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Dialect contact and the speed of Jespersen's cycle in Middle Low German

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Abstract
The present paper adds empirical evidence to the observation that dialect contact can lead to language change, and in particular, structural simplification. Empirically, the paper maps out the differences in the speed of the transition from stage II to stage III in different Middle Low German scribal dialects (*Schreibsprachen*) and proposes an account for these differences.

Keywords: Jespersen's cycle, Middle Low German, dialect contact, contact-induced change

1 Introduction

1.1 Jespersen's cycle

The term Jespersen's cycle (Dahl 1979, after observations by Jespersen 1917) is the directional development of the expression of sentential negation by which an original negation particle (stage I) is first joined by a new one (stage II) and later replaced by it (stage III). This development is found in many languages of north-western Europe, among which all of the West-Germanic languages. The phenomenon is well-described especially for English (a.o. Jespersen 1917, van Kemenade 2000, Ingham 2000; 2003, Iyeiri 2001, Mazzon 2004, and Wallage 2005), and has also been studied for Dutch (a.o. Van der Horst and Van der Wal 1978, Meersman 1980, De Haan and Weerman 1984, Burridge 1993, Beheydt 1998) and (High) German (a.o. Donhauser 1996; 1998, Abraham 1999; 2003, Jäger 2008), but is somewhat under-researched for historical Low German.[1]

The development proceeds at different speeds in the different languages it affects, a fact that has not received much attention in the literature. In

High German, for instance, stage III was essentially reached around 1300 (Jäger 2008: and literature cited there). English completed this transition around 1350-1420 (Wallage 2005:195). Dutch on the other hand only made this transition around 1600 (Burridge 1993:190f), and southern Dutch dialects even only in the 19th century (Beheydt 1998). The present paper shows that Middle Low German is positioned between High German and Dutch not only geographically, but also with respect to the completion of Jespersen's cycle. On the whole, stage III was reached around 1450 (Breitbarth 2013, 2014). However, the different scribal dialects (*Schreibsprachen*) differ with regards to the speed at which they completed the development. These differences and their account are the topic of the present article.

1.2 The empirical domain

Middle Low German refers to the dialects spoken in northern Germany between 1200 and 1650 (Stellmacher 1990: 39, Peters 2000b: 1482), which are, among others, characterised by lacking the affrication or spirantisation of West Germanic **p, *t, *k*. In the 14th and 15th centuries, it developed into an international *lingua franca* in connection with the expansion of the Hanseatic league of trade, spoken all around the North and Baltic Seas (Härd 1980, 2000; Peters 2000b). Middle Low German was replaced as the written language in the area by (Early New) High German between 1550 and 1650, though Low German continued to exist in spoken dialects (Peters 1998).

The present study is based on a corpus of editions of Middle Low German official texts (charters, city laws etc.), which have the advantage of being dated and localised. This allows tracking linguistic changes closely in time and space. Only Low German texts (not High German or Latin) which are clearly dated and localised have been chosen from these collections for the corpus. The chosen texts come from the public records of ten places in the Middle Low German area, covering the time span from 1325 to 1575. The scribal dialects represented in the corpus include Westphalian (Börstel, Steinfurt), Eastphalian (Barsinghausen, Braunschweig, Mariengarten) and North Low Saxon (Oldenburg, Scharnebeck and Uelzen in the Saxon *Altland* and Lübeck and Stralsund in the East Elbian *Neuland*).[2] 2828 negative clauses were extracted from this corpus.

1.3 Research questions and overview

The dialects form a continuum bordering Middle Dutch in the west and Middle High German (<1350), later Early New High German (>1350), in the south (Peters 2000a). The question arises whether its position is intermedi-

ate not just geographically, but also in a linguistic sense. More precisely, the question is how the completion of Jespersen's cycle maps out in the Middle Low German area, which dialects are faster at this completion and which are more conservative. In particular, one may wonder whether the southern or south-eastern dialects of Middle Low German are faster in their transition to stage III of Jespersen's than more western ones, that is, whether the innovative expression of negation (stage III of Jespersen's cycle) spread from the High German language area into the Low German area. Comparing the development in four scribal dialects, the present paper shows that diffusion from High German played less of a role for the speed of the transition to stage III of Jespersen's cycle in the different Middle Low German scribal dialects, but rather that the different colonisation histories of the different parts of the Middle Low German area and the resulting migration patterns are the main factor behind these differences, besides considerations of emergent standardisation and codification of the written language.

