

CONTACT WITH SCANDINAVIAN AND LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH  
NEGATIVE CONCORD

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ABSTRACT

Early Modern English saw negative concord disappear from the mainstream textual record (Nevalainen 1998; Kallel 2005), which may embody natural language change rather than prescriptivist pressure (Mazzon 1994). This study examines whether there is evidence that the change began in some Northern varieties of English, and if so whether it is attributable to Scandinavian influence. Data from 14<sup>th</sup> century verse show some weakening of NC in Northern verse, but not in corresponding southern variety texts, supporting the findings of Ingham (2006a) for late Middle English prose, contra Iyeiri (2002). Early Scandinavian verse data are shown to present a similar weakening of NC. These results are interpreted in terms of Jespersen's (1917) negation cycle, to the effect that Scandinavian varieties were in advance of early English on the negation cycle, were losing NC at the time of the Scandinavian incursions into England, and that their influence on Northern Middle English contributed to the weakening of NC earlier in the North than in the rest of England.

1. Introduction

A traditional view of contact between Scandinavian settlers and the English-speaking inhabitants of England was that it affected the lexicon and morphology of the language: the possibility of syntactic effects received little attention until recent years. If Scandinavian did not affect the abstract formal properties of English syntax, linguistic contact between the respective language communities could straightforwardly be seen as having been a matter of borrowing lexical items via transactional relations between adult speakers, rather than of Scandinavian-influenced speech providing input to English language acquisition in childhood. It is uncontroversial that adult speakers acquire further lexical items throughout their lifespan, whereas the core syntactic properties of the language are usually thought to be acquired in the earlier childhood years. More recently,

however, recent work on Middle English syntax has challenged the traditional view. Kroch et al. (1995) provided evidence from Northern Middle English showing that Scandinavian Verb-second syntax did have an impact on the dialects spoken in the areas of heaviest Scandinavian settlement, such as the North East Midlands and Yorkshire. Trips (2000) has likewise claimed that the systematic adoption of VO order rather than OV in Middle English was a result of Scandinavian influence. If other effects of Scandinavian on the core syntactic properties of English can be demonstrated, the argument for extensive intermixture of the language communities in a domestic context is further supported.

A well-known change in English syntax from the end of the medieval period onwards is the loss of negative concord, at least from the written record. NC is the co-occurrence of items that are formally negative in a clause which is semantically a single negation. It was obligatory in Early Middle English to accompany a formally negative indefinite such as *neuere* ('never') with the sentential negative particle *ne* (Ingham 2003).<sup>1</sup> Early Modern English prose showed variation as regards the syntax of negation, in particular as to whether negative concord or *any*-series indefinites were used (Nevalainen 1998; Kallel 2005). This alternation is already occasionally found in the 15<sup>th</sup> century *Paston* correspondence, e.g. in the writing of James Gresham (born by 1430):

- 1) I can not yet gete it to non issue (*Paston* 534,7).
- 2) I can not know any error therein (*Paston* 447,8).

Likewise in letters written by John Paston II (born 1442), e.g.:

- 3) I herde neuere syn that tyme any worde owt off Norffolk (*Paston* 263,4).
- 4) I will neuer advyse hyre ther-to in no wyse (*Paston* 236,12).

As shown by Iyeyri (2002), *any* was already in regular use as an indefinite in non-assertive clauses in Middle English. From the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the early Middle English strict negative concord rule was showing signs of weakening and NPIs were able to appear in negative clauses, even though they did not do so very often as yet (Kallel 2005). But when did these indications first appear, and did they show any particular regional trends? Is there evidence that they first appeared in Northern Middle English, as with other grammatical innovations that arose during the history of the language? Iyeyri (2002) has given some attention to this question, reporting on the basis of her study of the York mystery plays that the emergence of NPIs was not associated with Northern dialects. However, in section 2 we review late 14<sup>th</sup> century data discussed by Ingham (2006a), who suggests that further work is needed, and that her claim appears questionable.

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<sup>1</sup> Likewise in West Saxon Old English prose texts (Ingham 2006).

