Lidija Štrmelj
University of Zadar

On syntactic and morphological negation in biblical English: A diachronic study

The article deals with the development of negation in biblical English in the period from the eleventh to the seventeenth century. It explores the morpho-syntactic features of negative clauses in Late Old English, Late Middle English and Early Modern English, on the basis of the three English translations of the *Gospel according to John*, composed after Saint Jerome's Latin *Vulgate* and the Greek original. The presented examples show numerous patterns of single and multiple negations, the latter being mostly negative concord, but occasionally with double negation as well. Additionally, the results obtained in the research are compared with the main points of Jespersen's cycle in order to see to what extent negation in biblical texts fits in the general trends of the history of English.

Key words: morphological negation; syntactic negation; Jespersen's cycle; biblical English.

1. Introduction

Biblical English appears to be extremely convenient for diachronic investigations since "the history of English is the history of Bible translation" (Lerer 2005). Indeed, the translations of some portions of the Holy Scripture are among the first attestations of the written Old English language. Since then, the process of translation has never stopped. Moreover, it intensified, and the appearance of "Wycliffe's Bible … marked the start of a great flowering of English Bible translations." (Bessnett 2002: 54). Nowadays every few years a new translation of the Bible is published, showing the current state of the English language. Thus, by comparing the same

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biblical text(s), written in different periods of linguistic history, we may follow the development of the English language almost from its beginnings to the present day.

This article compares the translations of St. John's Gospel from Latin and Greek into Late Old English, Late Middle English and Early Modern English, with the aim of tracing the development of negation in biblical English from the 11th to the 17th century. The focus is on the types of negation, patterns of word-order and variety of negatives which can be found in negative sentences. As the span of approximately six hundred years of the history of English, covered by this study, was a period in which significant grammatical changes occurred, and English gradually changed from a synthetic to an analytic language, our expectations were to also find some of these changes in the negative sentences.

The first studied text was taken from the West Saxon Gospels, which was written by an anonymous author in the West Saxon dialect of Late Old English, and, which, according to Grünberg (1967), dates back to the mid10[th] century. It has survived in seven manuscripts. The manuscript taken for the purpose of this study is the Cambridge University Library Ii. 2. 11., or shorter, text A, which dates from before 1072. The second analysed text was written in the East Midland vernacular of Late Middle English and was taken from the new version of Wycliffe's Bible which appeared after Wycliffe's death, around 1400. John Purvey, a Wycliffe's follower, is believed to have been its author, although there is no concrete proof of it. In contrast to the above-mentioned West-Saxon Gospels, Purvey's manuscript has survived in a considerable number of copies. The King James Bible from 1611 was used as the third text. The translation of the New Testament into the Early Modern English dialect of the Oxford-Cambridge-London region, which is actually the basis of Standard English, was made by a group of university scholars, authorized by King James I.

The source text for both West Saxon Gospels and Wycliffe's Bible was St. Jerome's Vulgate from 405, which was the only source text used for all Gospels translations from Latin into Old English and Middle English, whereas the source text for the King James Bible was the Greek original.

We started the research by gathering negative clauses in the selected West Saxon Gospel (henceforth referred to as WSG), supposing that in the other two texts they would also be translated in the same way. This appeared to be quite justified, since only once we noticed that a negative clause from the source text was translated as an affirmative clause. The supposition was based on the fact that the Western Church in the Middle Ages had required literal translation of the Bible, as it brought the very Word of God.

Having collected the negative clauses from WSG, we searched further for their equivalents in Wycliffe's Bible (henceforth referred to as WB) and King James' Bible (from now on KJB), respectively. The samples are juxtaposed in the body of this article in 19 examples. In each of them, a small letter 'a' precedes a WSG fragment, a small 'b', its WB equivalent, and a small 'c', its KJB equivalent.

The analysis is organized in three sections which follow the Introduction. The first section deals with syntactic negation. It is further divided into two subsections, one which exemplifies the WSG clauses with single negation and their WB and KJB equivalents, and the other, which gives examples of WSG clauses with multiple negation and their related counterparts. According to the features revealed in the corpus, a concise development of negation and negatives is given at the end of both subsections. The second section, entitled *Morphological negation*, involves negative prefixation only, but also contains some examples of double negation. The last section discusses the results of the study, given primarily in the first section, and compares them to the main points of Jespersen's cycle (1917), pointing out the similarities and differences.