2 Jespersen's cycle in Low German

2.1 General overview

Old Saxon can firmly be classified as a stage I language in terms of Jespersen's cycle, as is discussed in more detail in Breitbarth (2013, 2014). The use of the negative head *ni* expressing sentential negation is virtually obligatory in Old Saxon and emphasisers of negation are hardly used at all. Among the latter, *niouuiht* 'nothing', the item that goes on to become the new expression of sentential negation as the language progresses through Jespersen's cycle, is particularly marginal (cf. Breitbarth 2013). The morphologically non-negative form *iouuiht* 'anything' is more common as an adverbial strengthener of the expression of negation, though still very infrequent. The bridging context appear to be predicates with an optional 'extent' argument filled by ((*n*)*io*)*uuiht*, meaning roughly 'at all' (Breitbarth 2013), a common development in an incipient Jespersen's cycle (Breitbarth et al. 2013).

(1) ni sculun us belgan uuiht
NEG shall.PL REFL be.angry anything
'We shall not be angry at all.'
(*Heliand* 4895)

The main development regarding the expression of negation in Middle Low German is the transition from stage II to stage III of Jespersen's cycle, that is, the loss of the old negation particle *ne/en*. By the time textual transmission in the vernacular resumes, *nicht* 'not' < *niouuiht* has become the standard expression of sentential negation. It is used in 99.9% of the negative clauses without indefinites in the scope of negation (i.e., simple sentential negation), in 1548 cases out of 1549 (Breitbarth 2013). In 1045 of these (equalling 67.5%), *nicht* 'not', the stage III-pattern, is used on its own, compare (2) and (3).[3]

(2) We des nicht en wete de lat=is sik berichten.
who this.GEN NEG EN knows REL let=it REFL report
'(Everyone) who does not (yet) know this, should endeavour to learn about it'
(Braunschweig 1349)

(3) we sek des nicht leddigen wel…
who REFL the.GEN NEG rid wants
'who(ever) does not want to rid themselves of this …'
(Braunschweig 1380)

These figures are based on the whole corpus, over the whole period (1325-1575). A more fine-grained picture emerges when the development in the different scribal areas is analysed separately through time segments of 50 years.

2.2 Diatopic variation within Middle Low German

The development of the expression of negation is not uniform across the different scribal dialects of Middle Low German. Table 1 shows the counts and percentages of the bipartite, or stage II, expression of negation for each scribal dialect, as they develop through the Middle Low German period covered by the corpus used. These numbers show significant differences between the dialects regarding the use and loss of the preverbal particle: The Hanseatic cities Lübeck and Stralsund and North Low Saxon already use the old preverbal particle much less frequently at the beginning of the period, and they lose it much more quickly than the dialects of the *Altland*. The North Low Saxon *Altland* seems to stagnate around one third of the negative clauses without indefinites using stage II negation between 1375 and 1524 and is eventually overtaken by Eastphalian. The slowest scribal dialect to make the transition is certainly Westphalian.

Table 1 The use of the preverbal particle with *nicht*, per scribal dialect (Breitbarth 2014: 44)

	Westphalian	Eastphalian	North Low Saxon	Hansa cities
1325-1374	22 (78.6%)	55 (72.7%)	37 (56.1%)	3 (50%)
1375-1424	25 (83.3%)	52 (71.2%)	42 (33.1%)	12 (18.5%)
1425-1474	3 (37.5%)	25 (52.1%)	75 (33%)	20 (29%)
1475-1524	14 (35.8%)	15 (14.6%)	62 (31.2%)	10 (7.8 %)
1525-1574	8 (21.1%)	18 (10.2%)	3 (12%)	2 (12.5%)

Table 1 shows that the transition from stage II to stage III completes at different speeds in the different scribal dialects. Westphalian is the most conservative scribal dialect with respect to the expression of negation, followed by Eastphalian and North Low Saxon, while the East Elbian Hansa cities are most innovative in this respect.

