NEGATIVE CONCORD AND THE LOSS
OF THE NEGATIVE PARTICLE *NE* IN LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH[1]

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ABSTRACT

The presence of Negative Concord (NC) and the sentential negative particle *ne* is investigated in northern, southern, and mixed later Middle English prose texts from around 1400. The typology of negation proposed in Rowlett (1998) is taken as the basis for an examination of whether the loss of an overt Negº head element is associated with the loss of NC. It is found that NC, though almost categorical in southern varieties, was showing signs of weakening in northern/northern-influenced texts. In these texts, the decline of NC was usually associated with the absence of *ne*. However, the converse relationship was not supported. It appears that loss of *ne* did not exert a direct influence on the grammar of NC in English, but that NC co-existed with the absence of a Neg head for a substantial period of time. This finding of a temporal disjunction is discussed in relation to the notion of cluster effects in parametrised syntax.

1. Introduction

Since Jespersen (1917), it has become customary in historical syntax to speak of a "negation cycle", in which sentential negators with relatively little phonetic substance are eroded and adverbial elements are pressed into service as negative elements, e.g. the process by which *nawiht* developed into *naht* and then *not*, while the Old English and Early Middle English sentence negator *ne* weakened and was lost. Jespersen believed that negative concord (henceforth NC) was related to the negation cycle – a language had NC if its principal sentence negator had relatively little phonetic substance, but lost it when it gained a principal negator with more phonetic substance. Early Middle English appears to fit Jes-

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[1]   This paper is a revised version of a study bearing the same name originally appearing in *Reading University Working Papers in Linguistics* Vol. 7 (2003)

persen's characterisation well: it exhibited strict Negative Concord, that is, in a sentence expressing a single negation all non-assertive indefinites had to be marked negatively, e.g.:

1)   þe feond ne   mei   neden na mon to na   sune
          the devil NEG   may   compel no man to no   sin
          'The devil may not   compel anyone to any   sin'

                                                        (*AR* 82b: 15; a. 1225).

The sentential negator *ne* was obligatory, at least in 12th and 13th century prose texts (Frisch 1997). It sufficed to negate a clause, although from the early 14th century onwards it tended increasingly to be accompanied by a secondary negator in some spelling form of *not* (Jack 1978; Frisch 1997; Iyeiri 2001).

    Rowlett (1998: 87-89) captured the association between NC and Jespersen's "short" negator in terms of current syntactic theory. Building on the work of Haegeman (1995) and others, he analysed sentential negation in terms of an X′ theory phrasal constituent NegP with a head and a specifier constituent (see also Beukema – Tomic 1996). He argued that a language has NC if and only if the sentential negator is the head of NegP, as in Serbo-Croat, where non-assertive indefinites must be accompanied by the head negator *ni*, e.g.

2)   Milan   ne   daje   nitkome   ništa
          M.   *ne*   gives   no-one   nothing
          'M.   isn't   giving anyone   anything'

                                                        (Progovac 1994).

Where a language has a negator in Spec NegP, e.g. Norwegian *ikke* ('not'), the language does not have NC, e.g.:

3)   Jeg så ikke   noen[2] gutt
          I saw   not   any   boy
          I didn't see   any   boy'

                                                        (Johanneson 2003).

It is interesting from this perspective to consider the changes in English negation between, say, 1300-1600. The co-occurrence of multiple negated elements

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2   *Noen* is synchronically non-negative in form, and functions as a polarity item equivalent to PDE *any*.

in a logically negative clause eventually went out of use in texts written by educated speakers (see Nevalainen 1998); polarity items such as *any* or *ever* became the norm within the scope of a formally marked negative expression. Well before this took place, however, the main sentence negator *ne* declined sharply in frequency and in the 15th century became extinct as an unsupported sentence negator (Frisch 1997). In the later Middle English counterparts of (1), therefore, one or more negated quantifiers could negate a clause in the absence of *ne*. This meant that in later Middle English (henceforth LME) Negative Concord could take the form of (i) the co-occurrence of *ne* and *not*, or (ii) the co-occurrence of *not* and a negative quantifier, and (iii) the co-occurrence of multiple negated quantifiers without a sentence negator. These three alternatives are exemplified by sentences (2), (3), and (4) respectively:

4)   …that he ne mowe nought selle his fish

(Brembre II: 18; 1384).

