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"N-words" in Negative Structures in English

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This paper will seek to answer the following two questions: (i) How can it be that in a language such as English, multiple "*n*-words" can be used to express a single semantic negation? and (ii) what is the status of *n*-words such as *nothing* and *nowhere* in the English lexicon? It will be shown that a semantic re-evaluation of *n*-words has occurred historically, with such words originating as a kind of morphologically-complex "*n*-marked" Negative Polarity Item (which entered into a "concord" relationship with other negative expressions) that later underwent *lexicalisation* to become Negative Quantifiers capable of expressing negation independently. Although this change is in keeping with the Jespersen Cycle, this paper will show that the change was not "across the board" in English, with both regional dialects and "the vernacular tongue" preserving the older system of negation, Negative Concord, until the present day. This has resulted in a rich and complex system of negation in modern English which has a similarly complex semantics.

Keywords: negative concord, *n*-word, dialect, polysemy, lexicalisation

1. Introduction

This paper will concern itself with what are hereafter termed "n-words" and their undoubted presence in the lexicon of many speakers of modern English. So salient a feature are they of English that one can readily find tips on avoiding their use in formal situations on educational websites (1), with such advice being primarily aimed at school leavers:

(1) A double negative happens when you put **two** negative words together in the same sentence. If the two negative words are talking about the same thing, they cancel each other out -- so the message becomes positive. This is confusing and it is a major mistake if you are in a formal situation (for example, writing a letter or at a job interview).
(BBC 2008)

As linguists, and as descriptivists rather than prescriptivists, we are forced to conclude that the "double negative" phenomenon referred to above, which involves the use of *n*-words, merely reflects the tacit store of knowledge that is an individual speaker's natural grammar. Despite the warnings of the BBC, the use of such constructions persists as shown in (2) and has been documented to occur in all parts of the UK (Anderwald 2005).

(2) a. I **divvent** know **nowt** else you know.
'I don't know anything else you know.' (Tyneside English)
b. I'm **not never** going to do **nowt no** more for thee.
'I'm not ever going to do anything more for you.' (Bolton English)
(Corrigan 2006:4)

The term "*n*-word" was firstly used by Laka (1990) to refer to negative nominal and adverbial expressions found in languages that use "Negative Concord" (hereafter NC), wherein the use of multiple *n*-words to express a single negation is standard. In English, the corresponding set of words are the nominals *nothing*, *nowhere* and *nobody* and the adverbs *never*, *neither*, *nor* and *not*. These expressions, with the exception of *not*, have been referred to as *n*-indefinites (Jäger 2006), as they consist of an indefinite expression "prefixed" by a negative morpheme. As these words have been subject to lexical re-evaluation historically, the neutral expression *n*-word is also used in this paper to refer to the English set of *n*-indefinites. A formal definition of *n*-words can be found in Giannakidou (2006), and is here repeated as (3) below:

(3) An expression α is an *n*-word if:
a. α can be used in structures containing sentential negation or another α-expression yielding a reading equivalent to one logical negation, and
b. α can provide a negative fragment answer.
(Giannakidou 2006:328)

Though the definition in (3) cannot be applied to *n*-indefinites as found in Standard English, the term "English" itself also needs stretching to include the many regional dialects in the UK. In many of these, *n*-words in the definitional sense do occur (as in (2)), and clauses which ought to trigger a Double Negation (hereafter DN) reading also have an NC reading open to them. This is best illustrated by example, and "Mary *didn't* talk to *nobody"* is used here for exposition. In Standard English, the DN interpretation of this sentence entails that Mary talked to somebody. This is due to the fact that the negation in *didn't* cancels the negation in *nobody*, thus "the message becomes positive" as in (1). However, in many dialects, an alternative NC reading sees the negative expression *nobody* behaving like a Negative Polarity Item (hereafter NPI); both negative elements combined yield only a single semantic negation.[1] The two semantic representations might be written as in (4):

[1] Hence *nobody* here is an *n*-word.

(4) a. (∃x: persons(x)) ¬TALK TO (Mary, x) = Mary did not talk to *anybody*.
b. (¬∀x: persons(x)) ¬TALK TO (Mary, x) = Mary talked to somebody.

Negative Concord is a system of negation widely used in Europe. So common is it that it should perhaps be considered the "unmarked" case (Ladusaw 1992). As this system also appears to be an option in English, this paper will take the approach of asking why it is that a DN interpretation should be available for sentences like that in (4). In taking DN to be the marked case, it is easier to answer the two research questions with which this paper is concerned, these being (i) how can it be that in a DN language such as English, multiple *n*-words can be used to express a single semantic negation? and (ii) what is the status of words such as *nothing* and *nowhere* in the English lexicon?

The structure of the paper is as follows; first, several semantic accounts of NC systems are examined in the literature review section before a preferred one[2] is adopted as a methodology and applied to English data in the analysis section. Older forms of English (itself NC) and evidence for the loss of NC is then considered in the final discussion. It will be shown that *n*-words in the definitional sense of (3) are still to be found in English, but that these words for most speakers have undergone lexicalisation to become Inherently Negative (universal) Quantifiers (hereafter INQs). It will be argued that this lexical change is nothing more than a manifestation of the Jespersen Cycle.