Another account of the rise of the NPI *any* series in late Middle/Early Modern English is offered by Rissanen (1999), who noted the strong preference in negated clauses in statutes of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century for the *any* series over NC. He argued that the *any* series established itself in official, especially legal documents, at this time as a way of avoiding the perceived ambiguity of a clause with two formally negatives which could be interpreted as a true double negation.

In this study we seek to consider the possibility that the weakening of negative concord in Middle English was at least influenced, if not entirely caused, by features of the syntax of negation among Scandinavian speakers. This claim will be made, as with other research on this question, by making an inference from possible differences between northern versus southern varieties of late Middle English, but also by considering what we might plausibly suppose about the syntax of negation in the language used by the Scandinavian incomers. So far as we know, an approach arguing from properties of Scandinavian at the time of settlement in England has not been taken in previous studies claiming Scandinavian influence. The immediate problem is that the variety of Scandinavian used by the Norse settlers in England in the late 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries has left virtually no trace behind. Apart from a few extremely brief inscriptions, there are no written texts dating from that period. The earliest substantial Scandinavian texts on which inferences could be based are Old Norse verse sagas found in Icelandic MSS dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

We shall nevertheless propose that in this domain of syntax, at least, it is feasible to reconstruct the main features of an earlier system of Scandinavian. This opportunity arises because in the Germanic languages and others, negation is affected in fairly well-understood ways by a process of cyclic change, known as Jespersen's cycle, as will be discussed in section 2. A case may be made for what the language in question would have looked like at an earlier state than the first substantial records, a scenario which is not usually possible in syntax.

Secondly, although the earliest Old Norse texts survive only in 13<sup>th</sup> century MSS as mentioned above, their composition long predates that period. They may in some cases (especially the mythological *Edda* poems) go back as far as the 9<sup>th</sup> century. On the assumption that these Old Norse texts were not updated by later copyists, the morphosyntax of negation they employ can be compared with the prose works composed later in Old Icelandic in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. We can see if in the relevant ways change takes place as expected in the light of the Jespersen cycle, as indeed Jespersen did with respect to sentential negation. In the same way we may use the Old Norse and Old Icelandic data sources to provide evidential material against which to check a hypothesis about the syntax of indefinites in Scandinavian negated clauses, in the period of settlement in England as compared with later periods. This picture can then be set against what is known of negation in Northern varieties of English. In this study

we proceed along both lines of enquiry, first augmenting the research of Ingham (2006a) with an investigation of Northern verse, dating from slightly earlier than the prose texts he studied, and then examining Old Norse and Old Icelandic negation syntax with a view to identifying what can be gleaned of the likely forms of negation in “pre-historic” Scandinavian.

## 2. The negation cycle

Jespersen (1917) put forward the idea of a negation cycle, recently taken up by researchers such as Haegeman (1995), van Kemenade (2000), Rowlett (1998), which considers negation in syntax as following a slow circle of change featuring the form and placement of the main sentential negative marker. At the beginning of the cycle there is just a prefinite negative marker, such as *ne* in Old English or Old French. As time goes on this becomes phonetically eroded and is eventually lost. During the cycle there is a phase when the prefinite negator is doubled by a second, phonetically heavier negative marker, such as *nawiht* in Early Middle English or *pas* and its congeners in later stages of French. According to Jespersen Scandinavian was also undergoing a change in its position on the negation cycle in the earliest phase of its recorded history, to be examined in section 3.

Note that negative concord is not just or even mainly about bipartite sentential negation: at least in the history of English this was a relatively short lived phenomenon, in the form of *ne, noȝt*. It chiefly manifests itself in the syntax of indefinites in negated clauses, i.e. whether or not they must be accompanied by a negative element.

Following the suggestion of Jespersen (1917), Haegeman and Zanuttini (1995) and Rowlett (1998) argued that NC is associated with a grammar having a prefinite negative element, such as Serbo-Croat *ni* or Italian *non*. When, following Jespersen’s cycle, a language loses such an element, we can make the prediction that it will lose NC. Language such as Modern Standard German and Modern Standard English uphold this prediction, having postfinite negators *nicht* and *not* respectively. It then becomes natural to suppose that speakers of a language with a more advanced position on the negation cycle might speed the movement of the target language (English) towards a more advanced position. We might expect to see this in the dialects of English most influenced by the Scandinavian speakers, which by and large were those of Northern England. If so we would see the loss of NC beginning in these dialect areas.