5)   the aduersairs of John Northampton should noght have be in non offices

(Usk: 121; 1384).

6)   …that no man make none congregaciouns

(Brembre I: 4; 1384).

Rowlett's (1998) analysis suggests that a transition was taking place from a language with a Head negator to a language with a Spec negator. If transitions in grammar change can be modelled as grammar competition (see Kroch 1989; Pintzuk 1996, etc.) we might expect to see evidence of competition between these two types. In the present case this would take the form of markedly higher incidence of NC in sources with retention of *ne*, as compared with sources lacking *ne*, assuming NC and *ne* retention "cluster".

   As regards whether the loss of *ne* was related to the demise in educated English of types (ii) and (ii) during the Early Modern English period, researchers seem to have reached somewhat differing conclusions. Jack (1978: 58-9) and Iyeiri (2001: 144) considered that multiple negation was not affected by the loss of *ne*. Fischer (1992: 281-283) apparently took the view that the decline in the use of *ne* had a role in the weakening of negative concord, saying: "The disappearance of *ne* precipitates the erosion of multiple negation".[3] Frisch (1997: 33) suggested that "… the decline in use of *ne* is concurrent with a decline in the use of negative concord in general". The uncertainty displayed by previous researchers may be at least partly attributable to an insufficient analytic base. The use of the negative polarity item (NPI) *any* series in negative contexts in later

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[3]   The same point is expressed using the same wording in Fischer *et al.* (2000: 87).

Middle English has not yet been given sufficiently detailed consideration. An exception is Iyeiri (2002), who conducted a survey of NPIs in late ME verse and found a small but apparently non-negligible level of incidence in negated clauses. However, her results included many cases where the indefinite was in a dependent clause, e.g.

7)   He was so full of veine gloire,
       That he ne hadde no memoire
       That ther was *eny* good bot he
       For pride of his prosperite

                              (Conf. Amant.: 2799-2802, after Iyeiri 2002).

As shown by Ingham (2003), using the early 13th century prose works in the *Penn-Helsinki parsed corpus of Middle English*, indefinites in such constructions already routinely took the *any*-series form in EME, e.g.:

8)   Nule   ich   naut   þat   ani seo ow bute   leaue
       NEG-wish   I   not   that   ani see you except permission
       habbe   of   ouwer   special meister
       should-have   of   your   special master
       'I don't wish anyone to see you without permission of you special master'

                              (CMANCRIW II: 47, l. 438)

The innovation with which we are concerned here is the spread of NPI forms such as *ani* within clausebound contexts. Iyeiri (2002) reported a further finding, to the effect that the Northern text sampled, *The York plays*, had the lowest incidence of NPIs in negated clauses. This would not support an association between head negation and NC, since sentential *ne* was apparently lost earliest in Northern texts. Unfortunately, it was not stated whether the finding obtained when only clausebound contexts were considered, so to that extent the issue must remain open.

     Nevalainen (1998) and Kallel (2005) found that *any* series items were beginning to appear in later 15th century private correspondence. However, by the period covered by Nevalainen's and Kallel's studies the *ne* negator had long been defunct. We do not know how far the loss of the *ne* negator had an impact on NC prior to that.

     In this study we seek to identify to what extent the loss of *ne* was associated with the loss of NC in educated written English. Fischer *et al*. (2000: 87) ob-

serve that the negative head *ne* was in decline in the later part of the 14th century. They go on to state that "the disappearance of *ne* precipitates the erosion of multiple negation" but they recognise that NC persisted well beyond the 14th century. Published work on the loss of *ne* and erosion of multiple negation in Late Middle English is not extensive. Jack (1978) found that, except in Chaucer's prose and London administrative texts, *ne* was uncommon in later Middle English prose. This automatically made the first type of NC obsolescent, but did not automatically target types (ii) and (iii), involving negative quantifiers, so we do not know from Jack's research how far they might have been affected by the loss of *ne.*

2. Rationale

In this study we investigate the earliest appearance in prose of NPIs in negated clauses. We analysed a number of Late Middle English texts covering especially the later 14th century, seeking to identify the co-occurrence or otherwise of a negated quantifier with other negated elements, either the sentence negator *not* or another negated XP, or both. Secondly, we sought to determine to what extent the survival of NC with a negated quantifier in these texts was related to a tendency to conserve the sentential negator *ne*.