2. Literature review

As will be by now evident, Negative Concord presents a major problem to any analysis designed to account for it that wishes to adhere to a compositional semantics.[3] Several models have been proposed in the literature and, of these, three will be discussed in this section. The models in question are Negative Absorption (or "factorisation"), treating *n*-words as polarity items, and treating *n*-words as polysemous. In a paper such as this one it is impossible to examine each hypothesis in great detail, and the main tenets of each only are presented.

Under the "Negative Absorption" hypothesis (Haegeman and Zanuttini 1990), *n*-words have the status of Inherently Negative Quantifiers which carry semantically-visible [NEG] features and are interpreted as universal quantifiers in the semantics. The main advantage of the model, then, is that it is able to preserve the intuition that speakers have that *n*-words are somehow inherently negative. A single

[2] That is the one that treats *n*-words as polysemous.
[3] That is to say, it needs to explain how an indefinite number of *n*-words in a single clause can resolve itself into a single negation in the semantics.

semantic negation is arrived at by all of the *n*-words in a sentence being raised to Spec-NegP[4] at the LF interface, where a process termed "factorization" reduces all of the [NEG] features to just one. The model has led to the formulation of a "Neg-Criterion" (Haegeman and Zanuttini 1991), which constitutes a "rule" for how the process works (as in (5)):

(5) **Neg-Criterion**

a. Each X° (NEG) must be in a Spec-Head relation with a Neg operator;
b. Each Neg operator must be in a Spec-Head relation with a Neg X° (NEG).

Though factorisation provides a plausible analysis of the phenomenon, this method will not be used here. There are several problems inherent in this system (for a broader discussion of which, see Jäger 2006 and Giannakidou 2006), one of which is that it must posit the existence of multiple vacant slots above NegP to which *n*-words raise. Evidence from the French system of NC suggests that this is quite unlikely, as the sentential negation *ne…pas* cannot participate in the concord system without giving rise to a DN interpretation (Corblin et al. 2004). French NC contains Neg-Spread structures, e.g. *Personne n'a rien vu* 'Nobody NEG saw nothing', thus multiple vacant slots in Spec-NegP would be required to accommodate all of the *n*-words. Given that these slots should be available for "factorisation", it becomes impossible to explain why *n*-words cannot be accommodated alongside *pas* in this position. There may only ever be one vacant slot in Spec-NegP, and this slot is perhaps reserved for sentential negation. The movement of so many words out of structural positions also seems to be counter-intuitive, given that LF representations and syntactic structures should approximate to one another quite closely (Ladusaw 1992).

A second hypothesis treats *n*-words as special kinds of non-negative Negative Polarity Items which are restricted to occurring in exclusively negative contexts. In English, NPIs are words in the *any*-series, such as *anything*, *anybody*, *anywhere*, *any*, and these words do have a clear distributional relationship with their *n*-word counterparts. Both NPIs and *n*-words require licensing by a c-commanding affective constituent,[5] which creates a "downward monotonic" environment (Ladusaw 1979). Given these similarities, it can be strongly argued that *n*-words themselves are merely a polarity item of sorts that are restricted to occurring in purely negative contexts. If *n*-words can be assumed to be semantically non-negative, as is proposed in Ladusaw (1992), then the problems they pose to a compositional analysis simply disappear as

[4] The specifier position is above the negative operator.

[5] The feature [+affec] is not limited to the semantic negative operator, but also being carried by adverbs such as *hardly* and verbs such as *doubt.*

NC as a system ceases to exist. These strong arguments have led to the hypothesis that *n*-words, as they are found in NC languages, are merely non-negative NPIs.

This model too, however, will not be adopted here. A major problem with it is that it is impossible to account for why *n*-words, unlike polarity items, can be licensed in subject positions and can stand alone as elliptical one-word answers to questions (as in (6)). One solution to this problem is to propose that a negative operator (hereafter NegP) can be inserted into a derivation "wherever necessary" to license the *n*-words. This then creates problems for syntax, as NegP is generally taken to occupy a fixed position in a language somewhere fairly high in structure. Additionally, the intuition that *n*-words are inherently negative is also lost.

(6) A : ¿Quién vino? (Spanish)
who came (he/she)
'Who came?'
B: **Nadie**.
nobody
'No-one.'
B': *A un alma.
To a soul
'A single soul'
(Jäger 2006:116)

The final model to be found in the literature is one that treats *n*-words as polysemous between INQs and NPIs, with their semantic interpretation ultimately being context-sensitive. This model is advanced in van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993), and constitutes the approach that will be adopted in this paper. The French sentences in (7) are able to demonstrate how the model works in practice. In these sentences, the word *rien* can mean both 'nothing' (the second sentence) and 'anything' (the first sentence), depending on the context. It cannot be argued that *rien* is simply an NPI meaning 'anything', as this is not the case in the second sentence. In order to adhere to a compositional semantics, one logical conclusion to draw is that the word *rien* is polysemous and is actually a homophone.