If the different periods are tested against each other for each individual scribal dialect using Pearson's χ-squared test for independence, the five periods (hence, four degrees of freedom) differ statistically highly significantly from each other in the expression of negation, as Table 2 shows. The effect of time seems to be particularly strong in West- and Eastphalian, which in their first period had a much higher percentage of bipartite negation than North Low Saxon and the East Elbian Hansa cities.[4] The change is thus somewhat less dramatic in these latter two.

Table 2 The periods tested against each other per scribal dialect (Breitbarth 2014: 45)

	Westphalian	Eastphalian	North Low Saxon	Hansa cities
χ^2	38.8105	163.9147	20.5637	20.0251
Df	4	4	4	4
p-value	$7.623e^{-8}$	$2.2e^{-16}$	0.0004	0.0005

In order to see whether the differences between the individual scribal dialects are significant, that is, whether they have different grammars with respect to the expression of sentential negation, each individual dialect was tested against each of the other dialects. As can be seen from Table 3, the most conservative scribal dialect, Westphalian, and the most progressive one, the East Elbian Hansa cities, are (highly) significantly different from all other individual scribal dialects, as is witnessed by extremely low p-values in Pearson's χ-squared test for independence. On the other hand, the grammars of Eastphalian and North Low Saxon are not significantly different at all with respect to the expression of negation, the p-value of .89 in fact points at a nearly identitical distribution of the expression of negation in the two dialects.

Table 3 The scribal dialects individually tested against each other (Breitbarth 2014: 45)

	WP vs. EP	WP vs. NLS	WP vs. HC
χ^2	10.9121	12.7203	52.3856
Df	1	1	1
p-value	0.001	0.0004	$4.561e^{-13}$
	EP vs. NLS	EP vs. HC	NLS vs. HC
χ^2	0.0197	27.9415	28.5254
Df	1	1	1
p-value	0.8883	$1.25e^{-7}$	$9.248e^{-8}$

The distance between the scribal dialects of Westphalian and the East Elbian Hansa cities is the greatest. The latter is the most distant dialect from all individual scribal dialects. Although highly significantly different from its neighbouring dialects North Low Saxon and Eastphalian, Westphalian is less distant from them.

The question addressed in section 4 below is how these differences in the speed at which a scribal dialect made the transition from stage II to stage III of Jespersen's cycle can be accounted for. In order to embed the account offered, the next section will provide a formal analysis of the developments affecting negative markers and indefinites in the scope of negation in the history of Low German.

3 Analysis of Jespersen's cycle in Low German

3.1 The typology of Jespersen's cycle and negative concord

The analysis offered here builds on and refines the theories of Jespersen's cycle and negative concord developed by Zeijlstra (2004 *et passim*) and Haegeman and Lohndal (2010). This account assumes a licensing relation between elements carrying interpretable and uninterpretable negation features ([iNEG], [uNEG]). An element carrying a [uNEG] feature requires licensing by an element carrying a [iNEG] feature c-commanding it. This [iNEG] element may be overt, or a covert operator (cf. Zeijlstra 2004, Penka 2010). This derives the following typology of languages, depending on the type of negative marker and its interaction with indefinites in the scope of negation. In a language without negative concord (NC), all morphologically negative elements, both negation markers and indefinites, carry an [iNEG] feature, and can therefore not co-occur with each other without causing double (logical) negation, i.e. ¬¬p = p. NC languages can be of four different types; in a *non-strict NC language*, like Italian, morphologically

negative indefinites (n-words) can typically co-occur with each other, and can co-occur with the marker of sentential negation if they follow it. Zeijlstra therefore analyses them as bearing [uNEG], and the marker of sentential negation in such languages as [iNEG]. This accounts for the fact that when an n-word occurs in pre-verbal position, where it would precede the [iNEG] marker of sentential negation, the latter cannot occur: as the [uNEG] n-word would not be c-commanded by an [iNEG] element, it triggers the insertion of a covert [iNEG] operator, which in turn precludes the appearance of the regular overt [iNEG] sentential negator. In *strict NC languages*, like Czech, on the other hand, in which the sentential negation marker obligatorily co-occurs with n-words, regardless of their position, Zeijlstra assumes that both the negation marker and the n-words carry a [uNEG] feature, and that they are licensed by a covert interpretable negation operator OP¬ [iNEG] scoping over them.