## 3. Negation in Old Norse

According to Jespersen (1917: 8), earlier stages of Scandinavian showed the following development with respect to the negation cycle:

- 5a) Ne veit Haraldr  
NEG knows Harold  
'Harold doesn't know'
- b) Ne veitat Haraldr  
NEG knows NEG Harold  
'Harold doesn't know'
- c) Veitat Haraldr  
knows NEG Harold  
'Harold doesn't know'

The suffix *-at* comes to replace the prefixed negative element *ne*, after a period of bipartite negation as in 5b. These changes mirror similar developments in the history of languages such as English and French. The key point for the present research, however, is that Scandinavian went through the process before other attested medieval European languages. *Ne* was already in decline in the oldest Scandinavian texts that we have, the mythological *Edda* that are thought to have been composed in some cases around the time of the Viking invasions. In these texts, use of the single sentence negating suffix *-at* was the most common sentential negation strategy, as in 6.

- 6) Munat hann falla (*Havamal* 157).  
Must-NEG he fail  
'He must not fail'
- 7) At þik þjofar ne lieki (*Havamal* 130).  
That thee knaves NEG outwit  
'That thieves should not outwit you'

As discussed by Eythórsson (2002), a fourth stage in the negation cycle already appears in some cases in the *Poetic Edda*, and later became the norm in Old Icelandic. This was when the negative suffix *-at* is lost and is replaced by the free-standing sentential negative elements *eigi*, or *ekki* ('not'), e.g.:

- 8) Enn Atli qvadhz/eigi vilia (*Odin* 22).  
but Atli said-REFL NEG want  
'But Atli said he did not want'

This newer negative element was syntactically independent of the verb.

If we compare these developments with earlier stages of English, there are some similarities, as noted by Jespersen. The Old English sentence negator *ne*, a particle associated with the finite verb, became eroded and replaced by spelling forms of *not*, a form syntactically independent of the verb. However, it is crucial to note the asynchrony between English and Scandinavian on the negation cycle. Even in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, surviving English prose texts almost never drop the element *ne* with the secondary negator *not*, or with a negated indefinite (Ingham 2003). Admittedly, these texts are from the South-East and West Midlands regions, so it is possible that, if we had texts from more northerly areas dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, they would show an earlier loss of *ne*. This issue of regional difference in the syntax of negation will be the focus of the data-based investigation pursued in section 5 below. We investigate whether the position of Scandinavian “further round” on the negation cycle than Old/Early Middle English had an impact on the English of areas settled by Scandinavian invaders. As an indicator of whether this influence was at work we shall take the maintenance of NC concord, which was associated by Jespersen with languages having a head negator (see also Rowlett 1998). In order to do so, the syntax of indefinites in early Scandinavian negative clauses needs to be considered. As this has not formed the object of enquiry in any recent work on negation cycle in the Germanic language of which we are aware, we next present some observations drawn from a reading of relevant primary sources.

#### 4. Negated indefinites in Older Scandinavian

Modern Scandinavian languages vary in their array of indefinites. Haspelmath (1997) notes the existence in Icelandic and Swedish of the inherently negated series *engi-* and *ingen-* respectively. As with German *kein*, these do not co-occur with a sentential negator. Alternatively, a sentential negator may be used together with an indefinite lacking an inherently negative meaning, namely Icelandic *neinn/neitt* (anybody, anything), Swedish *någon-*.

In this section we trace the development of indefinites in negative clauses in earlier Scandinavian. In Old Icelandic of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the modern non-negative *ne-* indefinite items are already found:

- 9) ...at aldri hefer fyrr meir nee inn madhr at thvi reynzc a Islande (*Hungrvaca* 5. 11).  
‘...that there has never been any man in Iceland proven so to be’
- 10) ...Þo at hann kveykðe eige upp hog sinn með ne einom dictom (*Ioans Saga* 13. 5).  
‘...even if he did not irritate his mind with any poetry’

As we see from these examples of negated clauses, the *nein-/neitt* forms are always accompanied by the sentential negator *ekki*, or by an inherently negative indefinite, such as *engi*. Furthermore, a form such as *neitt* was able in Old Icelandic to appear outside negated clauses, as with the English *any* series:

- 11) ...heldr an þat, at ek hafa neitt loget i fra-saogn (*Pols Saga* 8. 1).  
rather than that, that I have anything lied in  
'...rather than that I have a lied one whit in my story'

Thus the *ne-* forms in Old Icelandic, despite their apparent negative formal shape, constituted a non-assertive indefinite series syntactically distinct from the inherently negative *engi*, *aldrigi* forms inherited from Old Norse. As expected (Haegeman 1995), the co-occurrence of two such forms produced a double negation reading:

- 12) En þo hefer mer þeta eige fyre oenga saok at boresc (*Iaons Saga* 7.3).  
'As yet I have not done it for naught'

It appears, then, that by the early 13<sup>th</sup> century at the latest the loss of NC had been consolidated in insular Scandinavian. Furthermore, since it impacted on all varieties of Scandinavian, it seems likely that the introduction of a special set of negative clause context polarity items antedated the creation of Icelandic as such, in other words, that mainland Scandinavian speakers already had these NPI indefinites at the time of the settlement of Iceland.

In the older verse *Edda*, on the other hand, the forms *neitt* and *nein* are not found, presumably reflecting an early period before the introduction of the *ne-*series.<sup>2</sup> A search we have made of the mythological *Edda*, the oldest surviving Scandinavian literature, found that occasionally a negative particle, either *ne* or *-at*, did crop up with a negated indefinite, e.g.:

- 13) Né that máttu maerir tivar ok ginnregin of geta hvergi (*Hymiskviða* 4).  
Not that vessel famous gods & holy gods find nowhere  
'The famous holy gods could nowhere find such a vessel as this'
- 14) Svát at ár Hymir etki maéli (*Hymiskviða* 26).  
'So-not for a while Hymir nothing said  
'So for a while H said nothing'

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<sup>2</sup> Eythorsson (2002: 21) did not investigate co-occurrence of a negative particle with negated indefinites, but does say that certain indefinite words changed from assertive to negative meanings in the early history of Scandinavian. These featured the *-gi* suffix (= Goth. *hun*) seen in *eigu*, *einngi* > *eigi*, *eittgi* > *etki*, *ekki*, etc.

Mostly, however, negated indefinites lacked any sentential negator, e.g.:

- 15) Epli ellifu ek þigg aldri (Skirnismal 20).  
apples eleven I take never  
'I will never take the eleven apples'
- 16) Ey sva halt foraþ kömr at hölpa sunum (Fjölvinnsmal 40).  
no such mighty danger comes to men's sons  
'No peril so mighty can befall the sons of men'

The rarity of a negative particle accompanying a negative indefinite expression is seen from the following table of frequencies in the mythological *Edda*, featuring the most common negative quantified expressions such as *engi*, *aldri* etc.:

Table 1. Quantified expressions in the mythological *Edda*

	without negative particle <i>ne/-at</i>	with negative parti- cle <i>ne/-at</i>	TOTAL
<i>engi</i> 'no'	10	0	10
<i>vaetr/vaetki</i> 'no'	3	0	3
<i>ey</i> 'no'	3	0	3
<i>aldri(gi)</i> 'never'	11	0	11
<i>ae(va)</i> 'never'	3	0	3
<i>etki</i> 'nothing'	0	1	1
<i>hvergi</i> 'nowhere'	0	1	1
TOTAL	30	2	32

With a couple of exceptions, indefinites in negated clauses stand alone, without a clausal negative element, in accordance with the finding by Eythorsson (2002) that the *-at* sentential negator was virtually restricted to clauses not containing indefinites. Negative concord was thus rarely attested. In the heroic *Edda* and mythological *Edda* texts two negative indefinites are sometimes found to co-occur, though without a negative particle:

- 17) ...er vaetr engi vildi þiggia (*Sigrdrifomál* 5).  
which noone not might-wish take  
'...which noone would wish to take'
- 18) Astar firna skyli engi maðr annan aldregi (*Havamal* 93).  
of-affection blame shall no person another never  
'No-one shall ever blame the other for lack of affection'



Given the conservativeness of literary texts as compared with spoken language, a plausible inference can be made about the grammar of negation in the spoken varieties used by the Scandinavian settlers. If the literary texts showed such overwhelming avoidance of the negative particle in particular with negated indefinites, it seems very likely that spoken varieties did so at least to the same extent. It would be counter-intuitive to suppose they were less advanced on the negation cycle than was verse literature. We shall return shortly to considering what effect these developments of Scandinavian may have had on Northern English, but before doing so we present the results of an investigation into the use or avoidance of NC in Northern versus South Midland/Southern texts in later Middle English.