(7) a. **Personne** a **rien** vu (spoken French)
Nobody has nothing seen
'Nobody saw anything.'

b. J'ai **rien** vu
I.have nothing seen
'I didn't see anything.'
(van der Wouden and Zwarts 1993:3)

As an NPI, the word *rien* would require licensing by a c-commanding negative element. In the first sentence it is licensed by *personne*, itself an *n*-word, which takes scope over the quantifier *rien*. It is this c-command relation that triggers semantic shift in *rien* from that of being a negative universal quantifier to becoming a non-negative "NPI-like" existential quantifier. *Personne* itself retains universal INQ-type negative quantifier status whilst in subject position, with evidence for this status coming from the fact that it can be modified by adverbs like *presque* 'almost', and that such adverbs can only be used to modify universal terms. This account of NC seems able to account for how multiple *n*-words yield only a single semantic negation, as there is only ever one semantic [NEG] feature visible in the clause. It can also explain how negative fragment answers can be licensed as, in these positions, *n*-words become self-licensing. It is thought likely that this account, when applied to the English data, will be able to account for the different kinds of concord structures that can be found in its various dialects.

3. Methodology

The methodology, then, has already been outlined in the literature review section. It will be assumed that *n*-words in English dialects are polysemous between universal quantifier INQs and existential quantifier NPIs. This assumption will be tested on clauses of different syntactic types that contain instances of multiple negations to see how well the model can account for each structure. It is "type" of structure rather than frequency that is of relevance in this particular paper; testing multiple instances of constructions of the same type would be redundant and the use of NC in English dialects is not in question. Some parallels will be drawn with French, a working NC system, in which three types of NC construction have been identified: Neg-Doubling (*ne*…*n*-word), Neg-Spread (*n*-word…*n*-word), and both (*ne*…*n*-word + *n*-word). All three of these constructions can be found in English, where there also exists a fourth structure (not permitted in French) in which the sentential negator gets involved (*not* + NEG…*n*-word). It will be shown that the polysemous *n*-word approach of van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993) is capable of accounting for how only a single semantic negation is arrived at in all.

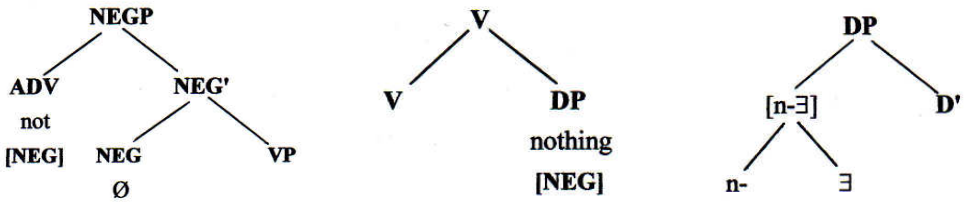
A number of sources have been used to acquire tokens for analysis, and these are

cited where necessary. Neg-Doubling (as it is found in French) appears to be a relatively rare structure in England, and the token dealt with under that section has been taken from a highly localised Scottish dialect: "Buckie" Scottish. The Neg-Spread token has been taken directly from the British National Corpus.

4. Analysis: Negative concord as polysemous *n*-words

In the analysis that follows, several syntactic structures have been assumed. Sentential negation in English, including its dialects, is assumed to be realised by a negative operator with a negative adverb in Spec-NegP as in (8a). The *n*-words have been assumed to be polysemous between the structures in (8b) and (8c). In (8b), they are an INQ carrying a semantically-interpretable [NEG] feature; in (8c), they are a morphologically-complex ("*n*-marked") existential quantifier prefixed by a negative morpheme. In the derivations that follow, they will both be classed as DPs in order to simplify the structures as much as possible.

(8) a. b. c.



4.1 Application to a dialectical "Neg-Doubling" structure

Instances of "canonical" (typical) Neg-Doubling structures are difficult to find in English dialects, as the weak element in Neg-head position (historically, *ne*) has already been dropped from use in most and been replaced by the structure for sentential negation (as in (8a)). It may survive in Scotland, though, where isolated dialects make use of the weak negative clitic *na(e)* (as in (9)). Though this element has elsewhere (e.g. Smith 2001) been analysed as the equivalent of the word *not*,[6] it has been placed in head position in the analysis given here on account of both its phonological similarity to the old clitic *ne* and the presence of *not* in Scottish English. The geographical isolation of dialects which make use of NC and its robust use in such dialects present further arguments in favour of this element being analysed as the head of NegP. Either way, its function and semantics would be identical to that of *not* regardless of position in syntax.

