

# The Loss of Middle English *ne* in Different Contexts

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## Two studies on *ne* in Middle English

- *Ne* default marker of negation in Old English
- Two studies:
  - 1 Distribution and diachrony of *ne*
  - 2 Reanalysis of other negative items

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(3) They  $\emptyset$  shall **not** mysse,  
they shall not miss  
They shall not miss (*A right merrie Comedie*, c. 1570)

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 And those two stars never move (*Mandevilles Travels*, c. 1371)
- b. for þey  $\emptyset$  synneden **neuere**.  
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- (5) a. they **no** haveth [ **no** joye ]  
 they not have no joy  
 They do not have any joy (*Alisaunder*, c. 1300)
- b. On hyme ze  $\emptyset$  had [ **no** mercy ]  
 on him you had no mercy  
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- (6) **næfre ne** sceal yfele mannen [ **na** god ] getidan  
 never not shall evil men no good be-tide  
 'Never shall anything good happen to evil people'  
 (*Elucidarium*, c. 1110)
  - (7) ... þat **noman** do hure [ **non vnriȝte** ]  
 ... that nobody do her no unright  
 ... that nobody should do her wrong (*Assumption Virgin*, c. 1240)
  - (8) he **ne** wyl **noght** lere [ **na sience** ]  
 (*Northern Rule of St. Benet*, c. 1415)
  - (9) he may **not** goo **nowher** thurgh the world.  
 (*Reynard the Fox*, c. 1481)

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## Research Question

Do the loss of *ne* as a sentential negator and the loss of *ne* in negative concord structures co-occur or not?

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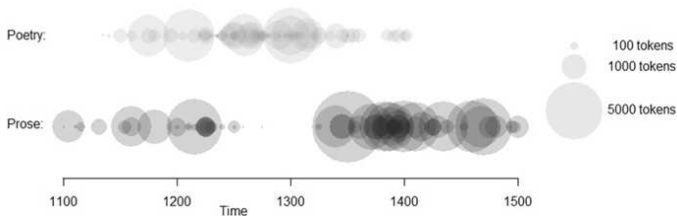


Figure 1: Representation of the temporal distribution of ME texts

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  - **ne**, **ne** + **not** vs.  $\emptyset$  **not** (n=8,512)

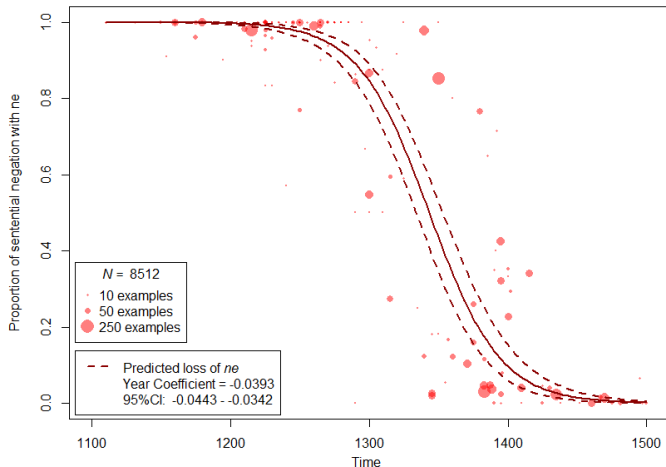
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  - Negative object: **ne** + **no** vs.  $\emptyset$  + **no** (n=1,965)
  - Negative adverbs: **ne** + **neuere** vs.  $\emptyset$  + **neuere** (n=1,715)  
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  - Multiple NC: **ne** + **multiple neg** vs.  $\emptyset$  + **multiple neg** (n=387)
- Exclusion of examples with other negative items.