Furthermore, there are languages like French in which n-words can co-occur with each other (negative spread; NS), but not with the sentential negation marker (which would be called negative doubling; N2). Zeijlstra has proposed different analyses for such languages. I will here adopt and adapt Haegeman and Lohndal's (2010) Pairwise Agree approach to NC and assume that in a language like French with NS, but without N2, the sentential negation marker bears an interpretable Neg feature, and the n-words bear two features, an uninterpretable Neg feature [uNEG] and an uninterpretable quantificational feature [uQ].[5] As Pairwise Agree can only occur between two elements with maximally matching features, Agree between an [iNEG] negator and a [uNEG, uQ] indefinite would leave behind an unlicensed [uQ] feature and cause the derivation to crash. Assuming a covert negative operator with the features [iNEG, iQ] licensing the [uNEG, uQ] indefinites can account for the presence of NS and the simultaneous absence of N2. The quantificational features are probably also present in all other types of NC, but do not lead to mismatches there.[6]

A final type of interaction only discussed in Biberauer and Zeijlstra (2012) is found in languages in which there is strict negative doubling, i.e., obligatory co-occurrence of the marker of sentential negation and an n-word, but in which n-words cannot co-occur with each other (i.e., there is no negative spread). They take one dialect of Afrikaans to be an example of such a language. In these languages, the sentential negator would carry a [uNEG] feature, while n-words are really [iNEG] negative quantifiers. The following typology of languages emerges:

Table 4 The typology of languages according to their JC stage and indefinite/negation interaction

	negative marker	indefinite
no NC	[iNEG]	[iNEG,iQ]
non-strict NC	[iNEG]	[uNEG,iQ]
strict NC	[uNEG]	[uNEG,iQ]
NS only	[iNEG]	[uNEG, uQ]
strict N2, no NS	[uNEG]	[iNEG,iQ]

3.2 The development of negation in historical Low German

Based on this typology, there are reasons to believe that the old preverbal negation particle in historical Low German (Old Saxon *ni* > Middle Low German *ne/en*) carried a [uNEG] feature throughout its attested history. As discussed in Breitbarth (2013), standard negation in Old Saxon was expressed by means of preverbal *ni*. In the older texts (the *Genesis* fragments and the *Heliand* epos), morphologically negative indefinites in the scope of negation are rare; they are entirely absent from the *Genesis* and occur at about 20% in the *Heliand*. As the morphologically non-negative indefinites used instead can also occur outside the scope of negation in non-negative affective contexts such as the standard of comparison or the restriction of a universal quantifier, (4), it is likely that they were NPIs and did not carry [NEG] features.

(4) allaro barno bezta, thero the io giboran uurði
all.GEN children best the.GEN the ever born were
"The best of all children who were ever born."
(*Heliand* 835)

On the other hand, these NPI indefinites could also occur as subjects preceding the negative marker, (5).

(5) that is ênig seg ni ginas
that of.it any man NEG was.saved
'that no man was saved from it'
(*Genesis* 322)

According to Zeijlstra (2004), this is only possible in languages where the negation marker is [uNEG], because in those languages, the interpretable negation features enter the derivation on a covert operator OP¬ [iNEG].

Such an operator would scope over and license subject NPIs as well. We therefore have to assume that Old Saxon *ni* is [uNEG]. This does not change when morphologically negative indefinites appeared in later Old Saxon texts, as *ni* remains obligatory regardless of the position of the indefinites, giving rise to strict NC of the Czech type.[7]

Middle Low German had an interaction between negation and indefinites of the French type, with negative spread, but no negative doubling with the main expression of sentential negation (the new negator *nicht*). N-words could, however, co-occur with the old preverbal negator *ne/en* (<*ni*), (6).

