

Syntactic patterns of negation in the history of German

The talk discusses the change in syntactic patterns of negation against the background of cross-linguistic research and current theory of negation on the basis of data from a corpus of Old High German (OHG) and Middle High German (MHG) texts.

Regarding the status and development of the negation particle in German, I assume an analysis that attributes the changes along Jespersen's Cycle from an X° to a bipartite X° and XP to an XP negation particle in German not to a change in syntactic structure but to changes in the lexical filling of NegP. According to this analysis, there is a single NegP that resides above VP throughout the history of German, in contrast to analyses with a lower or with multiple NegPs (cf. Kemenade, 2000, for the history of English) or with NegP only developing or drastically changing position in the course of the language history (cf. Weiß 1998, Abraham 2003, for OHG/MHG).

A central issue in the syntax of negation is the interplay of negation and indefinites. In the history of German there are three basic syntactic patterns that occur in clauses with indefinites in the semantic scope of negation:

I neg-particle and n-word, e.g.:

Inti niantligita imo/zi noheinigemo uuorte (Tatian, 310, 16f.)

and NEG-answered him at no word

'and did not answer to a single word'

II neg-particle and non-neg-indefinite, e.g.:

Inti ûzzan sín/ni uuas uuiht gitanes (Tatian, 25, 21f.)

and without him NEG was (any)thing done

'and nothing was done without him'

III n-word, no neg-particle, e.g.:

Inthemo noh nu níoman/Ingisezzit uuas. (Tatian, 322, 5f.)

in-which still now nobody put was

'in which nobody had been put yet'

Pattern I with NC is prevalent in OHG and can already be found in the earliest texts. The non-NC patterns II and especially III are far less frequent. In MHG, pattern III, which is still the standard pattern today, is the most common one. Pattern II is virtually lost. However, there are still a few cases of pattern I, i. e. NC, which is ungrammatical in Modern Standard German. These consist mostly of co-occurrences of Neg $^\circ$ *ne/en* and some n-word. Co-occurrences of SpecNegP *niht* and n-words are very rare. Besides pattern I, i. e. Negative Doubling, another type of NC, viz. the co-occurrence of several n-words (Negative Spread) is very occasionally found in MHG.

As in other Germanic languages, the rate of NC in German varies according to the rate of Neg $^\circ$ *ne*. This fact supports the link between the head-status of the negation particle and the occurrence of NC that is suggested in current cross-linguistic work (e.g. Zeijlstra 2004). With the loss of overt Neg $^\circ$, NC is largely lost in German.

NC is analysed as an instance of an agree relation between Neg $^\circ$ and an n-word which poses an uninterpretable neg-feature rather than being semantically negative. Thus, unlike under the Neg-Criterion approach (Haegeman 1995), no obligatory movement of n-words to SpecNegP is assumed (cf. Penka/Stechow 2001). This in turn leads to a different account of the grammaticalisation of *niwiht/niht* ('nothing') to SpecNegP: rather than a change from original movement to SpecNegP towards merge into that same position as a result of diachronic economy (cf. Roberts/Roussou 1999, Kemenade 2000, Gelderen 2004), I suggest adjacency of the adverbially used n-word to SpecNegP as the syntactic input configuration for the grammaticalisation of the second negation particle.

In the context of the different syntactic patterns of negation in historical German, the questions of licensing conditions of n-words and grammatical constraints on NC are discussed, as well as the distinction of NPIs and n-words especially in view of diachronic transitions from one category to the other.

References:

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