We initially investigated late 14th century works from the Midlands or South of England. In so doing, we noted that some of these contained material appearing to have originated in the north of England, or to have been composed by an author who himself originated in the North. As will be seen, this appeared to have an affect the linguistic variables used. We pursued this broad diatopic approach by considering "pure" Northern LME prose texts, that is, works extant in northern manuscripts and composed by a northern writer. Since such works are unfortunately almost non-existent in the second half of the 14th century, we were obliged for this purpose to use texts whose manuscripts were in some cases written well into the 15th century.

In the main part of this study we report our analyses of these groups of texts, which aimed to discover to what extent they displayed a bias in their use of NC and in their retention of the sentential negator *ne*. In the final section of the paper we return to the theoretical issues raised by Rowlett's (1998) model of negation and negative concord.

A terminological point should be noted: for the purposes of this study, we shall use the term "northern" English to refer to data sources located in Yorkshire and the North-East of England, and the term "southern and midland" English, when we are referring to those originating in the half of England located roughly south of the Trent, thus by and large conflating the traditional South-eastern, South-western, West Midlands and East Midlands dialect areas. This

broad usage of "southern and midland" is simply a matter of convenience, to allow reference to the totality of English regions outside the north. It is in no way to imply that Midlands varieties were the same as the varieties used south of the Thames, any more than our use of the term "northern" is meant to imply that all varieties North of the Trent were identical. It is a way of distinguishing from the rest a northern area commonly supposed to have led the way in various aspects of linguistic change in the late medieval and early modern periods, and in which we believe innovation may once again have arisen.

3. Sources

In the previous section we recognised the problem that data sources for Middle English syntax of the 14th century are far from ideal, especially as concerns regional distribution. A large preponderance of prose texts come from the Midlands or the South and date from the last two decades of the century. Furthermore, a pervasive problem in medieval linguistic studies is to distinguish between date and locality of the original composition, and date and origin of the earliest surviving manuscript(s). Few medieval texts occur in a manuscript reliably representing the dialect area in which they were originally composed.

To establish a data sample representing "southern and midland" English varieties, we followed a policy of using for our analysis only editions of prose texts in manuscripts originally written in a southern and midland variety of English in the second half of the 14th century, and not thought to postdate the early part of the 15th century. In many cases this was reasonably straightforward, as with localisable administrative documents and Chaucer's works. It was felt desirable to include the late 14th century Vernon manuscript, which is a major source for the period, but some of its texts, though written by a southern scribe, were of northern origin. Only Vernon MS material not of northern origin according to Horstman (1895) was included in the "southern and midland" group, which was as follows:

	Estimated date of composition	Estimated MS date
Chaucer:[4] *Boece, Treatise on the Astrolabe*	late 14th c.	early 15th c.
Trevisa: *Polychronicon*	late 14th c.	c.1400
Brut prose chronicle, continuation 1333-77	late 14th c.	c.1400

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[4]   In order to avoid biasing the data too much towards Chaucer's usage, we used only the two non-fictional texts, *Boece* and a *Treatise on the Astrolabe. The Riverside Chaucer* 3rd edition, based on the early 15th century Cambs. Univ. MS I. i. 38 for the former text, was used.

"Appeal of Thomas Usk" and other legal documents, London 1480s		c.1385
London guild returns of 1389	c.1389	1389
Norfolk guild returns of 1389	c.1389	1389
The old usages of Wynchestre	later 14th c.	later 14th c.
Vernon MS tracts: *Charter of theAbbey of the Holy Ghost, A talkyng of loue*	later 14th c.	c.1390

Horstman's (1895) Vernon MS religious tracts originating in the North, i.e. Hilton's *Scale of perfection*, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, and *The mirour of St. Edmund*, were put in a separate category, which we shall refer to as "mixed" texts. Also included here was the religious treatise *De institutione reclusarum*, which shows traces of Northern origin in its lexis.[5] Rolle's *Meditations*, found in a southern MS from around 1400, according to Horstman (MS Cambs Ll I. 8), was also counted in this group. We also wished to consider the extensive material attributed to Wyclif. Here the mixed source issue took a different form: Wyclif himself, though a native of Yorkshire, spent much of his working life in the south midlands and is thought to have been influenced to some degree by southern/midland usage. There is considerable uncertainty as to which works attributed to Wyclif are genuinely his. This applies in particular to the tracts of Wyclif edited by Matthew (1880); we therefore included only those where the editor stated his strong belief that the tract had been composed by Wyclif, who died in 1384, rather than being the work of his later followers. Data were taken only from tracts where the editor was able to identify some contemporary circumstances indicating a 14th century date, i.e. n°s. I, IV,V, X, and XXI. We used the text of Wyclif's sermons edited by Hudson (1984), with the readings from manuscripts dated to the late 14th century (MSS K, O, T, Z, and ð). We also used tracts n°. 3 "Of holy chirche and of hir membres" from the edition by Lindberg (1993). Adding Wyclif to the list of "mixed" data sources gave us the following:

	Estimated date of composition	Estimated MS date
Wyclif: tracts and sermons	c.1380	late C 14
Rolle: *Meditations*	c. 1349	c.1400
Vernon MS (texts of known or presumed northern origin) – Hilton, *Epistle on the mixed life*	c.1380	c.1390

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[5]   See Introduction to the EETS edition, p. li.

Abbey of the Holy Ghost	?	c.1390
Mirour of St. Edmund	?	c.1390
De institutione reclusarum	?	c.1390

The purpose of the "mixed" group was that it allowed us to put in the "pure southern and midland" or "pure northern" groups only those texts which could securely be taken as representative of "northern" or "southern and midland" English, as characterised above, with no known disturbance in the textual tradition. But the mixed group is not simply being used here as a ragbag category: its texts have in common some affinity with northern English, so we can perhaps observe the effect that this factor might have, when they are compared with "pure" southern/midland texts.

The third category consisted of "pure" northern texts, corresponding to the "pure" southern and midland texts mentioned above. The earliest northern prose compositions available to us in a northern MS are the *Epistles* of Richard Rolle, (MS Cambs Dd V. 64) , and the *Prose rule of St. Benet*, which have both been dated to around 1400. These two works were insufficient to form a sample comparable to the "southern and midland" texts. To supplement them, the northern prose treatises edited by Horstman (1895) from three northern MSS attributed to the period 1400-1450 (Harley, Rawlinson, and Thornton MSS) were included. Finally, we used a group of northern sermons thought to have been preached in York around 1415, found in a manuscript of the first half of the 15th century.

	Estimated date of composition	Estimated MS date
Rolle, *Epistles*, MS Cambs Dd V. 64	c1350	c. 1400
N. *Prose rule of St. Benet*	?	c.1400
Harley & Rawlinson treatises	?	c. 1420
Thornton MS treatises	later 14th century	c.1440
MES MS Harley	c. 1415	1420-1450?

As can be seen, the Northern prose sources are mainly from slightly later MSS than most of the other texts analysed, but this discrepancy was unavoidable given the material that has survived. Another unavoidable discrepancy was that the northern and mixed groups consisted exclusively of religious writings, whereas the southern and midland material represented a wider range of genres. It is not known whether this had an effect on the expression of negation in the

data collected.

   Altogether, these works present the opportunity to analyse a substantial body of prose data bearing on the status of negation in English around 1400. Nearly 170 contexts for NC or NPIs were identified, and some 750 negated clauses with or without *ne*.

4. Analysis of Negative Concord data

In our analysis of contexts for NC, we counted only finite clauses where a formally negated expression (either *not* or a negated indefinite) gave the sentence the interpretation of a negated proposition, rather than of phrasal negation. We analysed sentential negative contexts where Present Day English (PDE) would require an NPI, that is, where an indefinite XP was preceded by a formally negated element, either *not* or another negated XP. We did not count *ne* for this purpose. Examples of sentences included are given below:

9)   … that I ne con *not* thenken therof <u>no bigynnying</u>

(*A talkying of the loue of God*: 366).

10)   And shal *neuer* this vessel of <u>no crafty man</u> be made

(*Inst*. *Rec*.: 46).

11)   ... that *no* mannes cursynge hath <u>ony strengthe</u>

(*Wyclif tracts*: 289, 1).

Here the PDE NPI contexts (underlined) are provided by the italicised NPI triggers *not*, *no*, *neuer* and *no* respectively. As mentioned, contexts provided by the negator *ne* alone were not counted, e.g.

12)   Common tretys of the Astrelabie ne maken noon excepcioun

(*Astrolabe* II: 34, l. 13).

13)   … þt essoyne of oþer men ne be a-lowed in none manere

(*Wynchestre*: 361).