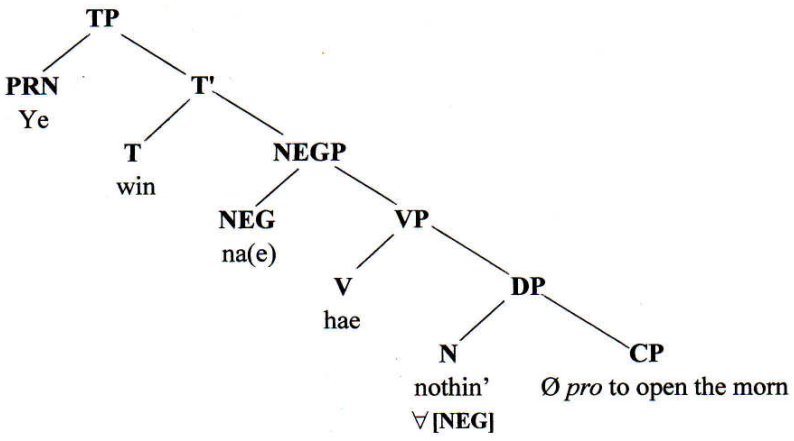
[6] And it is presumably as an adverb in Spec-NegP.

(9) Dialectical: Ye **winna** hae **nothin'** to open the morn. (Buckie Scottish)
Standard: You won't have anything to open tomorrow.
(Smith 2001:110)

In van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993:6), Neg-Doubling is said to involve "the formation of a marked verbal projection by means of a designated element that has the morphological form of a negative, but which denotes the identity function" and that this element must be "licensed by an expression with the appropriate semantic properties". In NC French, the designated element is the semantically empty *ne*, the head of NegP, and the expression which provides semantic licensing an *n*-word. Arguments are then said to form complex "functors" which take verbal projections as their own "arguments", thereby building clauses.

Whilst the underlying theory that *n*-words are polysemous will be followed in this analysis, the parsing mechanism will not. It is assumed here that arguments, both internal and external, are generated verb-internally, and that the basic "predication" is visible to both the semantics and the parser (HAVE [*Ye*, *nothin'*] in (9)). Following van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993), the word *nothin'* carries both a [NEG] feature and (as the dialect is NC) a [+NC] feature. The [+NC] feature dictates that the *n*-word be licensed by a c-commanding negative expression and, as the subject argument *Ye* (which will later raise to subject position to c-command the entire structure) is a referential pronoun which cannot be made negative, a pre-verbal NegP with an overt head *nae* is inserted into the derivation to license the following *n*-word. The element *nae* is semantically non-negative: its function is to satisfy the requirement that *nothin'* has a morphologically-negative licenser. This in turn allows *nothin'* to retain the [NEG] feature and the very weak particle *na(e)* to encliticise onto the modal verb *win* (will), as in (10).

(10) How *Ye **winna** hae **nothin'** to open the morn* yields a single semantic negation:



In the derivation in (10), the desired result of a single semantic negation has been achieved. Despite the presence of two (superficially) negative elements within the clause, only a single [NEG] feature is visible to the semantics, and the clause is interpreted as a single VP negation. This type of analysis is able to account for similar Neg-Doubling structures in French, where this type of negation is standard, as it can explain both the presence of the particle *ne*, and the c-command relation between it and *rien*, in formal sentences such as *Je n'ai rien dit*. It can also explain the absence of *ne* in spoken varieties (*J'ai rien dit*),[7] whereby *ne* comes to be discarded as it is semantically empty and contributes nothing to the actual negation. The element *ne* is perhaps best analysed as a functional clitic as it changes its phonology (in French) depending on whether the following constituent starts with a consonant or a vowel. In French, this element encliticises onto the verb, in Buckie Scottish, onto the auxiliary. Further instances of "Neg-Doubling" in Buckie Scottish can be found in example (11).

(11) a. I **didna** hae **nae** tools or **nothing**.
'I didn't have any tools or anything.'
b. She **didna** tak **nae** money fae us.
'She didn't take any money from us.'
c. She **disna** bide in Buckie **nae** mare.
'She doesn't live in Buckie any more.'
(Smith 2001:110)

In each of the examples in (11), the element in Neg-head position (*na*) is a clitic which attaches to the auxiliary verb. In the present system, this semantically empty element is purely functional in that it is required to license the negative expressions that follow lower in structure. There is no need for movement out of structural position at LF for factorisation, which is a distinct advantage of this system. Additionally, the intuition that the c-commanded negative expressions are themselves somehow inherently negative can also be maintained as they carry the only interpretable [NEG] features visible to the semantics.

4.2 Application to a dialectical "Neg-Spread" structure

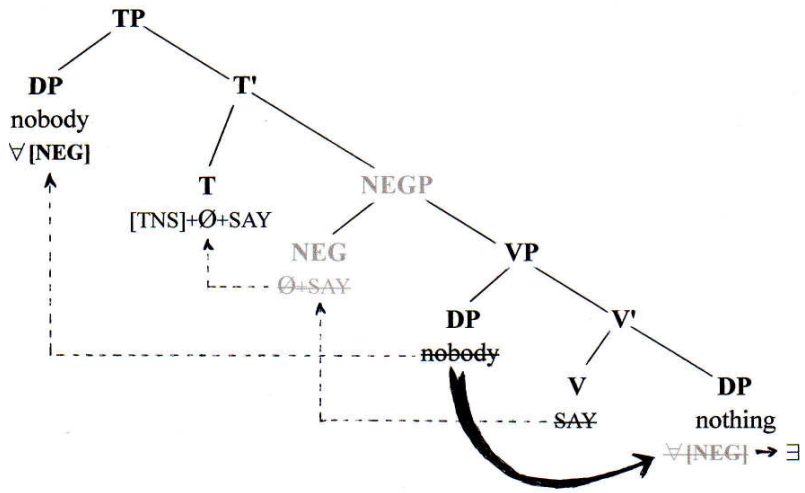
In van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993:6), Neg-Spread involves "context-dependent assignment of semantic values to quantifying expressions". This means that whether the *n*-word is treated as an inherently negative INQ or a as a non-negative NPI by the