(6) a. Na sunte Micheles daghe 1349 scal nemen nenne rok dragen ...
after St. Michael's day 1349 shall no one no cloak wear
'No one shall wear a(ny) cloak after St. Michael's day 1349 ...'
(Braunschweig 1380)

b. Und we enwillet noch enschullet nummermer neyn slot darin buwen
and we NEG.want nor NEG.shall never=more no castle there=in build
'And we shall and will never build any castle in it'
(Uelzen 24/10/1397)

The developments in historical Low German can therefore be summed up as in table 5.

Table 5 The development of negation in historical Low German

	ni > *ne/en*	*nicht*	**indefinites**	**NC type**
Old Saxon	[uNEG]	—	NPI	subject NPIs
			[iNEG,iQ] > [uNEG,uQ]	no NC > strict N2+no NS
Middle Low German	[uNEG]>Ø	[iNEG]	[uNEG,uQ]	NS, N2 with *ne/en* no N2 with *nicht*

Bearing a [uNEG] feature, Middle Low German *ne/en* no longer expresses negation on its own. In a regular negative clause, negation is expressed by [iNEG] *nicht*; in clauses with indefinites in the scope of negation, this is done by a covert [iNEG,iQ] operator, assuming that negative indefinites in Middle Low German are [uNEG,uQ]. This assumption follows under the adoption of Haegeman and Lohndal's (2010) Pairwise Agree approach to NS, taking seriously the *Defective Intervention Constraint* (Chomsky 2000:123), which is relaxed in "Multiple Agree" approaches to NC (such as Zeijlstra 2004, Penka 2010). Under the Pairwise Agree approach, two elements only agree if their features maximally match, that is, if they are

either identical ([iNEG] + [uNEG] or [uNEG] + [uNEG], leading to the elimination of one occurrence of uNEG, but allowing further matching with the next [u/iNEG] element) or if they match (e.g. [uNEG] + [uNEG,iQ]). As negative indefinites in Middle Low German do not co-occur with *nicht*, the assumption of non-matching features suggests itself.[8]

Its inability to express negation on its own renders *ne/en* essentially superfluous as the expression of negation. This is essential for its eventual disappearance. As seen in section 2.2 above, this disappearance takes place at different speeds in different scribal dialects of Low German. The following section will offer an account for these differences.

4 The speed of Jespersen's cycle in Middle Low German

There are two main ingredients to the account of the differing speeds at which the different Middle Low German scribal dialects made the transition from stage II to stage III of Jespersen's cycle. Language-internally, all Middle Low German scribal dialects start from the same premise, a functionally redundant [uNEG] particle formerly, but no longer, expressing sentential negation. Language-externally, the written records on which this study is based reflect different socio-linguistic situations, which influence the further development in different ways to be detailed below.

4.1 Language contact, dialect contact and structural simplification

It is well known that language contact can lead to structural simplification in a language affected by it. This has to do with the fact that in some language contact situations, there is either imperfect second language learning or first language attrition on the part of adult speakers, creating altered input to new generations of first language acquirers (cf. Trudgill 2011; Lucas 2012), which is likely to lead to the avoidance or non-acquisition of marked features in the source languages.

To be sure, dialect contact differs from contact between genetically distant or unrelated languages in that the varieties in contact are mutually intelligible (cf. Trudgill 1994:13; Braunmüller 1996:143). But in situations of contact between such mutually intelligible varieties, structural simplification is attested as well. Postma (2012) discusses one such example, the spread of the reflexive pronoun *zich* in the contact area between Low German (Saxon), Low Franconian and Frisian dialects in the 15th century. Similar phenomena have been studied and analysed as a result of 'semi-

communication' resulting from 'receptive multilingualism' (a scenario where the contact varieties are mutually intelligible and potentially analysable as part of an extended diasystem) in the work of Braunmüller (1996, 2007a,b). Such structural simplification as a result of contact between potentially mutually intelligible varieties is captured by Postma's (2012: 156) "Micro-scale Bickerton Hypothesis", (7), based on Bickerton's (1999) hypothesis that in a creolisation situation where a speaker does not get sufficient input to trigger a certain parameter setting, or where opposing settings meet the default setting is chosen.

