

The role of dialect contact in slowing down Jespersen's cycle in Middle Low German

NORMS Workshop on Negation
Universitet i Oslo

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AHRC-funded project
*The development of negation
in the languages of Europe*



Middle Low German

- Low German: dialects north of the Benrath isogloss



Middle Low German

- Middle Low German: ca. 1250-1550
- international *lingua franca* between 1350 and 1500 around the North and Baltic Seas in connection with the Hanseatic League
- replaced by High German as written standard in the area after 1550

Jespersen's cycle

stage I	stage II	stage III	stage I'
<i>ic ne secge</i>	<i>I ne seye not</i>	<i>I say not</i>	<i>I do not say</i> <i>I don't say</i>
Old English	Middle English	Early Modern English	Present Day English

- Jespersen (1917:9-11)

Jespersen's cycle in West Germanic

- all West Germanic languages underwent JC, but at different speed
- High German completed the transition from stage II to stage III around 1300 (Dal 1966: 164; Lockwood 1968:207f.; Jäger 2006:211)
- English completed this transition around 1350-1420 (Wallage 2005:195)
- Dutch only completed the transition around 1600! (Burridge 1993:190f)

Questions for Middle Low German

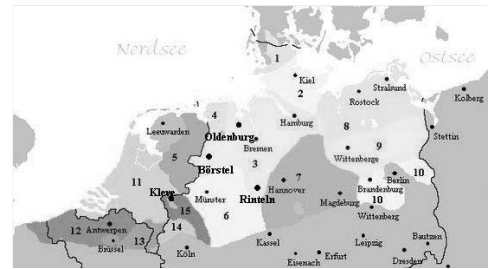
- geographically, Middle Low German is situated between Middle Dutch in the west and Middle and Early New High German in the south
- intermediate position also linguistically?
- can contact with Middle Dutch varieties influence the speed of the transition from stage II to stage III in Middle Low German?

contact leading to delay/reversal: Postma & Bennis (2006): Drentish is (a) very progressive in its expression of negation around 1400 and (b) reverts to a more conservative form under Hollandish influence around 1500

The corpus

- charters and deeds from two cities and two convents from 1350-1550 (advantage: exact place and date, disadvantage: somewhat formalised chancery language)
- three Low Saxon (Oldenburg, Rinteln, Börstel), one Low Franconian (Kleve)
- two close to what is now the Dutch border (Börstel, Kleve), two more to the east (Oldenburg, Rinteln)

The corpus



Corpus analysis

- no MLG dialect had stage I negation anymore, all occurrences of single *ne/en* are instances of the exceptive construction:

(1) Oec en sal men nyemant tot burger
 also NE shall one n.one to citizen
 ontfangen, men en heb on een
 receive, one NE have.SUBJN him one
 maent bekant
 month known
 'One shall not make anyone a citizen unless one had known him for one month'
 (Klever Rechtsbuch 1430: 4v)

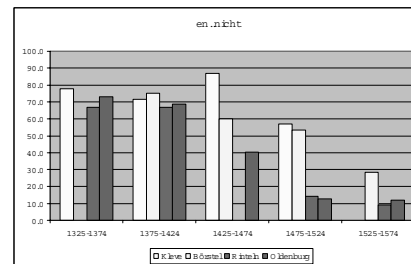
Corpus analysis

	<i>en... nicht</i>			
	Kleve	Börstel	Rinteln	Oldenburg
1325-1374	77.8% (9)	n/a	66.7% (3)	73.1% (26)
1375-1424	71.4% (7)	75.0% (4)	66.7% (3)	68.8% (16)
1425-1474	86.9% (213)	60.0% (5)	n/a	40.5% (84)
1475-1524	57.1 (21)	53.3% (13)	14.3 % (14)	12.5% (40)
1525-1574	0.0% (1)	28.6% (25)	9.1 % (11)	12.0% (25)

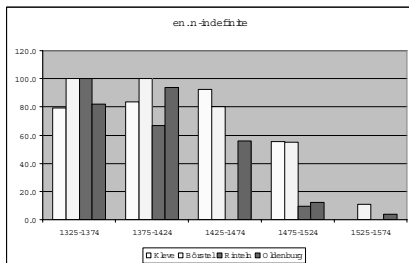
Corpus analysis

	<i>en... n-indefinite</i>			
	Kleve	Börstel	Rinteln	Oldenburg
1325-1374	79.3% (29)	100% (2)	100% (12)	82.1% (28)
1375-1424	83.3% (12)	100% (7)	66.7% (3)	93.8% (16)
1425-1474	92.2% (94)	80.0% (5)	n/a	56.1% (57)
1475-1524	55.5 (9)	55.0% (20)	9.5% (21)	12.5% (40)
1525-1574	0.0% (3)	11.1% (27)	0.0% (7)	4.0% (25)