[7] Both mean 'I didn't say anything', with or without the *ne*.

semantics is ultimately context-sensitive. Semantic shift is triggered by scope relations, whereby "a universal negative within the scope of a negative is interpreted as being an existential quantifier". In the present system, this reduces to the relation c-command; it is being c-commanded by one negative quantifier that causes others lower in structure to be re-evaluated in the semantics. In French, the element *ne* is "optional" in spread structures, as can be seen in pairs such as *Personne n'a rien vu* (formal) and *Personne a rien vu* (spoken) (both meaning 'Nobody saw anything'). Although structures containing both the functional clitic and *n*-words are either rare or absent in the dialects of English, for a comprehensive account of how a Neg-Spread structure can generate a single semantic negation to be given, the French structure also needs to be accounted for. For that reason, a NegP which would host the particle *ne* in French has been inserted into the derivation that follows (as in (13)), though it may no longer be present in the dialectical English structure.

(12) Dialectical: …, and **nobody** said **nothing**
Standard: …, and nobody said anything.
(The British National Corpus: CRS 1042)

(13) How ***nobody*** *said* ***nothing*** yields a single semantic negation:



In the structure in (13) it has been assumed, as before, that the basic predication is visible before the parser constructs the sentence (SAY [*nobody*, *nothing*] in (12)) and that it is from this that the structure is built. For a "standard" analysis to be given, it has also been assumed (as before) that *nothing*, the first word inserted into the derivation, is carrying both a semantically interpretable [NEG] feature and a [+NC] feature. The insertion of *nobody* into a position where it takes scope over *nothing*

triggers the semantic type-shift in *nothing*.[8] It is assumed that *nobody*, by virtue of being negative, is also able to satisfy the [+NC] feature of *nothing* and either deletes or cancels it. What happens next, however, is more speculative. It is probable that, in English NC, the "INQ-type" *nobody*, a universal quantifier, is sufficiently negative enough to not require the addition of a pre-verbal NegP into structure which formal French would require. In English, *nobody* presumably raises directly to Spec-TP, carrying along with it its [NEG] feature to negate the entire clause. In French, it is more likely that *nobody*, in the corresponding French sentence *Personne n'a rien vu*, raises first through an intervening NegP, in which Spec-NegP is empty, to subject position. Although the clitic *ne* is weak in French (cf. Neg-Doubling, above), its loss in spoken French is a relatively recent development, thus a NegP must still be present in the French structure even though it does not receive phonological spellout. Spoken French, therefore, in Neg-Doubling structures at least, is similar to the dialectical forms of English in which NC is still used. It is not possible to determine from the phonological output of these dialects whether or not a NegP also remains in structure, or whether the universal negative quantifier is itself negative enough to not trigger the insertion of one. In actuality it makes no difference either way. If the element in Neg-head position (*ne* in French, null in English) is taken to be contributing nothing to the negation, then the outcome is the same: namely that, at the end of the derivation, only a single semantically interpretable [NEG] feature is visible to the semantics and the clause is again interpreted as being another instance of a single negation.

That a negative expression can stand alone in subject position as an elliptical one-word answer to a question is a problem for the NPI analysis of NC structures outlined in Section 2 above. This is not a problem in the present system as the highest expression in structure is an INQ, capable of expressing negation independently as it carries an interpretable [NEG] feature. In (12), the INQ in subject position checks the [+NC] feature of the negative quantifier that it c-commands. If deemed irrelevant to or already established within the discourse, everything below the INQ can be left unstated, leaving it free to stand alone as a one-word answer to a question as the example below shows.

(14) A: Who said nothing?
B: Nobody.

4.3 Application to a complex mono-clausal negation with sentential negation

This system of analysis readily extends itself to more complex clauses in which

[8] It loses its [NEG] feature and is re-valued as a non-negative "NPI-type" existential quantifier.