2. Syntactic negation

2.1. *Single negation*

In the WSG clauses with single negation, the common negative word is the particle *ne* 'not', which precedes the finite-verb, either in clause-initial position, as in (1a), or in clause-final position, as in (2a):

(1) a. *ne   sende   god hys sunu*
     not   send (PRET 3 SG.)   God his son

 b. *for God sente not his sone*

 c. *for God sent not his Son*

(2) a. *gyt myn tyma   ne com*
     Yet my   time   not come (PRET. 3 SG.)

 b. *myn our cam not yit*

 c. *mine hour is not yet come*

In the equivalent clauses in WB as well as KJB, *ne* is completely lost and replaced by the adverb *not*, which follows the verb, as shown in (1b, c) and (2b). In those cases when instead of the preterite, the perfect tense occurs in KJB, as in (2c),

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not is placed between the auxiliary and past participle.

Occasionally, *ne* in WSG appears cliticised and attached to some frequently used verb, such as in (3a), while the negative adverb *neuer* 'never' can be used alone in WB, without *ne*, (see (3b)). Obviously, *neuer* there has no temporal meaning.

(3) a. *þaetic nat*
         that I   not-know (PRES. 3 SG.)

     b. *Y woot neuer*

     c. *I know not*

The position of the subject in the WSG negative clauses is not fixed, and varies from pre-verbal to post-verbal position, as seen from (2a) and (1a). On the other hand, the subject in WB and KJB appears in pre-verbal position. It should be noted that the past tense of (1a-c) and the present tense of (2a-c) have exactly the same form as if these were affirmative clauses, the auxiliary *do* having not yet entered the usage.

From these and many other identical examples, we may state the development of word-order in clauses with single negation as follows:

WSG *ne* + V > WB V + *not* (occasionally V + *neuer)* > KJB V + *not*

2.2. *Multiple negation*

The clauses with multiple negation in WSG contain two or three negative elements that stand in negative concord, meaning that they do not cancel each other out, but express one single negative meaning (Dahl 1979), as shown in the following examples. Those in which negation is expressed by two negatives use either *ne* plus a negative adverb, or *ne* plus a negative pronoun or quantifier.

(4) a. *Se haelend   ne geswutelode   na   hyne   sylfne hym*
         the Healer   not commit (PRET. 3 SG.) never they (DAT.PL.) himself

The above used negative adverb *na* actually stands for *never*, deriving from OE *ne + a* 'ever'. In the equivalent clauses of (4a) in WB and KJB, the concord of *ne* and *na* is substituted with a single negation:

     b. *Jhesus trowide not hym silf to hem*

     c. *Jesus did not commit himself unto them*.

However, while (4b) uses *V (in the past) + not* word-order, (just as (1b) above), in (4c) we may notice the auxiliary *do* preceding *not* and the main verb in the bare infinitive. Actually, (4c) is the only occurrence of the auxiliary *do* found in KJB indicative clauses. However, *do* regularly occurs in negative imperative clauses.

In the next example, the contraction of *ne* and *beon* is strengthened by clause-final *naht*, originally *ne + a-wiht* 'anything', which is noticeably quite a rare negative in WSG.

(5) a. *nys   myn   wuldor naht*
      not-be (PRES. 3 SG.) my   glory   not-one thing

In both (5b) and (5c), the verb negation disappears, while only the negative indefinite pronoun *nouyt* and *nothing* remain, respectively.

    b. *my glorie is nouyt*

    c. *my honour is nothing*

While *naht* rarely occurs in WSG, the negative *nan* or its accusative form *naen-ne,* meaning 'no one, no', frequently appears in negative concord with *ne*, either alone or in combination with the noun *man*, as in (6a), or *þyng*, as in (7a) and (8a), performing thus the function of a quantifier.

(6) a. *nan   man   ne   underfeþ   hys cyþnysse*
      not-one man   not take (PRES. 3 SG.) his   testimony

    b. *no man takith his witnessing*

    c. *no man receiveth his testimony*

(7) a. *ne maeg   ic nan   þyng don fram me sylfum*
      not may (PRES. 1 SG.) I   not-one thing do   from myself

    b. *I may no thing do of my silf*

    c. *I can of mine own self do nothing*

Occasionally, in WB a verb might be negated. In that case a negative quantifier is replaced by its negative polarity item, as in (8b), or substituted with some other adverb, as in (12b) below.

