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On Sentential Negation in *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*

Abstract: Although a substantial study has been done in the area of the development of negation in English, the present article seeks to shed light on and provide a general picture of the state of negation reflected in the Middle English text *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*. Furthermore, it approaches various types and functions of verbal negation, mainly *ne* and *nouht*, in both main and subordinate clauses as well as discusses several reasons which may have triggered the eventual loss of double negatives in Standard English.

Keywords: *The Lay of Havelok the Dane* (*Havelok*), negative *ne* and *not* (*nouht*), Old English, Middle English, Early New English, negative concord, word order, main clause, subordinate clause.

In the course of its history, a tremendous restructuring of the English language has occurred. Although, over the past 20 years, a number of studies have appeared, which are dedicated to sentential negation, this area is still very popular and remains in the focus of researchers. Therefore, the present article, falling in the category of diachronic study, intends to supplement the previous works and investigate the types of verbal negation and their form, word-order patterns, and the distribution of various negative expressions in *The Lay of Havelok the Dane* (~1280-1290), as well as to reveal their characteristic features.

Havelok, a 3002-line metrical "matter of England" romance composed in Lincolnshire dialect, is believed to be "worth reading as a good specimen of popular English poetry in the thirteenth century" (Ker 1965: 65).

The 13th century falls into the Middle English period, also known as 'transitional', during which English was shifting from synthetical to analytical type, and it is interesting to observe how this significant language restructuring, specifically the evolution of negation, was reflected in this text.

Negation in English has undergone a profound transformation. In 1917, Jespersen coined the expression "negative cycle" which is also referred to as Jespersen's cycle of negation. It describes five overlapping stages in English. To put it briefly, this well-known negative cycle is summarized as follows: the only preverbal negative marker *ne* is phonologically weakened in Old English (1) *ic ne secge*, where *ne* gradually begins to lose its meaning of negativity.

Therefore, *ne* comes to be reinforced and supported by another stronger negative element *not*: (2) *I ne seye not*, which already can be sporadically observed in Old English (Strang 1970: 312); however, it is often regarded as the most typical form of Middle English (Jespersen 1917: 9). The etymology of *not* is quite straightforward since it developed out of Old English *nāwiht*, *nōwiht*, meaning 'nothing' (Willis: 466).

Ultimately, the initial negative element *ne* came to be weakened. In other words, it came to be pronounced with little or no stress, which led to it losing its grammatical meaning and function. Consequently, the reinforcing element entirely supplants the sole negative marker in the 15th century resulting in (3) *I say not* and causing the original negative marker to disappear as it was considered redundant.

In the 16th century, the Elizabethans gradually introduce the auxiliary *do* in all types of sentences, which leads to (4) *I do not* say. Initially, the *do*-constructions were not completely developed, which means that the tendency to place the negator in preverbal position, in this case *not*, was still in use. When *do* strengthens its positions, it starts to precede *not*. Consequently, *not* comes to be regularly used after the auxiliary verb - the latter indicating number, tense, and person - and before the main verb. However, *not* often remained unstressed, which eventually became contracted to informal (5) *I don't* say in Modern English (Jespersen 1917: 10-13; Iyeyiri 2005: 59).

Negation in the Early Middle English period is assumed to develop somewhere between the 1st and 2nd stages. What is immediately evident in *Havelok* is that the innovative *not*, represented as *nouht* or *nowht*, is not yet particularly frequent. It appears only 64 times and almost exclusively with *ne*, which is still overwhelmingly used in the text, that is 244 times. This also means that Middle and even the beginning of Early New English implement *double*, *triple*, and even *quadruple*, ie., multiple, negatives. Such negatives, however, were not meant to cancel each other out, but rather they served pragmatic purposes in order to add "emphasis to its negativity" (Baker 2012: 111). For instance,

(1) *For i ne misdeed him neuere nouht, | And haueth me to sorwe brought (Havelok 1371-1372).*

"I never injured him at all, and hath brought me to sorrow" (Wyatt 1889: 36).

Chaucer and, occasionally even Shakespeare, are among many authors known for making extensive use of such negatives, as seen in:

(2) *Ther nas no man no wher so vertuous (Chaucer General Prologue 251).*

"There was no man anywhere so capable (of such work)" (Benson 2006).