### 5. Negative concord in Late Middle English

Ingham (2006a) investigated NC and NPIs in late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> century prose, comparing Northern texts with those originating in more southerly regions (i.e. comprising the traditional Middle English dialect areas of the South, South-west, and Midlands South, South-east or Midlands), and found more use of NPIs in those known to be Northern MSS or texts of northern origin. NPI use totalling over 30% of contexts, e.g.:

- 19) And when a man wil noȝt for any erþly thing wreþ god Rolle (*Epistles* 52, 42).  
 20) ...þat þu myth not haue set a nedyll poynte upon any place (*Four MES* 140, 295).

Texts that were “southern”, in the ad hoc sense indicated above, still made very little use of NPIs, under 3%, preferring NC, e.g.:

- 21) ...þat neuere non such was sene in no mannes tyme alyue (*Brut* 316, 20).  
 22) ...þat no wicked planet haue noon aspect (Chaucer, *Astrolabe* II 4, 36).

In this study we now seek to add to the picture of early weakening of NC in the North by comparing frequencies of NC versus NPIs in verse texts from the 14<sup>th</sup> century that can be reasonably safely given a northern or southern provenance, in the sense used in Ingham (2006a). Northern MSS were those identified as such in collections of verse, notably Horstmann and the *Cursor Mundi*. “Southern” MSS were chiefly the poems in MS Vernon and others of similar period, featuring the southern late 14<sup>th</sup> century poets Chaucer and Richard of Maidenstone (for full listings, see “primary sources”).

An attempt was made to avoid texts from the early part of 14<sup>th</sup> century in the case of the “southern” category, so as to avoid the possibility that non-use of NPIs in negated contexts in southern MSS might be an effect of the time period

sampled rather than their dialect origin. This meant that on the whole the verse MSS from the North selected for the research tend to be rather earlier than those representing the southern half of England. We thus weighted the data sources against the research hypothesis that NC weakened first northern verse. Therefore, a finding that upholds the hypothesis could not be attributed to an unwanted timing effect whereby southern MSS happened to be rather later in date. Instead it could more plausibly be interpreted as attributable to the different regional provenance of the texts.

As in Ingham (2006a) only those indefinite elements were counted that are within the syntactic scope of a morphologically and semantically negative element, i.e. the negator *not* and the *n*-series of indefinites (*none* etc). Thus cases were excluded where an indefinite was only in the scope of *ne*, since it was not clear at this time whether sentential *ne* still functioned as an independent negator (Jack 1978; Iyeiri 2001). Cases of an indefinite within the scope of the negative co-ordinator *ne* were also excluded, since these contexts did not regularly switch to NPIs until considerably later than non-co-ordinate contexts (Nevalainen 1998; Kallel 2005).

As a way of avoiding disparities due to different style and subject matters, didactic verse texts were used whose contents related to religious matters.

Note that for *Cursor Mundi* we consider both the Northern original and a Southern re-written version that often alters the Northern, Scandinavian-derived lexis to expressions in use in the southern half of England. In other words, it avoided expressions that would not be judged acceptable to English speakers outside the north. For this reason, it is often used (e.g. by Molencki 2001) in discussions of Middle English dialect variation as a touchstone for regional differences.

In Table 2 we see the frequencies of n-indefinites versus any series indefinites in negated clause contexts in the verse from the target categories.