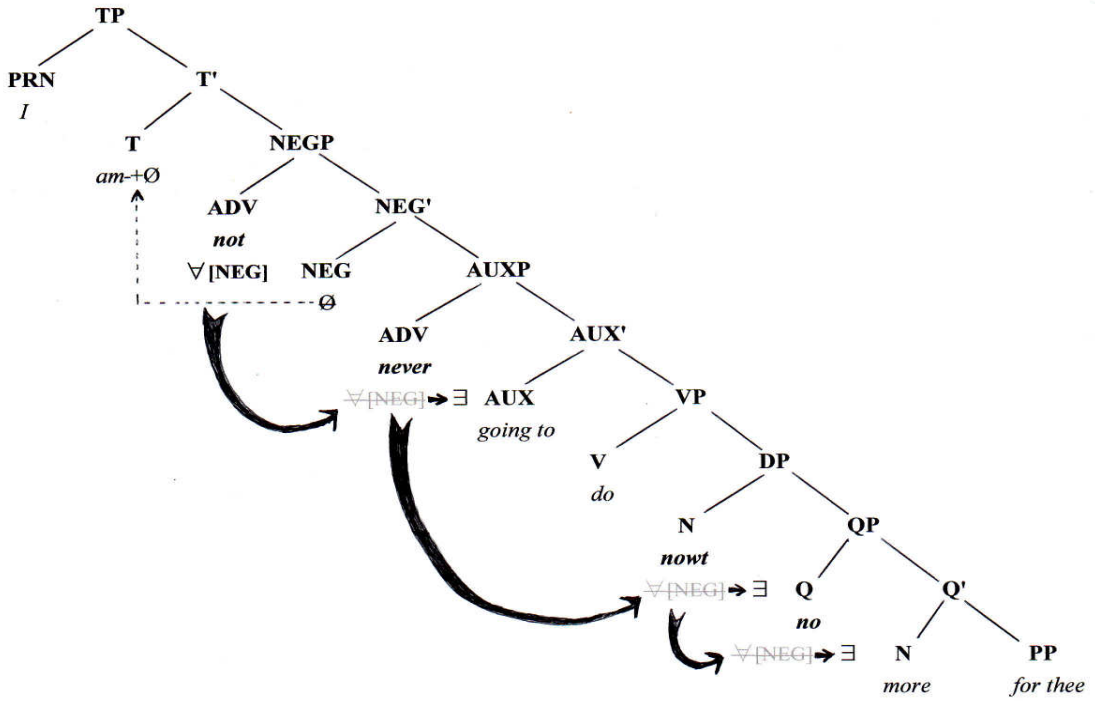
multiple negative elements are found, even those in which sentential negation plays a part. In the Bolton English sentence below (as in (15)), which contains no fewer than five instances of negation should the null Neg-head be counted, the knock-on effect of the insertion of additional *n*-words into positions above other *n*-words can clearly be seen: each new item triggers semantic type-shift in (and only in) the quantifier immediately below it.

(15) Dialectical: I'm **not never** going to do **nowt no** more for thee (Bolton)
Standard: I'm not ever going to do anything more for you.
(Corrigan 2006:4)

In van der Wouden and Zwarts (1993), it is lying in the scope of a negative that triggers such shift, and this itself accounts for how sentential negation can come to be involved in the concord system of a given dialect. The most widespread use of NC in English is of the type [$_{NEGP}$ not [$_{NEG}$ Ø][$_{VP}$ — [$_{NP}$ *n*-word]]] (sentential negation + *n*-word), which can be thought of as a form of Neg-Doubling (though not in the "canonical" sense). In the derivation given in (16), the exactly same procedure is followed as for both Neg-Doubling and Neg-Spread. The [+NC] feature of each *n*-word is satisfied by lying in the scope of another c-commanding *n*-word. Ultimately, it is the topmost negative expression in the structure that carries the only semantically visible [NEG] feature, resulting in the clause, despite the many *n*-words, being interpreted as a single negation. That *not* can come to be seen as a universal term is perhaps in need of some further justification. It is a very definite term, and clearly one which is inherently negative and well-suited to carrying its own [NEG] feature. It can be modified by the same adverbs of degree as can the suite of *n*-words, in particular *absolutely*, but also *almost* under specific conditions,[9] suggesting that *not* is also a universal term.

[9] Such conditions can be illustrated in the sentence: *Did he come or not? Almost not! He got lost on the way!*

(16) How *I'm* ***not never*** *going to do* ***nowt no*** *more for thee* yields a single semantic negation:



That sentential negation can come to be involved in an NC system does present problems when searching for a comparable sentence in French. As mentioned previously in Section 2, sentential negation (in the form of *ne…pas*) does not participate in the concord system of French (Corblin et al. 2004); the string *ne…pas* cannot be used in the same environment as an *n*-word without the resulting semantic interpretation being one of double negation. An equivalent sentence to the English NC dialect form of (15) which includes the string *ne…pas*, therefore, would not be permitted in French.[10] Whilst this superficially presents a problem to the type of analysis given above, it will be argued below that systems of negation in both languages and dialects are subject to a cycle of change (cf. Discussion). Under this cycle, participating elements in negation vary with time, sometimes strengthening (*n*-words), sometimes weakening (French *ne*), and sometimes disappearing (historical *ne*). It is possible that the string *ne…pas* has come to be viewed as inherently negative in French, as have *n*-words in Standard English, and for that reason cannot co-occur in the same clause as any *n*-word, polysemous or otherwise. Whilst full consideration of French is beyond the scope of this current paper, the answer to the problem stated above is assumed to lie somewhere in the diachronic development of that language.

