

Incipient Jespersen's cycle in Old English negation

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Abstract

While Jespersen's cycle, the development *ne* > *ne...not* > *not* in the expression of negation, proceeds apace only in Middle English, it clearly has roots in an earlier reanalysis of the indefinite pronoun *nāwiht* 'nothing' as an adverb. However, few clear-cut instances of non-argument use of *nāwiht* occur in Old English, raising the question of when and how the adverbial negator that formed the basis for 'incipient Jespersen's cycle' arose in the first place. This paper will address this problem by examining possible bridging contexts for reanalysis, proposing that contexts with ambiguous argument structure provided favourable conditions, in particular, optionally transitive verbs ('eat nothing' > 'eat not') and predicates permitting optional extent arguments ('care nothing' > 'care not'). It tests this idea against the distribution of *nāwiht* in a sample of texts from the York Corpus of Old English.

1. Introduction

It is well-known that English has undergone Jespersen's cycle (Jespersen 1917, Dahl 1979), the renewal of marking of sentential negation found repeatedly in many languages of western Europe and beyond. By Middle English (1150-1500), a negative reinforcing element *not* was widely in use, occurring both in a bipartite structure *ne...not* and, particularly in the second half of the period, alone as the sole expression of sentential negation. The three options illustrated in Table 1, namely lone *ne* (stage I), bipartite *ne...not* (stage II) and lone *not* (stage III), represent three overlapping stages of Jespersen's cycle, with the innovative *not* eventually coming to replace the inherited marker *ne* entirely. The grammatical competition between

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the three options has been the subject of intense empirical investigation. Wallage (2008:645), for instance, finds a steady progression through Jespersen's cycle in the course of Middle English. On the basis of data from the Penn Parsed Corpus of Middle English 2 (PPCME2), he shows that the bipartite stage II pattern was dominant in the period 1250-1350, being found in 68% of all negative clauses, while the stage III pattern with lone *not* had largely won out in the following period 1350-1420, being found in 88% of all clauses. Broadly similar patterns were found, but for declarative clauses only, by Frisch (1997:32).

	stage I	stage II	stage III	stage I'
English	<i>ic ne secge</i>	<i>I ne seye not</i>	<i>I say not</i>	<i>I don't say</i>
	(Old English)	(Middle English)	(Early Modern English)	(Present-day English)

Table 1. Schematic representation of the English Jespersen cycle.

While we have a broad understanding, at least at a descriptive level, of the progress of Jespersen's cycle once it was underway in Middle English, the initiation of Jespersen's cycle in English is much less well understood. The etymology of *not* is clear: it derives from Old English *nāwiht* 'nothing', evidently with reanalysis of the indefinite pronoun as a negative marker. The exact process by which this item was recruited for this function is less clear. This pathway of development, from negative indefinite to marker of sentential negation is crosslinguistically well-attested, being found also in Dutch, German, Old Norse, Middle Welsh, Piedmontese, Greek, North African Arabic dialects, Central Atlas Tamazight Berber, and perhaps Hungarian (Willis, Lucas & Breitbarth 2013:14). Investigation of the pathway for change in English is therefore also of relevance for our understanding of the emergence of new markers of negation and of the mechanisms behind cyclic syntactic change more generally (van Gelderen 2011).

Following van Kemenade (2000) and Wallage (2005), I will be assuming that recruitment of *not* as a negative marker was a two-stage process, the indefinite pronoun first being reanalysed as a VP-adjoined adverb and then integrated into the negation system (formally as the specifier of NegP). This assumption is based largely on crosslinguistic evidence, since there are languages where there is clear evidence for the additional, second reanalysis: for instance, in Middle Welsh, this reanalysis

is accompanied by clear changes in semantics (loss of emphatic meaning), word order (shift to earlier clausal position) and frequency (increase in frequency) (Willis 2010).