(3) *He neuere yet no vileynye ne sayde | In al his lyf unto no maner wight (Chaucer General Prologue 70-71).*

"He never yet said any rude word | In all his life unto any sort of person" (Benson 2006).

(4) *I never was nor never will be false (Shakespeare Richard III 492).*

(5) *I pray you, bear with me; I cannot go no further (Shakespeare As You Like It 9).*

According to Willis et al., the "strict negative concord" was more common in the West Saxon, the "proper" dialect of English (Ingham 2013: 142). In this case, people were often governed by grammatical reasons to use negative concord. Following the Latin model of lexicalized negatives *volo - nolo*, *scio - nescio*, Old English gave way to the following incorporated forms, where *ne* loses its vowel and is fused with the following word, such as *ne + wille > nille*, *ne + is > nis*, *ne + am > nam*, *ne + has > nas*, *ne + had(de) > nadde*, *ne + was > nas*, *ne + were(n) > nere(n)*, *ne + one/an/a > none*, *no*, *ne + aught/ought > naught*, *nought*, *not*, *ne + either > neither*, *ne + or > nor*, *ne + ever > never*, or *na + more > namore* (Jespersen 1917: 12; Ingham 2013: 129).

Based on the examples presented above, Ingham claims that speakers at that stage "might have assumed that when you used a word like 'naefre' ('never') or 'naenig' ('not any'), you needed another negative word in the

sentence to match it" (Ingham as cited in Bierma, 2006, para 6). That is why they tended to add the word *ne*, meaning 'not', before the verb, which resulted in multiple negatives:

(6) *Nis it no korn | þat men mihte maken of bred?* (*Havelok* 462-463).

"Is there no corn that men might make bread of?" (Wyatt 1889: 22).

Interestingly, in *Havelok*, only *nis* and *namore* appear, which coexist with their full and etymologically distinct combinations *ne is* or *na / no more*. Compared to other negative markers, *nis* or *namore* are used only sporadically, a total of three times each, which suggests that such forms are becoming less common towards late Middle English. Cf.:

(7) *Of me, ne is me nouht a slo* (*Havelok* 849).

"I care not a sloe about myself" (Wyatt 1889: 28).

(8) *Wile I namore þe storie lenge* (*Havelok* 2363).

"I will prolong the story no more" (Wyatt 1889: 47).

(9) *Of Grim bidde ich na more spelle* (*Havelok* 2530).

"Of Grim I offer to relate no more" (Wyatt 1889: 51).

(10) *Wolden he no more to putting gange* (*Havelok* 1057).

"They would go no more to 'putting'" (Wyatt 1889: 31).

Jespersen considers the double negative indispensable since "it requires great mental energy to content oneself with one negative, which has to be remembered during the whole length of the utterance both by the speaker and by the hearer, than to repeat the negative idea (and have it repeated) whenever an occasion offers itself" (Jespersen 1917: 72). Nonetheless, Trudgill (2009: 314), disagreeing with Jespersen, regards the loss of double negation as simplification or redundancy elimination. For instance, in Standard Modern English just as in other West Germanic languages, two negatives cancel each other out to produce an affirmative statement and such usage is often associated with uncultivated and unpolished speech.

Besides, many languages that belong to the Romance or Slavic groups of languages, and even some English non-standard systems, ie., regional and ethnical varieties, permit and employ negative concord to intensify the meaning of negation commonly referred to as 'emphatic' negation. At this point, it is essential to mention that more remote traditional dialects have not been fully and immediately affected by such innovations.

Since all languages are constantly changing due to complicated and not quite straightforward factors, it is almost impossible to say exactly when and how the decline of this negative concord began. When a change in pronunciation, spelling, grammar, or vocabulary appears, it does not affect everyone and everywhere at once (Crystal 2004: 543-549). Indeed, language changes do not happen overnight. They are never sudden; they always allow people to keep up with and adjust to the language. The decline of negative concord is no exception.

Some assume that Old Norse triggered this shift and consider it a change from "below" which first occurred

in speech and only later was implemented in writing. Certainly, there is a strong argument in favour of this theory since *Havelok* contains many Old Norse words and phrases. Moreover, Old Norse is assumed to have triggered and accelerated the loss of grammatical inflections in the north of the country, thus making Old Norse and Old English even more mutually intelligible. In view of the fact that the negation pattern also changed in Old Norse long before it did so in Old English, the loss of *ne* in spoken English due to this impact sounds reasonable.