Further tokens of mono-clausal negations involving sentential negation in English

[10] The translation can be written as *Je ne ferai plus jamais rien pour toi*, which does not involve *pas*.

are given in (17) below, all of which have been taken from the BYU-BNC: British National Corpus. As stated, this is the most common form of NC in many dialects of English, and tokens are relatively easy to find.

(17) a. …there ai**n't nothing** wrong with it. (KCN)
'… there isn't anything wrong with it.'
b. …there ai**n't nothing** these blokes can teach me about files and stuff. (KDA)
'…there isn't anything these blokes can teach me about files and stuff.'
c. …there ai**n't nobody** in this town that I ain't worked for. (G4N)
'…there isn't anybody in this town that I haven't worked for.'
d. …and I do**n't never** do that cos I don't like doing it. (KBE)
'… and I don't ever do that because I don't like doing it.'
e. … if I was raped I would**n't never** go to the police. (FL9)
'…if I was raped I wouldn't ever go to the police.'
f. … they would**n't neither** set him **nor** his brother on the pits you know. (FYH)
'…they wouldn't either set him or his brother on the pits you know.'
(BYU-BNC: British National Corpus)[11]

As with the other patterns of dialectical NC dealt with above, the present system has significant advantages over previously assumed models. There is no need for movement out of structural position at LF, which allows the syntactic representation to approximate closely to the LF representation. The presence of a negative adverb in Spec-NegP is assumed, as in French, to block factorisation, yet complex mono-clausal negations involving the sentential negator are permitted in dialectical English. An account based on polysemous *n*-words is able to explain this outcome for both English and French, but only when the diachronic development of the language is considered in the case of the latter. In French, as in Standard English, the negative adverb in SpecNegP is an inherently negative term which negates everything contained within and lying below the VP; in dialectical English, it merely triggers type-shift in *n*-words lying within its c-command domain. The fact that *n*-words bear striking distributional similarities to NPIs also follows naturally from such an account; in NC dialects, *n*-words occupy the same syntactic positions as do NPIs in DN forms. The intuition that *n*-words are somehow inherently negative need not be abandoned altogether if they are treated as polysemous.

[11] The data in (17) were retrieved using the BYU-BNC interface created by Mark Davies, as opposed to Oxford University interface as in example (12).

4.4 Additional benefits of this type of analysis

An unexpected benefit of using this model to account for NC became apparent during the analysis stage, this being the ease with which it could be accommodated into "bottom up" theories of syntax and into the theoretical principles of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995) in particular. In treating *n*-words as polysemous, it is always the insertion of a new *n*-word that triggers re-evaluation of the last, and ultimately only the topmost *n*-word that carries the semantically visible [NEG] feature. Type-shift to "INQ-type" existential quantifier is only triggered by the insertion of *n*-words into positions above other *n*-words. The lower *n*-words are then in the scope of the higher *n*-word, which triggers the semantic shift; thus the licensing of *n*-words can be reduced to the relation c-command. Semantic operations, in this case, can arguably be said to be both "local" (meeting the "Locality Principle" (Chomsky 1995)) and early (meeting the "Earliness Principle" (Pesetsky 1995)), in that they take place at the same time that the parser introduces the new *n*-word into the derivation and only affects the next *n*-word below the new one. By the time the parser inserts *never* into (16) above, it does not have to concern itself with the quantifier *no* lower in structure as this has already been re-valued as an NPI. The parallels with (*any*-series) NPI licensing in Standard English are obvious, in that it is only ever the topmost *n*-word (the last inserted) that remains semantically negative, whereby it is seemingly able to license any number of polarity items that occur below it, though in reality these have all been licensed much earlier in the derivation. The polysemous *n*-words approach, then, can also explain the distributional concordances between NPIs in Standard English and *n*-words in regional dialects. Thus a context-sensitive approach based on *n*-words being polysemous is not only able to account for how multiple *n*-words present in a single clause can be resolved into a single semantic negation, but also exactly how the replacement system (cf. Discussion) of NPI-licensing works.

5. Discussion: Lexicalization, the Jespersen Cycle and negation in English

(18) a. He **nevere** yet **no** vileynye **ne** sayde / In al his lyfe unto **no** maner wight
(Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales (General Prologue), 70-71, 14th Century)

b. I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth, / And that **no** woman has, **nor never none** / Shall mistress be of it save I alone
(Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, Viola: III .1.148–151, ca. 1600)

The analysis presented above is capable of accounting for the grammaticality of the concord system used in many dialects of English, thus the evidence presented in

the analysis section can answer the first of the research questions presented in the introduction. To answer the second, and to explain why in Standard English only the DN interpretation is available in clauses where multiple *n*-words are found, requires some consideration of the history of negation in English. English historically was an NC language, as random quotes from the literature (as in (18)) are able to demonstrate. The loss of NC (or the transition from NC to DN) has been widely studied, and some evidence from Kallel (2007) will be presented briefly here. It was found (in Kallel 2007) that *n*-word use was abundant in a series of family letters written at the start of the period 1450-1599. During this period, however, *n*-words effectively became "obsolete", being replaced by their corresponding *any*-words as a result of an unknown factor during the middle of this period, e.g. NC=83.3%, NPI=16.7% at 1500; by 1599: NC=0.6%, NPI=99.4%. When plotted graphically, this change was found to form a smooth "*s*-shaped" curve, indicating that the loss was regular and presumably driven by internal factors. The change was found to have occurred across grammatical contexts (both object expressions, e.g. *anything*, *nothing*, and adjunct expressions, e.g. *any*, *no*, were compared). Thus it is clear that NC went into a period of rapid decline in the sixteenth century, and it is concluded that this could only have occurred as the result of a change in a single underlying parameter setting.