(8) a. *ne maeg   man nan   þyng underfon*
      not may (PRES. 3 SG.) man not-one thing take

    b. *a man may not take ony thing*

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    c. *a man can receive nothing*

As adjectives, *naenne* and *nan* can equally precede the nouns other than *man* and *þyng*, as in (9a) and (11a) below:

(9) a. *naebbe   ic naenne ceorl*
         not-have (PRES. 1 SG.) I   not-one husband

     b. *I have noon hosebonde*

     c. *I have no husband*

When *nan* and *naenne* stand alone, they function as indefinite pronouns, as in (10a):

(10)a. *þeh   nan   ne cwaeþ*
       though not-one not   say (PRET. 3 SG.)

     b. *netheles no man seide to hym*

     c. *yet no man said*

It may be noticed that in (10b) two negatives are used in the same clause, *netheles* and *no man*. *Netheless* is originally a compound of *ne + the + less*, which most probably had lost its negative meaning long before WB was composed, so that the word was used there in the sense of 'but' or 'though'.

All quotations from WSG presented so far in 2.2., show the occurrence of two negatives. However, there is also a considerable number of those with three negatives, as (11a), where *nan + ne + naenne* occur in a single clause, or (12a), where *ne + ne + nan* appear. In WB and KJB equivalents, single negation is used.

(11)a. *þaet nan   wytega naefþ   naenne weorþscype*
       that not-one prophet not-have (PRES. 3 SG.) no   honour

     b. *a prophete hath noon onour*

     c. *a prophet hath no honour*

(12)a. *leof ne þu naefst   nan   þing to hladenne*
       Sir   not you not-have (PRES. 2 SG.) not-one thing to draw

     b. *Sire, thou hast not where ynne to drawe*

     c. *Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with*

The concord of more than two negatives in WSG is especially typical of negative clause co-ordination, where *ne* functions both as a negative particle and a negative conjunction, and *never* as a negative adverb:

(13) a. *ne   ge   naefre hys stefne ne gehyrdon,   ne ge   hys*
        neither you never   his voice not hear (PRET.PL.) nor you   his

        hyw   gesawon
        shape see (PRET.PL.)

   b. *nether ye herden evere his voice, nether ye seien his licnesse*

   c. *Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape*

Negative phrase co-ordination is noticeable as well:

(14) a. *þonne ye ne gebyddaþ   faeder. Ne   on þyssere*
        when   you not worship (PRES.PL.) father neither on   this

        dune   ne on hierusalem
        mountain nor in Jerusalem

   b. *whanne nether in this hil, nethir in Jerusalem, ye sculen worschipe*

   c. *when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor at Jerusalem worship*

From the data shown so far in 2.2., we may generally state:

a. negative concord in WSG is replaced by single negation in WB and KJB,

b. negative markers in WSG (adverbs, pronouns, quantifiers, conjunctions) are replaced as follows:

	WB	KJB
ne/na	not	not
naht	nouyt	nothing
nan	no man	no man
naefre	euere/withouten ende	at any time
nan man/naenne man	no man/ony man	no man
nan þyng	no thing/ony thing	nothing
nan N/naenne N[1]	noon N	no N
ne ... ne	nether … nether	neither … nor

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[1] *N* represents any noun other than *man* or *thing*.

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It should be pointed out that *ony man, ony thing, euere* in WB as well as *at any time* in KJB, appear only if the verb was previously negated.

c. the usage of either a negative adverb, or a negative pronoun / quantifier, prevails over verb-negation in both WB and KJB.

3. Morphological negation

The attachment of prefixes with negative meaning to adjectives, verbs and nouns is attested in all three target texts, although sporadically. The most common negative prefix, at least in WSG, seems to be *un-*. In (15a), *un-* is attached to the noun *ryhtwysnys* 'justice', in (17a), to the adjective *geleaffull* 'believing', and in (18a) and (19a), to the verbs *byndan* 'bind' and *arweorþan* 'honour'. However, the meanings of these clauses and their equivalents vary from affirmative to negative, depending on whether other negatives co-occur in them.

In (15a) the negative concord of *ne* and *nan,* which expresses one single negative meaning (as shown in Subsection 2.2.), appears close to *unryhtwysnys*, the word with a negative meaning as well. Two negative meanings cancel each other out, giving thus the clause the affirmative meaning: *Righteousness is in him.* The same case of double negation, with the same effect, is evident in (15b, c):

(15) a. *nys   nan unryhtwysnys   on hym*
       not-be (PRES. 3 SG.) no   unrighteousness in him

      b. *vnriytwisnesse is not in hym*

      c. *no unrighteousness is in him*

Similarly, the co-occurrence of *(may) not* and *undo* in (16b) results in the affirmative meaning: *The Scripture must be done.*

(16) a. *þaet halige gewryt   ne   maeg beon awend*
       that   holy   scripture not may be   removed

      b. *and scripture may not be vndon*

      c. *and script cannot be broken*

On the other hand, in the clauses (17a,b), the only negative element is the prefix *un-* (*vn-*), so the resulting meaning is negative.