(7) If two languages L_1 and L_2 with respective parameter settings L_1 (+π1, -π2) and L_2 (-π1, +π2), being in mutual contact, produce the interlanguage $L_{1.2}$, then $P(L_{1.2}$ (+π1, +π2)) << $P(L_{1.2}$ (-π1, -π2))
where: [+π] denotes a non-default parameter setting, [-π] a default setting, and P(ζ) is the probability of ζ.
(Postma 2010: 156)

I take parametric variation to result from differences in the features of lexical items, in particular functional heads (the so-called Borer-Chomsky conjecture, after Borer 1984 and Chomsky 1995) and adopt the markedness hierarchy given through Van Gelderen's (2011) Feature Economy Principle, (8) which gives rise to linguistic cycles such as Jespersen's cycle (after Van Gelderen 2011, ch. 1 (32)).

(8)

Adjunct		Specifier		Head		0
semantic	>	[iF]	>	[uF]	>	–

Given these two assumptions, less marked (= more economical) feature types are preferred in the absence of evidence to the contrary, especially in contact situations where simplification through adult agents plays a role.

4.2 Dialect contact and accelerated change in the *Neuland*

The north east of the Middle Low German language area, formerly inhabited by Slavonic speakers, was only colonised during the 11th century by settlers from the North Low Saxon and Westphalian areas. During the Middle Low German period, the East Elbian cities of Lübeck and Stralsund became centres of the Hanseatic trade. We thus find a typical urbanisation scenario here, with dialect levelling and koinéisation. Peters argues,

> In der Frühzeit Lübecks ist mit einem Nebeneinander verschiedener altländischer Mundarten zu rechnen. Das Zusammenleben in der Stadt führt im Verlauf des 13. Jhs. zu einem innerstädtischen Ausgleich, es entsteht eine städtische Umgangssprache. Es ist anzunehmen, dass sich relativ früh innerhalb der hansischen Gemeinschaft, unter den Fernhandelskaufleuten im Ostseeraum eine lübisch geprägte mündliche Handels- und Verkehrssprache entwickelt hat [...].[9] (Peters 2000a:1414)

Initially, there would have been a situation of 'receptive multilingualism' (Braunmüller 20007a,b) between adults (Hanseatic trade, settlers), contributing their various *Altland* dialects, all including the preverbal [uNEG] particle *ne/en*. As described by Postma (2012), a contact language can have features that are not part of any of the input languages, because of the working of UG markedness constraints. I take the relevant markedness constraint in the case at hand to be Van Gelderen's Feature Economy. Feature Economy prefers the elimination of [uF], in our case [uNEG], heads from a language in the absence of compelling evidence for its postulation. The elimination of [uNEG] *ne/en* is possible in the contact variety (the interlanguage) because negation is already always expressed by other elements, either by [iNEG] *nicht* or by [uNEG,uQ] n-words (as those trigger the insertion of a covert [iNEG,iQ] OP¬). This is different from Old Saxon, where until the rise of [iNeg,iQ] n-marked indefinites by univerbation of the negator *ni* and morphologically non-negative indefinites, the interpretable negation features always needed to be provided by a covert operator (cf. Breitbarth 2013, 2014). As *ne/en* never occurs without either *nicht* or n-words in Middle Low German[10], there is no evidence for the need to postulate it. As described by Van Gelderen (2011) and Postma (2012), (markedness and economy principles of) UG can act as a 'third player' in language change, in particular in contact situations.

The new expression of negation without *ne/en* in the interlanguage would then form the input to new generations of language acquirers (cf. Lucas 2012), leading to a rapid abandonment of the old preverbal particle in the new variety. Being redundant in negative clauses, the preverbal particle is doomed to be lost anyway, but this loss will proceed even faster in a situation of urban dialect mixture as found in the newly founded Hansa cities.[11] The possible presence of speakers of Central and High German dialects may have added to this, but does not alter the scenario of the accelerated transition to stage III of Jespersen's cycle in the *Neuland* described here.