Old English had a number of lexicalized or semi-lexicalized (conventionalized) items to express emphatic negation, including *nānra þinga* 'of no things, not at all', *nāteshwōn* 'in no way, not at all', and *nā* 'never, not at all'. Lexicalization represents the first step towards Jespersen's cycle, and, for this reason, I will refer to items that have conventionalized as reinforcers of negation, whether or not they have changed syntactic category (i.e. undergone the first reanalysis) in the process, as involving 'incipient' Jespersen's cycle. Incipient Jespersen's cycle is no guarantee that any item in the language in question will progress on to a full Jespersen cycle, although it may be a necessary prerequisite. Emphatic items, particularly long and linguistically transparent ones, may retain their emphatic character indefinitely. While it has been argued that *nā* already functioned as the second part of a bipartite negative construction *ne ... nā* in Old English (van Kemenade 2000:64-66, but see van Bergen 2003:190 for the view that it was simply an adverb), none of the others participate further in a Jespersen-type development.

Direct word-order evidence in English for the second reanalysis is hard to come by: by Middle English, *not* is probably already a specifier of NegP and well-established both within bipartite negative structures and increasingly as a lone negator. Haeberli & Ingham (2007) argue, on the basis of word-order asymmetries between adverbs and *not*, that *not* does not have the distribution of an adverb in early Middle English (1150-1250) and should therefore already be treated as a specifier of a low NegP (above VP but below TP). Van Kemenade (1999, 2000), while arguing for a different, higher structural position for negation, nevertheless assumes that *not* is a specifier of NegP, rather than an adverb. While this will be adopted here, it is by no means the only view. Frisch (1997:30-42) considers that early Middle English uses of *not* are not instances of bipartite negation, but rather represent a use of *not* as an adverb with a distribution parallel to *never*. Others avoid the question entirely: Kroch (1989:236) suggests that *not* was reanalysed directly from VP-adverb to head of NegP, with no stage as a specifier, in the middle of the seventeenth century.

If *not* is already a negative specifier in early Middle English, then the second of the reanalyses evidently occurred in late Old English or very early Middle English. This is the position of van Kemenade (2000:68-69),

who states that *nāwiht* ‘in Old English was used as a negated noun or an emphatic negative adverb’, and that its later reflex, *not*, ‘replaces *na/no* as the negative adverb in Spec,NegP in the transition from Old English to Middle English’. In a careful consideration of evidence for both positions in which he takes issue with a number of Frisch’s theoretical assumptions, Wallage (2005:91) concludes that ‘the general picture which emerges is one in which the distribution of *not* is consistent with its reanalysis as a sentential negator prior to the earliest Middle English period’.

This leaves us with the question of how, when and why Old English *nāwiht* became an adverb in the first place (the first reanalysis), a question which will be the main focus of this article. What status did *nāwiht* have in Old English; that is, was it already a negative adverb, or was its use still limited to etymologically expected positions (i.e. nominal argument positions)? It is often assumed that Old English *nāwiht* was already a member of the class of adverbs, and that it reinforced sentential negation expressed by *ne*. On the other hand, Ingham (2013:123-4) suggests that evidence for use of *nāwiht* as a negative adverb in Old English is actually rather limited.

A closer examination of the data will allow us to decide between these two positions and to reach a better understanding of the ways in which Jespersen’s cycle gathers momentum during its early stages. I will begin by looking at crosslinguistic parallels of other negative indefinites to suggest that such items often have the potential to extend their domain beyond argument positions because they are often found in positions whose status is open to multiple interpretations. I will then examine a sample of instances of *nāwiht* in Old English texts to determine the extent to which its use can be accounted for in similar terms. I will argue ultimately that use of *nāwiht* in Old English as a negative reinforcer is highly structured and constrained and that these constraints are ones that are found repeatedly in the use of negative indefinites manifesting incipient Jespersen’s cycle crosslinguistically. The conclusion is that *nāwiht*, in the Old English texts examined, in addition to its function as an ordinary argument (subject, object etc.), is largely constrained to function as an extent argument and as an extent (degree) modifier of an adjective (cf. Present-day English *very* or *no* in *very good* or *no better*). This is indeed incipient Jespersen’s cycle, but reflects a stage which, in other languages, has not led inevitably to progression to full stage II of the cycle.