# The Loss of *ne* as a Sentential Negator



**Figure 2:** Logistic regression model predicting the occurrence of *ne* as a sentential negator ( (*ne* + *ne* ... *not*) vs. *not*) from time, random text intercepts, NC excluded, including *ne*-clitics, data points represent years

# The Loss of *ne* in All Contexts

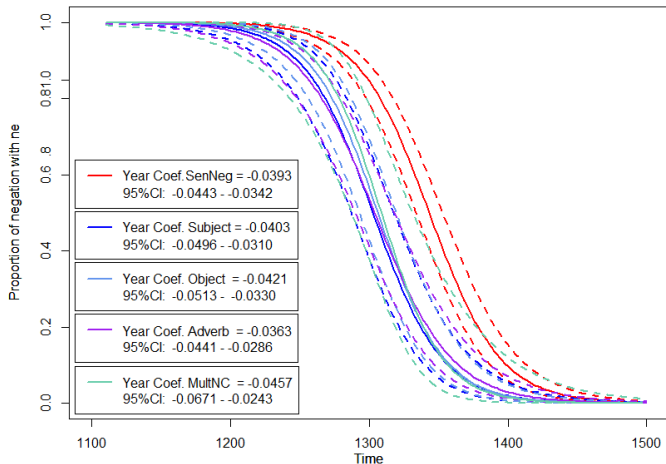


Figure 3: Logistic regression models of finding *ne* over time in four contexts; parallel lines indicate identical rates of change

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- The results are not perfectly clear-cut. But there is reason to believe that Frisch's (1997) intuition is correct - the loss of *ne* is roughly concurrent in all contexts.
- This suggests that same form of *ne* is involved in constructions with *not*, negative adverbs, negative objects and negative subjects.

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- (11) a. In **no** dress Mary looks good. “Mary looks good when she wears no dress” (**constituent negation**)
- b. In **no** dress does Mary look good. “It is not the case that Mary looks good in a dress” (**sentential negation**)

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- If so, that would provide independent evidence that the loss of *ne* and the ability for negative items to function as sentential negation are related.

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(13) **No uaeht** ich nauere [u]e[ht] non  
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(15) **no defaute** fond þei in hir feith (*Capgrave's Chronicle*, c. 1460)

# The Loss of *ne* in All Contexts

Period	NEG-SV	NEG-VS
M1 (1150-1250)	9	1 (10%)
M2 (1250-1350)	23	15 (39%)
M3 (1350-1420)	23	22 (59%)
M4 (1420-1500)	10	21 (68%)

Figure 4: The development of inversion after initial negative constituents

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- Negative elements (*no*, *never*) did not commonly occur in sentence-initial position in medieval English.
- Where they did occur, they show an increase in subject-verb inversion. Structures such as *Never have I ever...* are a late Middle English innovation.
- This may offer some additional support for the hypothesis that the loss of *ne* goes hand in hand with a reanalysis of other negative items.



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- Loss of *ne* can be analyzed in conjunction with a reanalysis of other negative items like *never*, *no* in the sense that they can function as sentential negators.
  - Once this negation can scope over clauses, it can attract the verb leading to a rise in inversion patterns.
  - Unfortunately, medieval data has low data quality, which leads to great uncertainty.

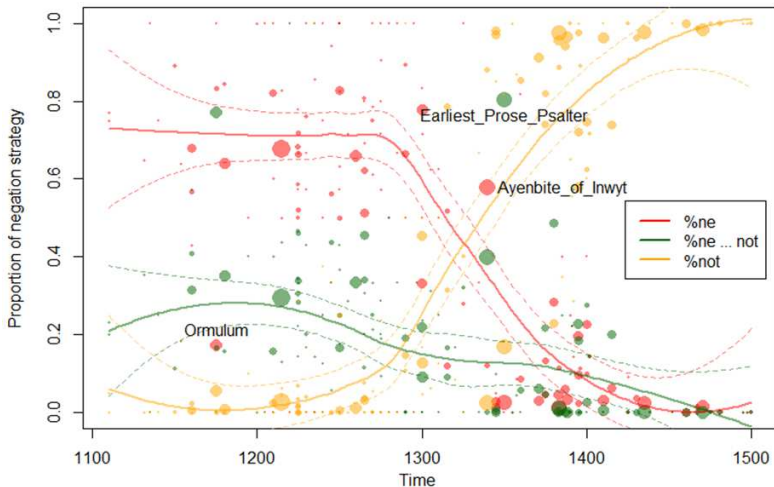
Not not the end.

Thank you for your attention.

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## Appendix 1: *ne* vs. *ne ... not* vs. *not*



**Figure 5:** Evolution ME negation strategies, *ne*-clitics included, NC excluded, *not* in all positions,  $N=9,719$  ( $N_{ne} = 3,230$ ,  $N_{ne...not} = 2,087$ ,  $N_{not} = 4,402$ )