(17) a. *se þe   þam suna   ys ungeleaffull*
       he that   the son (DAT.SG.) is unbelieving

b. *he that is vnbileueful to the sone*

c. *he that believeth not the Son*

It should be noted that the usage of negatively prefixed words in the translations is uneven. KJB translators, for example, prefer the verb negation over negative prefixation (see (16c) and (17c)), or a synonymous simple verb, such as *loose* instead of *unbind* and *break* instead of *undo* (in (18c) below). The reasons are probably pragmatic. Hidalgo Downing (2000: 44) points out that "From a pragmatic perspective, stylistic and contextual factors condition the choice of the negative form: V-neg is preferred in spontaneous, informal speech." The language of the Bible is, indeed, an informal, spoken language of common people, with a very simple vocabulary.

(18) a. *unbyndaþ hyne*
         unfasten him

    b. *Vnbynde ye him*

    c. *Loose him*

Even when negatively prefixed words are used in all three translations, there are occasional etymological differences between them. Thus, in (19a) we find *unarweorþodon*, the verb with a Germanic prefix and a Germanic stem, in (19b) *vnhonourid*, the hybrid verb composed of a Germanic/Latinate prefix and a French stem, and in (19c) *dishonour*, the verb formed using a French suffix and a French stem.

(19) a. *ge unarweorþodon me*
         you dishonour (pres.PL.) me

    b. *ye han vnhonourid me*

    c. *you do dishonour me*

Obviously, the development of English morphological negation was influenced not only by the inner factors and stylistic reasons, but also the external factors, such as the language contact with French and Latin.

4. Discussion

Otto Jespersen viewed the history of syntactic negation as a regular cycle of weakening and strengthening, evolving in five main stages. He says that "the original negative adverb is first weakened, then found insufficient and therefore

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strengthened, through some additional word, and this may be felt as the negative proper" (1917: 6). According to him,

> The starting point, as in the other languages was (1) *ic ne secge*. This is the prevalent form throughout the OE period, though the stronger negatives which were used (and required) whenever there was no verb, *na* (from ne + a), *nalles* 'not at all', and *noht* (from *nawiht, nowiht*, orig. meaning 'nothing'), were by no means rare after the verb to strengthen the preceding *ne*. (Jespersen 1917: 9)

Having researched WSG, we find that single negation of the type *ne* + V undoubtedly prevails in negative clauses, reaching the percentage of 66 %. Nevertheless, in 34 % of the total number of clauses, negative concord is found, with additional negatives such as *na, ne, nan, naenne* or combinations *nan man, nan thing*, etc. We found *noht* only once, and no evidence of *nalles*. Additionally, the position of the subject is relatively free, varying from pre-verbal to post-verbal position. Regarding the considerable one third of all the clauses with negative concord, it might be said that the process of the strengthening of negation was already in action in the Late Old English period, at least when biblical English is in question. In other words, biblical English, considering negation, seems to have been somewhat more progressive at that time than the other types of written language.

According to Jespersen (1917: 9), "typical ME form was (2) *I ne seye not*" in which *ne* was strengthened by *not*, so the word-order had changed from OE S + ne + V into ME S + ne + V + not. He explains the reason for the change as essentially phonological, claiming:

> Here *ne* was pronounced with so little stress that it was apt to disappear altogether, and *not* became the regular negative in all cases: (3) *I say not*. This point – the practical disappearance of *ne* and the exclusive use of *not* – was reached in the fifteenth century. (ibid.)

This resulted thus in S + V + *not* as a dominant word order in Late Middle English. The beginning of the fifteen century is exactly the period when WB was written, in which the only pattern used in a negative clause is S + V + *not*. Therefore*,* we may say that the results of our research completely overlap with Jespersen's conclusion.