A language-external factor that may have had a bearing on the transi-

tion from stage II to stage III of Jespersen's cycle in the corpus is the early levelling of local dialect features in the written language under the influence of the powerful chancery of Lübeck and the emergence of a super-regional quasi-standard in the North East. However, the levelling of local dialect features mainly targeted differences between dialects in order to achieve a greater reach of the emerging standard. As the new expression of negation without *ne/en* was not yet part of the original dialects, the simplification scenario described above involving oral contact between speakers of different dialects of origin seems to be more plausible. This simplification then entered into the written use. This is corroborated by the fact that the transition to stage III of Jespersen's cycle starts the earliest and proceeds fastest in the Stralsund subcorpus, which consists of the Stralsund memorial register. This is a different text type from the charters in the Lübeck subcorpus, which, as chancery texts, were probably subject to stronger codification. Given that written language generally tends to be more conservative, particularly so when codification plays a role, we can assume that in the East Elbian Hansa cities, the transition started first due to adult bidialectism/receptive multilingualism and ensuing levelling in the spoken language, and only then diffused into the written use.

4.3 Syntactic continuity in the *Altland*

There are two factors arguably influencing the linguistic continuity or rather the delayed transition to stage III in the 'Altland' scribal dialect areas of Westphalia and, to a lesser extent, Eastphalia and North Low Saxon. First, these areas were socially more stable. Less population movement means less dialect contact. A probable consequence of that are closer social networks, which have been argued in the socio-linguistic literature to delay change:

> Linguistic change is slow to the extent that the relevant populations are well established and bound by strong ties whereas it is rapid to the extent that weak ties exist in populations.
> (Milroy & Milroy, 1985:363)

> The second implication that society size, network structure and stability may have for linguistic structure is that dense, multiplex networks may lead to greater conformity in linguistic behaviours and to the stricter maintenance of group norms, since tightly-knit communities are more able to enforce continued adherence to such norms.
> (Trudgill, 2004: 442)

Second, unlike in the East Elbian Hansa cities, we can invoke the emerging standardisation of written use as a potential factor. Peters (1997, 2003) argues that the traditional view (e.g. Sanders 1982) that the development of a writing standard emanating from the chancery of Lübeck caused a large-scale levelling in written Middle Low German is mistaken. Rather, regional orthography and morphology was preserved in the West and South of the Middle Low German area (e.g., West- and Eastphalia), where more local, smaller-scale regional writing standards evolved. Codification as found in the genre of chancery texts is likely to preserve older traits, as mentioned above. Together with the fact that there was likely less impetus from the spoken use for the elimination of [uNEG] *ne/en* in the written use, this can account for the conservatism of the southern and western scribal dialects.

The stagnation of the transition in North Low Saxon between 1375 and 1524 is remarkable (cf. Table 1). Peters (2003:438) signals that the written use of western North Low Saxon chanceries seems to have wavered between Westphalian and Lübeck influence. It might thus be accommodation to the emerging Westphalian regional standard, which was competing with the north(east)ern Hanseatic standard of the Lübeck chancery, that caused the stagnation concerning the transition from stage II to stage III of Jespersen's cycle in the written language used in the North Low Saxon chanceries, geographically situated in a transitional zone between the two dominant varieties.

5 Summary and conclusions

The present paper has argued that the different speed at which different scribal dialects of Middle Low German make that transition from stage II (*ne/en ... nicht*) to stage III (*nicht* alone) of Jespersen's cycle can be accounted for invoking a number of related reasons. In the East Elbian Hansa cities in the North East, where the loss of the former preverbal negation particle *ne/en* is accelerated compared to the dialects of the Saxon *Altland*, the colonisation history of the area suggests an urbanisation scenario leading to levelling in the speech of adult speakers, which then forms the input to new generations of language learners, accounting for the rapid loss of *ne/en* especially in the Stralsund subcorpus, whose text genre is less influenced by codification than the Lübeck subcorpus. The delayed transition especially in Westphalian was accounted for by (a) the lack of population movement providing a base for dialect contact and ensuing

levelling and (b) the emergence of a regional written standard, which in connection with the generally conservative nature of the chancery genre may additionally have impeded the spread of the innovative expression of negation in the texts available to us.