   Also excluded were instances where the target context stood in a co-ordinate phrase introduced by *ne*, even if a negative expression other than ne was present earlier in the clause, e.g.

14)   He shuld not reste ne take no breþe   (*Brut continuation*: 319, l. 22).

In Early Modern English, negative co-ordination introduced by ne continued to

license an N-word. It was therefore considered that this kind of context should be kept separate from our analysis (cf. Nevalainen 1998, who uses the same procedure). Finally we excluded cases where the trigger and the target context were in different clauses (Ingham 2003).

5. Results

The results of the foregoing analysis are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Frequencies of NC and NPIs in PDE NPI contexts, Late Middle English prose texts

Northern prose	NC	NPI	TOTAL
Rolle *Epistles*	1	6	7
St Benet	5	1	6
Four MES	6	1	7
Prose treatises Rawl. MS	4	0	4
Prose treatises Harley MS	1	2	3
Prose treatises Thornt. MS	10	3	13
TOTAL	27 (67.5%)	13 (32.5%)	40

"Southern and midland"'prose	NC	NPI	TOTAL
Vernon – *Chart. Ab. Hol. Ghost*	7	0	7
– *Talkynge of Holi Ghost*	3	0	3
Chaucer – *Boece*	26	0	26
– *Astrolabe*	1	1	2
Trevisa *Polychronicon*	11	0	11
"London English"	12	1	13
Norfolk Guilds	9	0	9
Ancient usages of Wyncestre	3	0	3

Brut continuation 1333-77	10	1	11
TOTAL	82 (96.4 %)	3 (3.6%)	85

"Mixed'"prose	NC	NPI	TOTAL
Wyclif sermons and tracts	12	12	24
Rolle *Meditations*	4	0	4
De institutione reclusarum	5	2	7
Vernon MS *Mirour of St Edmund.*	1	1	2
Hilton, *Epistle*	2	1	3
Abbey of the Holy Ghost	1	1	2
TOTAL	25 (59.5%)	17 (40.5%)	42

The contrast between northern and "southern and midland" prose takes the form of a very low rate of NPI use in the latter, as compared with NPIs in nearly one-third of contexts in the former. The mixed text data actually show an even higher level of NPI use than the "pure" northern texts, but they are heavily skewed by the Wyclif data. Following are examples of NPIs in negated clauses:

15)   God may not juge folily ony man   (Wyclif *Sermons*: 237, l. 33).
16)   And when a man wil noȝt for any erthly thing wreth god

(Rolle *Epistles*: 52, l. 42).
17)   Non innere mowe haue any entre to maken þi silence   (*Abbey*: 324).
18)   … þat þu myth not haue set a nedyll poynte upon any place

(Four *MES*:140, l. 295).

Yet all northern texts show some use of NC, and the overall rate of NC in pure northern texts, at nearly 70%, is so great that it must still be seen as very much the predominant option at this time in northern varieties.

It is interesting to consider to what extent NC was provided by co-occurrence of the target item with the sentence negator *not*, and to what extent by co-occurrence with another negated XP. The following table shows that in the pure Northern texts contexts were almost always provided by co-occurrence with *not*, while in the southern/midland texts and mixed texts such cases were in a clear minority.

Table 2. Negated indefinites co-occurring with not or with another negated XP

Co-occurrence with:	*Not*	Negated XP	TOTAL NC
"Pure" Northern prose	24	3	27
"Pure" Southern and Midland prose	27	53	80
"Mixed" texts	11	13	24
TOTAL	62 (47.3%)	69 (52.7%)	131

Jack (1978) and Iyeiri (2001) gained the impression that *not* very rarely co-occurred with a negated indefinite, but this view is not upheld by these texts, which show as many as 62 out of 131 cases of NC (47.3%) co-occurring with *not*. Their judgment may derive from inspecting southern and midland or mixed texts, where NC most often arises between two negated quantifiers.