Furthermore, Jespersen argues that a new wave of strengthening occurred in Early Modern English by addition of the auxiliary *do,* stating: "The Elizabethans began to use the auxiliary *do* indiscriminately in all kinds of sentences, with *not* being placed before the really important verb" (1917:11). Accordingly, the typical word-order was then S + *do* + *not* + V. In general, the development of the dummy

auxiliary *do* was the greatest structural change in Early Modern English. As Brinton and Arnovick point out (2006: 353), it dates back to the Middle English period:

> There were two main sources for the dummy auxiliary: 1. a causative verb *do*, meaning 'cause, make', as in *he dede Davy sadillyn an oder hors* (Paston Letters [Closs Traugott 1972: 140]) 'he made Davy saddle another horse'; this is common in Middle English but has given way to verbs such as *make* and *cause* and 2. *vicarious* or *substitute do* used in place of another verb; this has existed from Old English onwards, as in *he left and so did I.*

Considering the usage of *do*, our results greatly differ from Jespersen's, since the common word-order pattern in KJB is S + V + *not*. The auxiliary *do* does not occur at all in negative clauses, except for the imperative ones, as pointed out in Subsection 2.2. This is rather surprising, since in Early Modern English the auxiliary *do* "was very common between 1570 and 1640, especially in scientific and educational treatises, diaries, sermons, comedies and trial records" (Nevalainen 2006: 201). So, it might be said that biblical English in Early Modern English was much more conservative than English in general, preserving the inherited Late Middle English patterns. Indeed, it is sufficient to compare the examples quoted in 2.1. (such as (1), (5), (6), (7), (9), (11)) to see that KGB brings exactly the same structure of negative clauses as WB. Considering negation, KGB is not a new translation, but rather a revision of WB, since it is more based on the WB patterns from a century or so ago than on the trends of contemporary spoken and written language. This is completely in conformity with the claim of KJB translators that the version they had written was "with the former translations diligently compared and revised."[2]

5. Conclusion

It may be said that in WSG we find clauses with both single negation and multiple negation, the latter actually representing negative concord, as two or three negatives used in a clause express one single negative meaning.

The WB and KJB equivalents of the WSG single negation involve single negation as well, in which the WSG pre-verbal *ne* is replaced by post-verbal *not*. The WSG negative concord is regularly expressed in WB and KJB as single negation, in the way that either, the negative pronouns and quantifiers are used with affirmative verbs, or negative polarity items of pronouns or quantifiers occur with negated verbs.

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[2] From the preface to the first edition of KJB.

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Comparing the development of syntactic negation in biblical English with Jespersen's cycle, we may state that the negation in WSG only partly overlaps with it, while the negation in WB stands completely in conformity with it. On the other hand, KJB appears to be highly conservative, preserving the same WB style. In other words, the successive stages of Jespersen's cycle are not at all so clear cut, as we often take it for granted, since an extremely important part of English literature, such as translations of the Bible, does not fit in.

Considering morphological negation, it has been shown that double negation occasionally occurred in WSG, WB and KJB, if a word with a negative prefix co-occurred with the verb negation in a clause. Furthermore, it is obvious that the original English prefixes were gradually replaced with the Latinate ones, and negatively prefixed words were replaced with single words of synonymous meanings. Therefore, we may conclude that the development of morphological negation in biblical English was influenced not only by internal, but also by external factors, such as the contact of the English language with French and Latin.

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The address of the author:

University of Zadar,
Department of English
Kralja Krešimira IV. br. 2,
23 000 Zadar, Croatia
lstrmelj@unizd.hr

O SINTAKTIČKOJ I MORFOLOŠKOJ NEGACIJI U BIBLIJSKOME ENGLESKOM: DIJAKRONIJSKA STUDIJA

Ovaj se članak bavi razvojem negacije u biblijskome engleskom u periodu od 11. do 17. stoljeća. U njemu se istražuju morfosintaktička obilježja niječnih rečenica u kasnom staroengleskom, kasnom srednjoengleskom i ranom modernom engleskom, na temelju triju engleskih prijevoda *Evanđelja po Ivanu*, sastavljenih prema latinskoj *Vulgati* Sv. Jeronima i grčkom originalu. Obrađeni primjeri pokazuju brojne oblike jednostruke i višestruke negacije, pri čemu se kod potonjeg uglavnom radi o niječnom slaganju, a povremeno i o dvostrukoj negaciji. K tomu, rezultati provedenog istraživanja uspoređuju se s glavnim postavkama Jespersenovog ciklusa kako bi se vidjelo do koje se mjere negacija u biblijskim tekstovima uklapa u opća kretanja u povijesnom razvoju engleskoga jezika.

Ključne riječi: morfološka negacija; sintaktička negacija; Jespersenov ciklus; biblijski engleski.