A geographical diffusion of stage III from High German into the Low German area is less likely, even though High German is known to have completed Jespersen's Cycle earlier than Middle Low German (Jäger 2008). The preverbal particle is lost last in the south(-west)ern areas of West- and Eastphalia, which border Central (i.e., High) German dialects. Rather, the reason for the accelerated loss of the preverbal particle in the Hanseatic cities in the North East is likely to be dialect levelling because of contact between speakers of different Middle Low German dialects. The levelling could occur because of the working of universal markedness and economy constraints such as Van Gelderen's Feature Economy, which can act as a 'third player' in language (or dialect) contact situations, causing simplification (or, 'micro-creolisation', as Postma 2012 calls it). In the case at hand, this leads to the elimination of the [uNEG] head, as it is no longer supported by compelling evidence. The possible presence of High German speakers in the context of the Hanseatic trade may have contributed to the loss of *ne/en*, but this would not change the essence of the account.

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Notes

1. Exceptions include Coombs' (1976) chapter on negation in Old Saxon, Pensel's (1976) mention of Middle Low German negation compared to Central and Upper German varieties and Sundquist's (2007) brief treatment of Jespersen's cycle in the Middle Low German written in Lübeck, besides recent work by the author (Breitbarth 2009, 2011, 2013, 2014).
2. For various reasons, some Middle Low German scribal dialects are not represented in this corpus, viz. the *Neuland* dialects of Elb-Eastphalian, Brandenburgish and the Low German used in the Baltic areas conquered by the Teutonic Order.

3. The old preverbal particle is used to negate a clause on its own in only one case in my corpus, (i). In another 168 cases, it is used on its own in exceptive clauses like (ii), which I have argued not to express sentential negation (Breitbarth 2009, 2013).
   (i) der ik unde myne erven en-scholed recht warende wesen
   of.that I and my heirs NEG-shall right keeping be
   '… of which I and my heirs shall not keep priority of claim'
   (Scharnebeck 26/05/1420)
   (ii) vnde dar moste numment yn, he ne gheue V mark vp dat minste
   and there must no.one in he NEG give.SUBJN five marks on the least
   'and no one shall enter there, unless he give/pay at least five marks'
   (Stralsund 1392)
4. For both, the χ-squared approximation may be incorrect due to lower token numbers. However, Fisher's exact test confirms the statistically high significance of the influence of the period of composition on the expression of negation in both Westphalian ($p = 1.995e^{-8}$) and the Hansa cities ($p = 0.0004$).
5. See Haegeman and Lohndal (2010) for other types of interaction between negation and indefinites analysed in terms of other combinations of these features and their interpretability, as well as a justification of the assumption of a quantificational feature on indefinites.
6. For more details and arguments, cf. Haegeman and Lohndal 2010 and Breitbarth 2014.
7. The only difference with Czech is that Old Saxon did not also have negative spread, though it eventually develops it on the way to Middle Low German. Where more than one indefinite occurs in the scope of negation, one is morphologically negative, the others are from the NPI series, (i). See Breitbarth (2013) for an analysis.
   (i) Nis thes tueho enig gumono nigienumu …
   NEG=is the.GEN.SG.N doubt any men.GEN.PL none.DAT.PL …
   'There is no doubt about it to any of the men…'
   (*Heliand* 3190-3191)
   The question may arise why Czech never underwent Jespersen's cycle. I refer the reader to Breitbarth et al. (2013) for answers. In short, while most languages have means to emphasise the expression of negation, such emphasisers have to overcome a number of grammatical obstacles before they can be reanalysed as neutral expressions of sentential negation, and thus for the language to enter Jespersen's cycle. In fact, in most cases, many incipient developments never go anywhere at all.
8. See Haegeman and Lohndal (2010) for further arguments and independent empirical support.
9. 'In the early days of Lübeck, we have to assume a co-existence of different dialects of the Saxon 'Altland'. The collective life in the city leads to an intra-city levelling during the 13th century, to the rise of an urban vernacular. We can assume that already early on, an oral trade language and lingua franca based on the dialect of Lübeck developed within the hanseatic community, among the traders around the Baltic Sea.' [transl. AB]
10. In Middle Low German, *ne/en* is only independently used in the exceptive construction (see (ii) in fn. 3). As it does not express negation in this construction (and therefore arguably does not even have a [uNEG] feature), it cannot support the postulation of [uNEG] *ne/en* in negative clauses.
11. Cf. also Trudgill (1994, 2011), who argues that adult 'bidialectism' (Trudgill 1994: 19) commonly leads to simplification.

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