2. Bridging contexts for incipient Jespersen's cycle

Breitbarth, Lucas & Willis (2013) examine the emergence of new emphatic negative adverbs from nominals (both minimizers and indefinite pronouns) in a range of languages, suggesting that there is a fairly limited set of possible bridging contexts in which the acquisitional ambiguity necessary to initiate incipient Jespersen's cycle may be present in a given language. Not all environments are found in every language at this stage, and their relative importance is unclear, but all can be hypothesized in a number of different language histories. These environments divide into two broad types: (i) optionally transitive verbs such as *eat*, *drink*, *read*, *write*; and (ii) predicates taking an optional extent argument, with the latter type having a number of typical sub-categories, namely verbs of succeeding and verbs of caring and indifference. To these two sub-types may be added verbs of harming, and it is possible that other sub-types may be identified in individual languages, since the argument structure of verbs in these semantic classes varies somewhat from language to language.

Optionally transitive verbs, such as English *eat*, *drink*, *read*, *write*, have transitive and intransitive uses which, even if truth-conditionally distinct, may be pragmatically equivalent in many instances. Lucas (2007) argues that this played an important role in the reanalysis of Arabic *šay* 'thing, something' as a negative reinforcer. In the context of the question in (1), the response in (2), intended in the grammar of the speaker as a transitive clause, may be understood by a hearer-acquirer as an intransitive clause where *šay* marks emphatic negation.

(1) akalt al-xubz
eat.PAST.2MSG the-bread
 'Did you eat the bread?' (Breitbarth, Lucas & Willis 2013:148)

(2) la mā akalt šay'
no NEG eat.PAST.1SG thing(/NEG)
 'No, I didn't eat (anything/any)'.
 (Breitbarth, Lucas & Willis 2013:148)

A similar scenario is sketched as a contributory factor in the Middle Welsh Jespersen cycle by Willis (2006:77). In languages, such as Old English, where verbs expressing modality may be transitive, may take an infinitival complement or may participate in ellipsis of their complements, similar possibilities arise.

The second type is more diverse and more subject to crosslinguistic variation. Various predicates are prone to selecting an optional extent argument. We find this in various languages with verbs of caring or indifference, as with German *kümmern* ‘care’, illustrated in (3), and Dutch *schelen* ‘make a difference’, illustrated in (4).

- (3) Das hat ihn nicht / nichts / wenig gekümmert.
that has him not nothing little bother.PAST.PTCP
 ‘That didn’t bother him (at all, much).’ (adapted from Bayer 2009:11)
- (4) Dat kan me niet / niets / weinig schelen.
that can me not nothing little differ.INF
 ‘I don’t care about that.’ (adapted from Hoeksema 1994:277)

With these verbs, we find both the ordinary negator (*nicht, niet*) and various other elements expressing the extent to which the predicate is true. While these are semantically closely related, they are not syntactically parallel: *nicht* and *niet* are true negators, *wenig* and *weinig* are adverbs, while *nichts* and *niets* are noun phrases, presumably arguments of the verb (extent arguments), but not its direct object. Acquisition of the syntax of these extent arguments thus poses some difficulty for the acquirer, and one might expect them to be misanalysed as adverbs, and hence extended historically to predicates that do not express a scale and hence do not meet the semantic requirements to take an extent argument. The negative indefinites *nichts* and *niets* express a more emphatic or emotive level of indifference, a fact which accords well with the fact that the new negator in Jespersen’s cycle is typically emphatic in some way (Kiparsky & Condoravdi 2006). Similar issues arise at least with verbs of success and verbs of harming in certain languages. Willis (2006:72-76) argues that verbs of succeeding and verbs of harming played a significant role in promoting reanalysis in incipient Jespersen’s cycle in Welsh.

3. A parallel development: Negative degree modifiers of adverbs and adjectives

A second, parallel development seems to act as a confound for investigation of incipient Jespersen’s cycle. Negative indefinites in some languages develop into narrow-scope focus markers for adjectives or adverbs in negative clauses (Bayer 2009). Present-day English allows this to a very

limited extent, with *nothing* acting as a modifier of *like* (cf. its opposite, *exactly like*):¹

(5) I know the Mayor and he looks nothing like that. (Bayer 2009:6)

(6) A dodo flies nothing like that. (Bayer 2009:6)

Here it is clear that *nothing* is not heading a noun phrase, because the verbs *look* (in the sense 'appear') and *fly* do not allow a nominal complement, as is clear from (7) and (8), where omission of *like* leads to ungrammaticality.

(7) He looked *(like) that.

(8) A dodo flies *(like) that.