On the other hand, from a sociolinguistic perspective, it is often ranked as the change from "above", and it was the upper classes which initiated the elimination of multiple negation (Nevalainen 1999: 523). Since the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance were the periods when the status of English was reconsidered, the tendency to use one negative is assumed to have begun in the south of the country, the hub of aristocracy and education.

In fact, the next reason is commonly attributed to the rise of aristocracy and reconsidering English and its status. After French lost its position as the superior language, the empty space needed to be filled, but this time with a different English which was viewed as more polished, sophisticated, and quite distant from the language of the less educated, 'common' English people.

Governed by the aim to improve the language, the nobility started to devise and contribute not only to new spellings and pronunciations, but grammatical structures as well. This revised English language began to influence other dialects and was soon picked up by the middle class. Thus, a 'new' English steadily began to re-establish itself as a medium through which literature and culture could reach their full potential (Albert 2017: 47).

Iyeiri states that the deterioration of multiple negation was followed by the rise and use of non-assertive indefinites, later being gradually admitted to negative context (Ingham 2013: 147), which were, in fact, promoted by better-educated individuals (2002: 2017-220). This means the decline of negative concord correlates with the social status of the speaker. Her findings also indicate that "multiple negation persisted longest in the language of women and low-ranking men" and was less prevalent in the speech of the upper social classes. In a similar fashion, Mazzon (2014) points out that "scientific and legal prose presented a much lower number of multiple negations as compared to religious or historical prose" (p. 83). The upper classes were most likely aware and were probably following the 'algebraic logic', where two negatives result in a positive statement (The Standardisation 2006).

Gradually, the use of double or multiple negatives came to be highly disparaged and even "explicitly frowned upon as illogical and incorrect" (Anderwald 2005: 114) long before the era of prescriptive grammars (Nevalainen 2006: 580-581; Mazzon 2014: 53). Inspired by Latin, which itself does not permit such concord, an eighteenth-century purist, Robert Lowth, in his *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) decided against double negatives, as they were irrational and confusing just to be "confined to non-standard English" later on (Ingham 2013: 146). Therefore, the rise of prescriptive grammars and their proliferation due to the mass production of books could have accelerated its decline. These changes allowed the rapid spread of accurate information, triggered the growth of literacy and the spread of books, which

contributed to the emergence of a unified and standardized English (Albert 2017: 47).

All things considered, internally motivated language change always aims at creating balance within the language system, especially when one structural change involves another. More so, all the influences and changes listed should be taken as potential, which intertwined with one another in a complicated way resulting in the single negative. Surely, English must have had an inherent predisposition to such changes, which means the tendency towards the loss of the double concord was encoded in the language from the very start and, thence, was inevitable.

We started research into the topic by collecting negative clauses in *Havelok* and expected to find considerable differences compared to *Beowulf* as presented by Masayuki (2005: 50). To reach a better understanding of the ways in which these negatives are used in Old and Middle English sentences, it should be acknowledged that the problem and usage of negation is closely related to the problem of word order. There are many speculations as to the main word order in Old English. For instance, Fischer claims that Old English does not manifest any dominant word order whatsoever (1992: 371). Conversely, Haerberli and Haegemann (1999: 102-104) argue and consider SOV, among many other possible permutations of subject, verb, and object, dominant in subordinate clauses. Mazzon describes them as "more conservative" in their nature (Mazzon 2014: 19); consequently, the main clause displays mainly V2 word order.

In Old English the negative adverbial *ne* usually occurs before the verb, whereas in early Middle English prose two ways of negating the finite verb emerge. One of them was using *ne* and the other *ne...nawt*, where the position of *nawt* (also *naht*, *nat*, *nought*, *not*) only later becomes set: it follows *ne* and is placed right after the finite verb and hence acquires greater prominence (Jack 1978: 295).

Havelok still exhibits numerous patterns of single, double, and multiple negations which can be verbal, nominal and combined. Following Masayuki's analysis of *Beowulf* (2005: 50-51), sentences where *ne* and *no/na* can introduce: a) coordinate clauses: ...*ne* S (...) V; ...*no/na* S (...) V; b) main clauses: *ne* S (...) V, *no/na* S (...) V; c) negating the finite verb: ...*ne* V...; ...*no/na* V...; c) inversion: *ne* V S ...; *no/na* V S... (Masayuki 2005: 50). In *Havelok*, often instead of Old English *ne/no*, the Middle English negative *nouht* is already in use; however, its position appears to be more erratic.

