance is also observed in the higher classes of the society, where men belonging to the higher circles used multiple negation less often than women. In the first half of the 16th century, the gender difference was not statistically significant, it became apparent in the 17th century and reached 5% (ibid., p. 52). At the very end of the process of linguistic change, this difference becomes particularly sharp due to certain representatives of the royal family: Princess Anna, Maria Stewart and Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia used multiple negation 25% more often than men in their circle (Nevalainen, 2000, p. 50).

The aforementioned discrepancies in the use of negation by men and women indicate that the loss of multiple negation in English was, according to Labov, a change ‘from above’ (2001). As the researchers note, this situation differs from modern linguistic practice in communities where negative concord is used. Currently, it is used more often by women belonging to the lower strata of society, and in all social classes women use negative concord less often than men (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003, pp. 128–129). The change in gender association of multiple negation models occurred during the Late Modern England period and became part of the *gender :: prestige* correlation where women tend to use prestigious forms more frequently than men; women use less established expressions and are more sensitive to the use of prestigious forms.

Remarkably, forms with a single propositional negative marker first appear in English at the end of the 15th century in official documents, for example, in legislative acts of the English Parliament. Obviously, the persons who contributed to the spread of the new model of negation in the sentence were familiar with the legal discourse at the time. This is also confirmed by data on the social affiliation of speakers.

Based on the social hierarchy reconstructed by social historians (Nevalainen, 2000), it was determined that the new model of propositional negation was preferred by men who communicated in writing on issues related to their professional activities. This category of informants includes lawyers, wealthy businessmen and, especially, officials of the royal court, who sought to improve their own social status: by birth they belonged to the classes below the nobility or to the lowest strata of the nobility, but achieved significant success in building their own career.

In addition, the idea that the loss of multiple negation was a change ‘from above’ is confirmed by the less frequent use of such structures by representatives of non-professional classes below the nobility. Unfortunately, these segments of society are not widely represented in the linguistic corpuses, however, the available data confirm that the process of loss of negative concord spread ‘from above’, and this was facilitated by its active promotion by professional circles (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003). It is interesting to note that social variability is not eliminated even in the last phases of the process of linguistic change.

The disappearance of multiple negation in the process of standardization of the English language in the 18th century is often explained by the influence of extralinguistic factors: the rules of prescriptive grammar and attempts by grammarians to apply the rules of logic when describing linguistic phenomena. This theory was the most traditional and widespread explanation for the loss of negative concord in English. However, recent research refutes the view that prescriptivism was the cause for disappearance of the negative concord. Multiple negation began to fall out of use long before the appearance of the first prescriptive grammars based on Latin (Mazzon, 2016, p. 92). The role of prescriptivists was only to speed up the processes that had already taken place in the language (Kawabe, 2010). Multiple negation was becoming less common, and by the time prescriptivists (e.g. Campbell, Clarke, Greenwood, Lowth) banned its use, it was already rare.

The factor of the Latin language remains part of the explanation, since the early English texts were written by educated people, and education at the time was based on the study of classical languages, which may have had an impact on the language of the authors of the relevant period. Therefore, Latin could indirectly be related to the establishment of rule N1 (no more than one negative particle per negative sentence).

7. Conclusion.

The loss of multiple negation in the Early Modern English period was due to a change in the deep structure of propositional negation: transition from a model with a negative element as the Head of a Negative Phrase to a model with a negative element in the position of the Specifier. Northern dialects, where contacts with Scandinavian languages were the most intensive, are a possible source of accelerating the emergence of the rule for non-use of multiple negation in English. However, in the Early Modern English period, the situation is changing, and the representatives of the royal court become the undisputed leaders of the change. The process was socially stratified, with leaders being men occupied in professional activities at the royal court, especially those who aspired to improve their social status.

From the beginning, the leaders of the change were representatives of the upper classes, a little later, the socially mobile representatives of the middle class became the proponents of the change, and this situation was maintained until the end of the process. It was a change 'from above' in terms of public awareness of the change. The process was completed in the newly created English standard before the end of the 17th century, although in some non-standard variants, multiple negation continues to be the norm even at the present time. Prescriptive grammars of the 18th century, therefore, required the use of forms that had already become the usual means for marking negation by the speakers of "standard" English in the previous two centuries.

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Sources of Illustrative Material

CMRPV = Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse. Available at: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/>

PCEEC = Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence, text version. 2006. Compiled by Terttu Nevalainen, Helena Raumolin-Brunberg, Jukka Keränen, Minna Nevala, Arja Nurmi and Minna Palander-Collin, with additional annotation by Ann Taylor. Helsinki: University of Helsinki and York: University of York. Distributed through the Oxford Text Archive.

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Анотація

У статті досліджується історія втрати множинного заперечення в англійській мові. Історичний розвиток маркерів заперечення в англійській мові відповідає циклу Єсперсена та включає повні п'ять етапів. Відбувається перехід від давньоанглійської моделі [+NC] через варіативність [-NC]/[+NC] у середньоанглійський та ранньоновоанглійський період до [+NC] у сучасній англійській мові. Втрата множинного заперечення в ранньоновоанглійський період була спричинена зміною глибинної структури пропозиційного заперечення. Можливим джерелом прискорення появи правила невживання множинного заперечення в англійській мові є північні діалекти, де контакти зі скандинавськими мовами були найінтенсивнішими. Однак у ранньоновоанглійський період ситуація змінюється, і беззаперечними лідерами змін стають представники королівського двору. Процес був соціально стратифікований, лідерами зміни були чоловіки, які займалися професійною діяльністю при королівському дворі, а особливо особи, які намагалися підвищити свій соціальний статус. Отже, інволюція множинного заперечення – це зміна 'зверху' у плані її соціального усвідомлення. Процес був завершений у новоствореному стандарті англійської мови кінця XVII ст., хоча в деяких нестандартних варіантах множинне заперечення продовжує бути нормою навіть дотепер. Прескриптивні граматики XVIII ст., таким чином, вимагали вживати форми, які вже були звичними засобами маркування заперечення для тих, хто говорить "стандартною" англійською.

Ключові слова: множинне заперечення, ранньоновоанглійський період, цикл Єсперсена, мовні зміни 'зверху'.