Corpus analysis



Corpus analysis



Observations and questions

- Rinteln and Oldenburg = more progressive
 - Börstel and Kleve = more conservative
- >> effect of dialect contact with Middle Dutch or just normal geographic diffusion of the new pattern from (south-) east to west?
- >> how can dialect contact between conservative and progressive varieties slow down a change in progress?

Geographic diffusion continuum?

- if stage III just spreads from south-east to north-west, we would expect Oldenburg to be slower in the transition from stage II to stage III, and much closer in its pattern to Börstel
- however, this transition is significantly delayed in Börstel, compared to Oldenburg, even though the latter is only about 30km more to the east

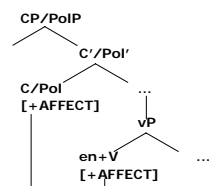
Socio-economic background

- underlying close socio-economic contacts
 - Kleve: enclave in Gelderland, long time part of it
 - Börstel: about 40 km from border, but owned much land in the low county of Lingen which was under very strong Dutch influence (Dutch often used as written language in private documents; Taubken 1981:386)
- >> diglossia likely

Dialect contact and syntactic continuity

- in contact: different negation systems (Breitbarth 2007);
 - (i) overt lexical exponent of Pol⁰ or not;
 - (ii) n-indefinites able to identify negation on their own or not

(2)



Dialect contact and syntactic continuity

- if
 - the preverbal marker does not undergo further functional specialisation (cf. Breitbarth & Haegeman, in prep., on Flemish dialects) and
 - loses its non-negative uses (e.g. exceptive construction, (1)) which would constitute independent evidence,

... it will ultimately disappear from negative constructions because its presence is entailed by the negation marker

Dialect contact and syntactic continuity

- 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)
- dialects are orally defined, non-standard character, in opposition to contact between written/standard or genetically distant languages

Dialect contact and syntactic continuity

- speakers are able to adjust to/understand forms by relating them to some archaic, poetic or dialectal forms in their own diasystem – “receptive multilingualism” (Braunmüller 2007); hypothetical diasystem
- they can use such forms to accommodate
- a dialect which is already losing the preverbal marker, can maintain it under contact with a more conservative dialect, as it
 - (a) can be recognised as a historical variant of covert Pol^o
 - (b) is not in conflict with the recipient grammar
 - (c) it can eventually be sustained by first language acquisition

Dialect contact and syntactic continuity

- children analyse the data of the two dialects in their linguistic environment as combined output of one system incorporating both variants of a form (the metasystem adult speakers can fall back on)
- delay of 2-3 generations in the border places w.r.t. to eastern places in transition from stage II to stage III negation points at mixed PLD

Dialect contact and syntactic continuity

- the fact that the preverbal marker is maintained is evidence for child dialect contact/diglossia being involved, as pure adult ‘bidialectism’ (Trudgill 1994:19) would be expected to lead to simplification
- evidence for preverbal marker being on its way out: faulty use

Dialect contact and syntactic continuity

- (3) a. Die eens anders siin, die werden onnuttelick
those of.a other are they are in.vain
in testament tot voirmonderen gegeven,
in will to guardian given
so veer sii niet vrij en wesen
as long they NEG free NE be.INF
werden
will
‘Those who are bondslaves are made guardians in a
will in vain as long as they are not going to be free’

(Klever Rechtsbuch 1430:4v)

Dialect contact and syntactic continuity

- (3) b. then en sii onsheren ende
it.NE NE be.SUBJN our master’s and
desgeenen wil ind raide
his wish and counsel
‘unless it be our master’s and his wish and counsel’
(Klever Rechtsbuch 1430:4v)

Summary

- Middle Low German is intermediate between High German and Dutch in the period 1350-1550 w.r.t. loss of the preverbal marker – even more progressive dialects make the transition only ca. 1450
 - transition from Jespersen's stage II to stage III is delayed (50-100 years) in contact with the more conservative Middle Dutch varieties
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Thank you!

- Arts and Humanities Research Council award no. **AR119272**
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