The polysemous *n*-word approach to analysing NC languages, and NC dialects of DN languages, is also able to explain the emergence of the DN system in standard forms. The parameter that was reset in English was that *n*-words underwent rapid lexicalisation, and came to be seen as the carriers of negation. This resulted in the whole suite of NPI-like *n*-words being dropped from the language—though in reality they were actually "assimilated" to inherently negative INQs—and the loss of the concord system within the space of one or two generations. That *n*-words were initially patterning like NPIs itself supports the hypothesis that they are/were polysemous, and their lexicalisation to INQs comfortably fits the Jespersen ("negation") Cycle (Jespersen 1917) as example (19) shows**,** whereby *n*-words come to be seen as "the negative proper":

(19) The history of negative expressions in various languages makes us witness the following curious fluctuation: the original negative adverb is first weakened, then found insufficient and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional word, and this in its turn may be felt as the negative proper and may then in course of time be subject to the same development as the original word. (Jespersen 1917:4)

What is not always considered by such accounts of change is the class of people

that it might have affected. In Kallel (2007), the pattern of change manifests itself in letters; therefore it can logically be inferred that the change to DN was a change that affected those who might have written letters, i.e. the literate. It was not a change that affected the illiterate, and it can be hypothesized that earlier systems of negation, which made use of polysemous *n*-words, survived amongst the working classes via oral tradition. It is this that gives rise to the staggering diversity of negation in the UK's dialects, most of which are localised, that can be seen today. With both historical data and probable socio-economic factors in mind, it becomes possible to advance a strong hypothesis that is capable of answering all of the research questions presented in the introduction. That English becomes a "marked" form in which a DN reading, and only a DN reading, is available for multiple *n*-words can be explained by the lexicalisation of such words, which itself accords with the Jespersen Cycle. This leaves only sentential negation (as in (8a)) and negation by INQ-type universal quantifier (as in (8b)), both of which carry semantic [NEG] features, available as options to negate clauses. That *n*-words of the morphologically complex yet inherently non-negative NPI-type in (8c) did not undergo this process in certain dialects allows for an explanation as to why mono-clausal negation by multiple *n*-words remains grammatical in many places. In these regional dialects, the status of *n*-words is that they are polysemous between (8b) and (8c). This system can be seen at work in the analyses presented above, and it can be readily applied to almost any type of NC structure. The hidden benefit of adopting this approach is that it can also account for how the replacement system works, that which is responsible for licensing *any*-series NPIs in Standard English. This, alone, is strong evidence for a change occurring that affected only words, lexicalisation, and not the underlying system of parsing actual clauses.

6. Conclusion

The conclusions of this paper became evident throughout the course of the discussion. It is concluded here that the use of multiple *n*-words to express a single negation in a variety of regional dialects in the UK is both (i) grammatical, in that it conforms to the same rules of syntax as does the "standard" system of negation, and, (ii) semantically interpretable, in that it uses a system that can be demonstrated to work in other languages that make use of polysemous *n*-words.

That it survives into the present day as a last vestige of a widely-used older system is likely due to socio-economic factors such as social class and illiteracy. Its continued use in "the regions" may also serve a pragmatic function, in that it allows for certain types of information, such as the expression of social and regional identity, to be

readily conveyed.

What is clear from the discussion and from the evidence given above is that negation in English cannot be thought of as being a straightforward case of the use of a single *not*. For many speakers there is an alternative system available, and this is one which has its roots in the history of the language. That this system survives today adds both richness and colour to the manner in which negation can be expressed.

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英語否定詞組中的N-Word現象

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本文旨在以語意學的觀點探討英語中的 n-word 詞項所形成的獨立否定詞組以及在英語字彙中 n-word 所隱含的歷史意義。研究結果發現 n-word 可被視爲構詞學上的否極詞項 (negative polarity)，而其所展現的一致性經過詞彙化 (lexicalization) 後，更衍生成爲否定式量化詞 (negative quantifier) 具備闡述否定詞組的功能。本文接著提出 n-word 效應與語法化 (grammaticalization) 中的 Jespersen Cycle 的異同之處，並進一步論證在母語人士亦或地域方言中，n-word 效應並非主流。換句話說，否定語式 (negative concord) 較廣爲使用。然而，n-word 效應所形成的語言現象卻爲現代英語與語意學增添了多元性與包容性，爲語言學研究中的重要發現。

關鍵詞：否定語式、英語方言、多義詞、詞彙化