Table 2. Frequencies of NC vs. NPIs in northern vs. “southern” verse

	NC	NPI	TOTAL
Northern			
<i>North. Pass. Gg 5</i>	7	2	9
<i>North. Homily Cycle</i>	21	3	24
<i>Myroure of lewed men MS Eg. 927</i>	14	2	16
<i>Cursor Mundi MS Cotton C. II. 1-4,000</i>	6	1	7
<i>St Mary's lament MS Tiber. EVII</i>	6	1	7
TOTAL	54	9 (14.3%)	63

“Southern”			
Chaucer, CT3	7	0	7
Rich. of Maidst.	4	0	4
<i>Cursor Mundi</i> MS Trinity ll. 1-4,000	8	0	8
MS Vernon refrain poems	15	0	15
MS Vernon, <i>Barlaam &amp; Josaphat</i>	2	0	2
MS Vernon saints’ lives: SS	11	0	11
<i>Augustine, Ambrosius &amp; Bernard</i>			
MS Addl 22283 <i>Castel off louue</i>	10	0	10
MS Vernon: <i>How to hear mass</i>	4	0	4
TOTAL	61	0 (0.0%)	61

The main finding evident in these figures is an early appearance of NPIs in Northern verse texts, in contrast with their total absence in Southern sources. The overall numbers in Table 1-2 are of course relatively modest by comparison with some numerical studies of diachronic syntax, but indefinites in negative clauses are not particularly common in running text, and the exclusion of unsupported *ne* as a sole contextual criterion, as stated above, meant that many cases could not be used. However, the resulting body of data is thereby strengthened: in 15<sup>th</sup> century English contexts such as those used for this study became able to permit either NC or NPIs, (cf. example 3 above).

It should also be emphasised that these texts were produced in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, substantially earlier than the 15<sup>th</sup> century material studied by Iyeiri (2002). Our results, unlike hers, show a clear indication of dialectal difference: NPIs in the North were beginning to be an established option, though not yet a majority tendency.

The Northern original of the *Cursor Mundi* is generally thought to have been composed around the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the Northern version in MS C is interesting to compare with Southern re-workings of the text, such as the MS T version. The latter, even though certainly a later redaction, has more NC in negated clauses than the Northern version, introducing negative indefinites where they are absent in the MS Cotton C., e.g.:

23a) Sekenes shal he neuer noon dreghe (*CM*, MS T 1025).

23b) Sekenes suld he neuer drei (*CM*, MS C 1025).

<sup>3</sup> We used only those portions which seemed intuitively to have some religious content, in the sense of offering material of Christian origin relevant to moral instruction. These were: The prioress’s prologue and tale, the pardoner’s prologue and tale, and the second sun’s prologue and tale.

24a) Nouþer he nor his offspringe /loued oure lord no maner þinge (*CM*, MS T 1225-5).

24b) He alsua wit his oxspring/þai luued our lauerd nan-kin thing (*CM*, MS C 1225-6).

25a) For no chaunce/shal I not take suche vengeaunce (*CM*, MS T 1941).

25b) For nakin schauce/sal i ta suilk a noiþer wengance (*CM*, MS C 1941).

The Northern MS Cotton C has an early use of *ani* in a negative clause, namely:

26) ... þat miȝt neuer flod ani þar nei (*CM*, MS C 1042).<sup>4</sup>

Overall, then, we can see that 14<sup>th</sup> century verse shows a perceptible use of NPIs in negated clauses, whereas NC survives unchallenged in verse written in southern varieties. Following Ingham (2006a), it can now be said that both late 14<sup>th</sup> century northern prose and verse written earlier in the century testify to a dialect difference from corresponding material written in the Midlands and South. Negative concord was beginning to be lost, in keeping with the earlier loss of the negative head *ne* in the North than in the South. We shall next address the question of whether this dialectal difference may be attributable to Scandinavian influence on Northern Middle English.

## 6. Discussion

The situation represented by the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> century prose texts has already been studied by Ingham (2006a): the *any* series indefinites appeared in Northern texts in some numbers before doing so in more Southerly texts. In keeping with the loss of the negative head *ne* in the North, we find an earlier weakening of NC there, as is predicted on the basis of Jespersen's cycle. The earlier 14<sup>th</sup> century verse texts analysed here demonstrate the same outcome. The main finding is that all five Northern texts showed a small but noticeable frequency of *any*-series items instead of NC, while none of the Southern texts did. This was the case even though the southern texts were mostly of slightly later origin. The findings together with the results of the analysis of prose texts in Ingham (2006a) support the view that the change that led to the loss of NC in educated written English began in the North.

