

Negative contraction in Old Frisian – a corpus study

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The paper takes the diachronic perspective and seeks to discuss the situations in which Old Frisian verbs can contract with negative particle *ne* ‘not’ (often spelled *ni* or *en*), which, as pointed out by Bor (1990: 27) is the basic negating element in Old Frisian.

There has been a substantial research conducted on the topic of negative contraction in Old English (e.g. Levin (1958), Blockley (1988; 1990), Jack (1999), Hogg (2004), Ogura (2008)), still, the phenomenon has not been studied well for Old Frisian. Taking into account Levin’s (1958: 492) claim that “[in Old Frisian and Old English] negative contraction with verbs reaches a stage of development that is not paralleled in any other Indo-European language”, the analysis of Old Frisian material may lead to some interesting observations.

The first part of this paper looks in detail at the data elicited from the online corpus of Frisian language - *The Integrated Scientific Frisian Language Database* (mainly composed of legal texts and charters from the period 1329 – 1550) to investigate to what extent it can be used to show and characterise the behaviour of negative contraction in the Eastern and Western varieties of Old Frisian.

The second part of this paper explores whether there can be found any differences between the dialects as far as the preference of the contracted or non-contracted negative forms is concerned. The author will attempt to investigate the factors such as, for example, the grammatical person, tense, syntactic context to see whether they promote the use of contracted or non-contracted forms.

Special focus is also to be put on the problem of cooccurrence of negative contraction and double negation. The problems are already mentioned by Bremmer (2009: 107) who states that “negative contracted verbs often come with double negations” and Bor (1990: 40) who claims that double negation is more common when we deal with the younger version of the language. The author of the paper attempts to check whether Bremmer’s and Bor’s claims can be supported by the corpus material.

The adopted approach may shed some new light on the neglected so far topic of negation in Old Frisian. The results of the research contrasted with the available knowledge of the other West Germanic languages, will help us understand the direction of the linguistic changes that were taking place in the North Sea Germanic language family.

Keywords: negation, negative contraction, Old Frisian, corpus study

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