Our observations reveal that in this text, single, double, and even multiple negations in both main and subordinate clauses coexist, but gradually by Early New English, they give way to single negation. As opposed to *Beowulf*, in *Havelok* a more unsystematic behaviour of negatives is observed, where one can reveal clauses with single negation with the negator *ne* mainly preceding the finite verb, either in the main or subordinate clauses, or *nouht* often following VS in case of inversion; double and even triple negatives each time following a different word order pattern. This means that compared to other texts, one can find a greater variety of sentences, where the negative elements behave in a more flexible manner within the sentence frames.

Apart from that, the variety of sentential structures can be attributed to the fact that this text is metre-sensitive, which is prone to more elaborate structures. Levin correctly warns that the poems are not very reliable sources since there are certain constraints linked to sustaining the metre and rhyme. Hence, such

texts are bound to provide a less accurate or completely different picture (Levin 1958: 500, Machida 1979: 2).

In short, the following types of verbal negation exist in this medieval text, such as: single negation manifested by *ne* V and *nouht* V, whereas double by *ne* V *nouht* and *nouht* *ne* V. Multiple negation combines verbal and nominal negation which exhibits a more flexible way of using and arranging different negative adverbs in the sentence.

By analysing *single negation* in the main clause, one can conclude that *Havelok* contains sentences already utilizing *nouht* without *ne*. It means that *nouht* finally "becomes fixed closer to the verb" (Machida 1979: 23). Since such structures are considered novel, the position of *nouht* is not fixed yet (11-12). On the other hand, observations made in Old English recur in Middle English subordinate clauses, where *ne* is solely used without *not*, demonstrating a rather fixed position following the subject and each time preceding the lexical verb (*nouht* V / V *nouht* vs. *ne* V), as in (13-14):

(11) *Shal it **nouht** ben als sho þenkes...* (*Havelok* 306).

"It shall not be as she thinks" (Wyatt 1889: 20).

(12) *Slep wel faste, and dred þe **nouht**...* (*Havelok* 661).

"Sleep very securely, and dread nought" (Wyatt 1889: 25).

(13) *Ne funden he non þat dede hem sham, | Þat he **ne** weren to sorwe brouht* (*Havelok* 56-57).

"Found they none that caused them shame, who were not soon to sorrow brought" (Wyatt 1889: 16).

(14) *Were he neure kniht so strong | Þat he **ne** made him sone kesten* (*Havelok* 80-81).

"Were he knight never so strong, he caused (men) soon to cast him (into prison)" (Wyatt 1889: 16).

Subordinate clauses are more conservative in this sense, since the position of *ne* is quite predictable and fixed. Whereas when *nouht* appears, the author is experimenting with placing it where it presumably makes sense to [him to render the meaning and sustain the rhyme](#).

Interestingly enough, *double negation* in the main clause is realized mainly by means of *inversion*. Fischer (1992: 376-377) claims that it is the negative *ne* that triggers it in both declarative and interrogative sentences where *ne* is normally found in pre-verbal with *nouht* in post-verbal position (*ne* V-S- *nouht*). In addition, when *ne* appears at the beginning of a sentence or clause, it aims at making "the hearer realize as soon as possible that it is not a permission that is imparted" (Jespersen 1917: 5). Furthermore, Jespersen believes there is a "natural tendency, also for the sake of clearness, to place the negative first, or at any rate as soon as possible, very often immediately before the particular word to be negated" (1917: 5). Apart from avoiding ambiguity and adding clarity for the sake of intelligibility, *ne* at the beginning of the sentence is bound to add solemnity to poetic texts. Moreover, in such *ne*-sentences the fortifying element *nouht* is already being introduced as described in stage two of Jespersen's cycle:

(15) ***Ne** wile i **nouht** be [nou] forloren* (*Havelok* 580).

"I will not be ruined" (Wyatt 1889: 24).

(16) *Hwan þis trayson was al þouht, | Of his oth **ne** was him **nouht*** (Havelok 312-313).

"When this treason was all thought (out), his oath was naught to him" (Wyatt 1889: 20).