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<sup>4</sup> The corresponding passage in the southern version reads:

i) Mighte neuer flood com ther neghe (*CM*, Tr 1042).

On this occasion, unlike the instances in 23a-25a, the southern version does not use NC.

Scandinavian influence has been proposed as a driving factor in a number of processes of grammar change in Northern Middle English. To say that Scandinavian had an influence on the syntax of later Middle English negation does not necessarily mean it created a total innovation here: it may have accelerated a development that was already under way. In any case, it is worthwhile to try and identify to what extent Middle English syntax may have been pushed in certain directions thanks to contact with Scandinavian.<sup>5</sup>

One possibility is that the Scandinavian used by the incomers in the late Old English period still had the remains of NC, and was not an unambiguously NPI language. If it had contradictory properties, it would have weakened the NC constraint on the appearance of indefinites in Middle English. Interestingly, Wilson and Henry (1998), in a study of a contemporary NC variety in Belfast, argued that where the input to the acquisition process is contradictory as regards NC/NPIs, children default to a non-NC grammar. It seems that Belfast English is variably, rather than consistently, NC. Presumably the variable NC grammar of the adult community is transmitted by being learned as a later acquisition, perhaps from older peers. However that may be, the pre-school children in their study resisted NC even when their primary caregivers use it quite extensively.

If, in the historical context of early English as used in contact with Scandinavians, Scandinavian was now ambiguous as to its status as regards the negation cycle, the input triggers to the acquisition of a consistent NC grammar in English (i.e. one excluding *ani*-series NPIs in negated clauses) may not have been robust enough for that grammar to be transmitted. A strong cue would have been the obligatory presence of the English negative particle *ne* accompanying other *n*-items. But the use of its equivalent in Scandinavian, whether *ne* or *-at*, in clauses with indefinites was obsolescent, we argue, by the time of the period of major Scandinavian settlement. In the language variety used by Scandinavian speakers with English speakers, including caregiver speech to young children, the syntax of English negative clauses is likely to have been calqued on that of Scandinavian, and featured a postverbal negator equivalent to ME *not* calqued on Scandinavian *eigi* (see e.g. 8 above). In this, *ne* would have been vulnerable to omission, thus cuing learners away from a NC grammar. At the same time, NC would also have been attested, if we can extrapolate from the *Edda* data such as 17-18 above, which show co-occurrence of negated indefinites, to the ambient language of the time of their composition. Nevertheless, given the prevalence of single negation in negative clauses, children learning English from such input would, as with Wilson and Henry's (1998) Belfast study, initially have adopted NPIs as a default, and then, perhaps in older child-

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<sup>5</sup> However, it is noteworthy that negative particles did not co-occur with an indefinite, thus raising the problem of what licensed them, in term of the discussion in section 3.

hood and later, approximated to the variable NC used in their community. The adult outcome would have been a language variety in which NPIs could never be expunged from negated clauses, because that pattern had been set down in primary acquisition. Most negation involving indefinites would have been expressed through the use of a single inherently negative indefinite, such as ON *eigi*. However, the co-occurrence of negative indefinites would also have been grammatical.

The adult outcome described in the foregoing is attested in later Middle English in texts with northern origins, both prose (Ingham 2006a) and now, as we see, in verse, but is absent in texts with southern origins. We contend that this pattern of distribution in northern-origin texts can plausibly be linked to an acquisition process in areas of Scandinavian settlement in which negative clauses used by speakers of Scandinavian varieties influenced the input of children learning English.

## 7. Conclusion

The textual evidence analysed in this study has shown that the onset of the decline of NC in late Middle English is associated with texts from Yorkshire, one of the strongest areas of Scandinavian settlement. We believe this can be linked to the earlier loss of NC in Old Norse. The Scandinavian settlers brought with them a language which was at least on its way to losing NC, or may have already done so, at a time when Old English showed no sign at all of losing the negative head *ne* or NC. When speaking English as a second language they would, in the sense of Kroch et al. (1995), have “imposed” a grammar where negation was expressed by an adverbial particle rather than a head, and where negated quantifiers were unsupported by another negator. If sentences generated by such a grammar were available as PLD to language learners, this “imposed” grammar could now become a native-speaker variety, in other words in the relevant geographical areas, the language changed.

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