Let us now see whether there were any particular tendencies in the kinds of constituent that were affected by the weakening of NC in Northern and mixed texts. We investigated the use of NC or NPIs in different grammatical functions, notably Direct Object and Adverbial, the most common cases. The results were as follows:

Table 3. Frequencies of NC or NPIs in Direct Object and Adverbial grammatical functions

	Direct Object		Adverbial	
	NC	NPI	NC	NPI
"Pure" Northern texts				
Epistles of Rolle	0	0	1	5
Prose rule of St. Benet	1	0	4	1
Harl. & Rawl. treatises	1	0	3	0
Thornton MS treatises	4	0	7	3
MES, MS Harley	0	0	5	1
Total Northern texts	6	0	20	10

Mixed texts				
Wyclif tracts & sermons	1	7	7	8
Rolle: *Meditations*	1	0	2	0
Vernon MS (known or presumed northern origin) – Hilton, *Scale of perf*ection	0	0	2	1
Abbey of the Holy Ghost	2	2	1	0
Mirour of St. Edmund	1	0	0	1
De institut. reclusarum	0	1	2	0
Total "mixed" texts	5	10	14	10
Overall total	11	10	34	20

The numbers are small, so interpretations must remain very tentative, but the "mixed" prose results suggest that in Northern-influenced writers NPIs were making headway in both grammatical functions. In the pure Northern prose itself, unfortunately, there is an imbalance between the numbers of object and adverbial contexts, with very few of the former, so the picture remains unclear. At least we can say that the grammatical function of the constituent see MS not to have imposed any strong restriction on whether NC or an NPI was used.

The "pure" southern and midland texts, as noted above, showed very little use of NPIs. Of the very few that occurred, Direct Objects as well as Adverbials were found with NPIs.

It was noted that NC in adverbials in "southern and midland" texts often took the form of the expressions *in no manner*, *in/by no way*, and *in no wise*. Of 44 adverbials showing NC, 16 (36.4%) had this wording. Such expressions may have been favoured for rhetorical purposes: they do not add to the representational content of the clause (Halliday 1994) but rather seem to convey the strength of the speaker's commitment to the proposition expressed. We wondered if Northern varieties tended to retain NC in such expressions, for special rhetorical reasons. However, in pure Northern texts the corresponding figures were only 4 out of 20, and in mixed texts 3 out of 13, suggesting that the persisting NC uses in Northern or Northern-influenced texts were not purely a matter of rhetorical choice, but continued to be generally a matter of grammatical concord, although this was now clearly an optional phenomenon in Northern varieties.

6. Analysis of sentential negator *ne*

We now turn to the question of how far a negator in Neg^0 was still present in LME prose towards the end of the 14th century. We took samples of the first 50 possible contexts for sentence negator *ne*, counting finite clauses where a formally negated expression (either *not* or a negated indefinite) gave the sentence the interpretation of a negated proposition, rather than of phrasal negation. Not all sources provided sufficient contexts: in particular, some shorter texts from the Thornton MS and the Vernon MS could not be included by this procedure. The percentages for the sixteen texts with at least 50 contexts are shown below:

Table 4. Percentage use of sentential negator *ne* in first 50 negated finite clauses per text

Northern	%	Southern and mid-land	%	Mixed	%
St. Benet	20	Chaucer *Boece*	52	Wyclif	0
Rolle *Epistles*	2	Trevisa	0	Vernon – Hilton	4
MES MS Harley 2268	0	Norfolk Guilds	8	*St Edmund*	22
Tracts MS Rawlinson 285	0	"London English"	22	Rolle, *Meditiations*	4
Tracts MS Thornton	0	*Brut Chronicle* 1333-77	4	*De institutione reclu sarum*	26
Av. Northern: 4.4%		Av. Southern and Midland: 17.2%		Av. Mixed: 10.8%	

It can be seen that in every text *ne*-retention fell well below 30%, except in the work of Chaucer. The southern and midland texts had the greatest average rate of *ne*-retention, four times that found in the pure northern texts. The data from Wyclif and Hilton, both born in the North but whose texts have southern/midland influences, showed little or no use of *ne*.

Overall, these findings uphold the conclusion of Jack (1978) and Frisch (1997) that *ne* was generally obsolete by the latter part of the 14th century. However, in addition to the London English texts and Chaucer, noted by Jack, *ne*-retention also occurs at a non-negligible rate in certain other texts: *St. Benet*, the Vernon *Mirour of St Edmund* and *De institutione reclusarum*. These texts were either pure northern or with northern influences. Nevertheless, it is un-