There are other examples with *nouht* immediately preceding *ne* or following the modal auxiliary for the purpose mentioned above: *nouht ne V* and *ne aux nouht V*, as exemplified in:

(17) *And he slep, and **nouht ne** wiste* (Havelok 1280).

"[...] and he slept, and knew naught" (Wyatt 1889: 35).

(18) *þe erl **ne** wolde **nouht** ageyn | þe kinge be* (Havelok 2884-2885).

"The earl would not against the king be" (Wyatt 1889: 57).

The classical example of the shift from stage 1 to stage 2, which marks the Middle English period (*S ne V nouht*), is not yet richly represented in *Havelok* (19-20):

(19) *þe riche erl **ne** foryat **nouht**, | Þat he ne dede al Engeland | Sone sayse intil his bond* (Havelok 249-251).

"The rich earl forgot naught, but did soon seize all England into his hand" (Wyatt 1889: 19).

(20) *So as sho **ne** misdeed **nouht!*** (Havelok 337).

"Whereas she did naught amiss" (Wyatt 1889: 20).

In the subordinate clauses, *ne* is often paired with *no*, *neuere*, *non*, or other *ne* resulting in double or even multiple negation. In such sentences *ne* commonly precedes the modal auxiliary, whereas the second negative constituent can function as both nominal or verbal negator (*S-ne-mod.aux-V-no-O* vs. *S-ne-mod.aux.-no-V*) as in (21-25), Cf.:

(21) *He was so faste with yuel fest, | Þat he **ne** mouhte hauen **no** rest* (Havelok 144-145).

"He was so set fast with sickness, that he could have no rest" (Wyatt 1889: 17).

(22) *[...] Þat he **ne** mouhte **no** more liue, | For gold ne siluer, ne for no gyue* (Havelok 356-257).

"[...] so that he might live no longer, for gold, nor silver, nor for any gift" (Wyatt 1889: 20).

(23) *He dede it tere, and ful wel pike, | Þat it **ne** doutede sond **ne** krike* (Havelok 707-708).

"He had it tarred, and full well pitched, so that it feared neither sound nor creek" (Wyatt 1889: 26).

(24) ***Ne** weren he **neuere** ayeyn hem fikel* (Havelok 1210).

"[they] were never fickle to them" (Wyatt 1889: 33).

(25) *Þat with **no** salue **ne** sholde him helen leche **non*** (Havelok 1835-1836).

"That no leech (physician) should heal him with any salve" (Wyatt 1889: 40).

Nouht can also be used preverbally just before *ne-V* in order to intensify it. Such sentence types are not very numerous (7 examples). However, they are striking evidence in support of the change that already started with *nouht* being shifted from the final position in the clause with double negation (26) and being placed just before the *ne*-verb.

(26) *Þat nouht ne blinneth forto graten | Þer sho liggeth in prisoun (Havelok 328-329).*

"[Goldborough] who ceases not to lament, that she lies in prison" (Wyatt 1889: 20).

As the pie-diagram suggests, main clauses with single or double negation are more progressive since they both already make extensive use of *nouht*. However, the sentences with *ne* are definitely more numerous and still exhibit a striking contrast with the main clauses.

Similarly, Ingham (2013) notices that in the main prose works of the early 13th century the breakdown into main and subordinate clauses reveals that main clauses, which tend to convey the speaker or writer's illocutionary act, were far more likely than subordinate clauses to contain the secondary negator *nouht* (p.130).

Overall, a closer examination of data reveals that *ne* in *Havelok* is predominantly preverbal just as it is in Latin: it either precedes the finite or the auxiliary verb to strengthen the idea of negation. On the other hand, *nouht* is more loosely related to the finite verb. It can be found in the pre- or post-verbal position. However, towards the late Middle English period, the position of *nouht* gains more ground, which means it becomes stressed and fixed closer to the finite verb, and that is why *ne* tends to be dropped. Yet, *ne* did not fully disappear; rather, it morphed with and gave way to forms such as *never*, *nor*, *none*, *non*, or *no* which are still in use today. From the study presented above it can be concluded that there were three ways of marking sentential negation in Middle English: the preverbal *ne*, inherited from Old English, the new postverbal marker *not*, or both markers used together to make negation even more emphatic. Over the course of the Middle English period, *not* alone takes over which can already be observed as early as the 13th century.

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