doubtedly in the southern and midland texts that *ne*-retention survived longest. The relationship between ne-retention and the form of negative indefinites in these 15 texts is summarised in Figure 1:
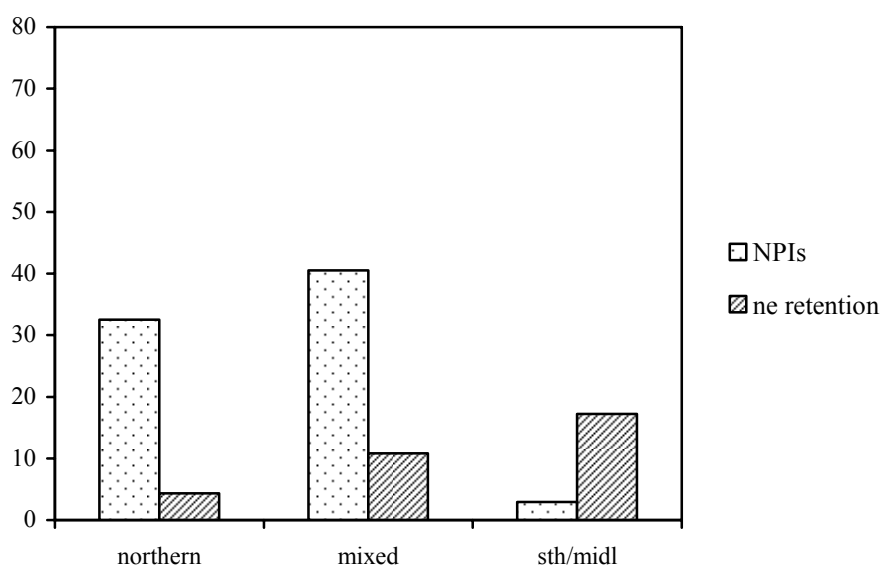
Category axis: 10-80%
Key: lighter shading: NPIs; darker shading: *ne*-retention

Figure 1. Percentage use of NPIs and *ne*-retention

As noted above, there was some indication of a geographical trend as regards *ne*-retention: the rate of *ne* use is lowest in northern and highest in southern and midland texts.

7. Discussion

NC between *not* and a negated indefinite was found in both northern and southern/midland texts. However, in northern English co-occurrence of negated indefinites was rare, whereas in southern and midland varieties it was very common, e.g.:

19)   … þat neuere non such was sene in no mannes tyme alyue

(*Brut*: 316, l. 20).

20)   … þat no wicked planet haue noon aspect

(*Astrolabe* II: 4, l. 36).

We cannot say that in northern varieties *not* was becoming an obligatory element in negated clauses, since sentence negation with a single negative indefinite was also found commonly in northern texts, e.g.:

21)   ... þat he kan fynd na ioy in þis life   (Rolle, *Form*: 43, l. 34).
22)   Scho sulde no more seke hym

(Bonaventura, *Privity of the Passion*: 215, l. 36).

Our main finding was that NC, though still virtually undisturbed in southern and midland texts, was yielding ground to NPIs in the northern texts.

The mixed texts, sharing a northern factor either in the origin of the texts or of their author, also showed substantial use of NPIs. The eighty or so datapoints obtained from these two groups of texts, though relatively small in terMS of the numbers often found in diachronic grammatical investigations, nevertheless form quite a representative sample, taking taken into account the infrequency of the construction: indefinites in a clause already containing at least one semantically interpretable negator.

It is true that the slightly later dating of the Northern MSS leaves open the logical possibility that if we had late 14th century prose MSS from the North they would show virtually uniform NC as the southern and midland MSS do. Against that, however, is the fact that the mixed group, which actually show proportionately even more NPI use, come from late 14th century MSS, and the factor they share is the presence of northern influence. We consider, therefore, that the earliest substantial use of NPIs in English prose is to be associated with northern varieties. The linkage of *ne*-loss and the rise of NPIs suggested by certain earlier researchers, such as Fischer, and expected on theoretical grounds following Rowlett (1998), thus receives some support. Although the demise of *ne* was not far from completion in both North and South, it see MS to have been most marked in the North. The five sources in which it was totally absent all had northern associations, except for Trevisa, suggesting that the Jespersen cycle completed a new stage in northern varieties before southern and midland. We may then speculate that in the process took place, NPIs entered use earlier in northern varieties. This can be no more than a tentative proposal, given the limited sample size we have been able to use for the present investigation.

An alternative possibility that might be envisaged is that NPI use in negated clauses arose under the influence of Latin, in which NPIs were used rather than NC in equivalent contexts. Both Wyclif and Rolle are known to have also com-

posed works in Latin, and their works account for the bulk of NPI use in the data analysed in this study. However, Trevisa, who translated a large amount of material from Latin, seemingly underwent no such influence, so we believe that the argument for Latin influence in the avoidance of NC is less than compelling.[6]

It was noted in an earlier section that the southern and midland texts were stylistically much more diverse than the other two groups, featuring historical works (*Brut*, *Polychronicon*), philosophical literature (*Boece*), administrative documents ("London English", "Norfolk guilds") as well as a modest amount of religious prose. It is certainly conceivable that the formality of the administrative documents from London and Norfolk, as well as the literary aspirations of Chaucer's *Boece*, may have encouraged the retention of NC as a conservative form. Perhaps the influence of French, in which NC was the rule, also exerted itself. It could be that for stylistic reasons NPIs are under-represented in the southern and midland data we have. Vernacular usage at this time cannot, of course, be directly accessed via any of the religious, historical, literary, and administrative written works analysed in this study. The question is whether the religious prose genre, to which the northern prose available from this period largely belongs, was relatively closer to that usage than others. We do not at present know of any reason to suppose that it was, and wish to leave the issue open. On the basis of the data we have, and for all their limitations, it can be said that the loss of *ne* and the loss of NC do not seem to have been contemporary. If there was a connection between them, these grammatical changes appear to have taken place in succession, rather than simultaneously.

This outcome illustrates an important issue in the relationship between theoretical linguistic enquiry and grammatical change as attested in the material surviving from earlier periods of the language. It is well-known that the observable effects of the loss of V$\rightarrow$ Infl in Early Modern English, for example, took some time to work through in different constructions (e.g. Ellegård 1953; Kroch 1989). To expect that theoretically related characteristics of the language should all undergo change in lockstep, as it were, when an underlying parameter changes, would surely be unrealistic. Other relevant factors, such as lexical choice, high frequency of certain recurrent patterns, stylistic preferences in certain registers, and so on, may well intervene to affect the picture. A routine but crucial caveat is that in examining the textual record for evidence of grammar change we are seeing only indirect effects of changes in individuals' linguistic competence. Clustering effects in language change, then, may well not be syn-

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[6] Although Chaucer's *Boece* is nominally a translation of a Latin original, he appears to have made considerable use of the Old French translation of Boethius by Jean de Meun, entitled *li livres de confort*.

chronically clearly observable.

The above considerations raise numerous issues to do with the relationship between historical linguistic data and the constructs posited in diachronic syntax research to which we cannot do justice in the space available here. Suffice it to say that this study has attempted to present one way in which the problem can be addressed: a theoretically grounded claim regarding an association of two grammatical traits can be seen as making a prediction of the form that variation would take for the claim to be false: if the data revealed a tendency for NC to weaken in a language variety conserving a head negator. The late 14th century Middle English prose data show us that, on the contrary, where NC weakens in it is in areas where *ne* tended to be lost first. This outcome leaves open the problem, to which we hope to return in a subsequent study, of the nature of grammars acquired in the transitional period between the loss of *ne*, and the disappearance of NC.

8. Conclusion

In this investigation we wished to examine how far use of NPIs may have made progress in the prose texts available from the later 14th century, and in particular to look for evidence of regional tendencies. We have also sought to place the development of NPIs in relation to the loss of the *ne* sentential negator. It is apparent from the results obtained here that in Southern/Midland texts NPIs were still almost entirely absent, whereas in some texts with Northern associations NPIs were by no means rare. These concerned most notably the Rolle epistles and Wyclif's prose, though NPIs in negated clauses examples crop up in most of the northern and mixed texts investigated. The Southern and Midland texts, as expected from the work of previous researchers, showed a higher level of retaining *ne* as a sentential negator. These results, then, go in the direction predicted by a theoretical link between head negation and NC, insofar as the texts associated with Northern Middle English, where head negation was lost earlier, are those where NPIs developed earlier.

It remains to be acknowledged that the surviving data we have is far from ideal from the point of view of attempting any precise kind of historical sociolinguistic analysis, being often difficult to localise precisely. However, as a broad generalisation it seems reasonable to believe that the loss of the *ne* sentential negator may indeed have had repercussions on the expression of negation in English, in terms of favouring NPIs rather than NC, at least in the educated register of English transmitted to us by the textual record.

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