We can therefore posit a structure in which *nothing* modifies the adjective. It can itself be modified by another item, as with *absolutely* in (9). Integrating *nothing* into the system of Neeleman, van de Koot & Doetjes (2004), we can propose the structure in (10), with *nothing* acting as a degree head selecting an adjective phrase headed by *like*, and *absolutely* acting as the specifier of *nothing like that*.²

¹ Interpretation of these examples is complicated by the fact that English *like* may be an adjective/adverb or a preposition. I assume that *like* is an adjective in (5) (cf. *The mayor looks* [_{AP} *important*], but **The mayor looks* [_{PP} *in the office*]) and an adverb in (6); for further discussion of the dual status of *like*, see Huddleston & Pullum (2002:608).

² These structures assume that, in this use, *nothing* is a class-1 degree expression, that is, the head of a degree phrase. Like other class-1 items, such as *too* and *very*, it triggers optional expletive *much*-insertion with *like*:

- (i) You look nothing (much) like your father.
- (ii) You look too (much) like your father to go unnoticed.
- (iii) You look very (much) like your father.

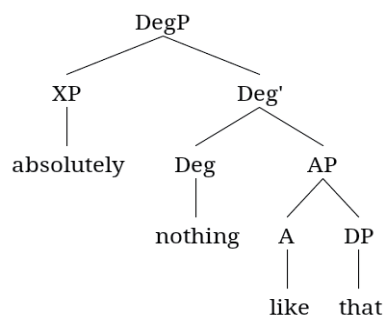
While such items normally do not need *much* when their complement is an adjective, the optionality in these examples may be explained by the dual nature of *like* as both a preposition (triggering *much*-insertion) and an adjective (not triggering *much*-insertion). Contrast this behaviour with class-2 degree expressions (adjoined phrases), which combine freely with any category and are incompatible with *much*-insertion:

- (iv) You look somewhat (*much) like your father.

Nothing hinges on adherence to this particular analysis and another tradition going back to Jackendoff (1977) treats all these items as phrasal specifiers. The only crucial observation is that *nothing* has been reanalysed as a modifier of *like*, in whatever precise configuration.

(9) He looks absolutely nothing like that.

(10)



Thus, Present-day English has, however marginally, an item *nothing* used solely to modify adjectival or adverbial *like*. German *nichts* in (11), Dutch *niets* in (12) and Slovene *nič* in (13) and (14) manifest this same property somewhat more productively with modification of adjectives (in all cases, judgments are quite subtle and variable across speakers, but such uses are acceptable to a proportion of speakers, with no obvious geographical or social basis, and so provide the necessary input for syntactic change):

(11) Aber ich war nichts zufrieden.

but I was nothing satisfied

‘But I wasn’t satisfied at all.’ (Bayer 2009:12)

(12) Hij was niets tevreden over het antwoord.

he was nothing satisfied about the answer

‘He wasn’t at all satisfied with the answer.’

(13) Njegova krivda ni nič manjša.

his guilt NEG.be.PRS.3SG nothing less

‘His guilt is no less.’ (*Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika*, s.v. *nič*)

(14) Ali nisi nič vesela?

QU NEG.be.PRS.2SG nothing happy.FSG

‘Aren’t you happy?’ (Nova Beseda Corpus, IC HMP 1739)

There are various instances where the sequence ‘nothing’ + bare adverb may arise as a possible bridging context. One possibility (using English words as an example) is given in (15). This provides the opportunity for

nothing to be reanalysed from object of *did* to modifier of adverbial *better* (in a context where *did* could reasonably be interpreted either as transitive or intransitive).

- (15) We [_{VP} [_{VP} did nothing] better] today than yesterday. →
 We [_{VP} [_{VP} did] [_{AP} nothing better]] today than yesterday.

In a language where adjectives and adverbs are not formally distinct, the use may extend from there to non-comparative adverbs and to adjectives.

In English, the more common negative specifier of adverbs and adjectives is *no*, used to negate the scale of comparison in the case of comparatives. This item, evidently the result of a semantic and syntactic reanalysis of *nā/nō* 'never', is robustly attested with adverbs already in Old English:

- (16) ...butan he geladige, þæt he na bet
unless he make.oath.PRS.SBJV.3SG that he no better
 ne cuðe.
NEG know.PAST.3SG
 'unless he provides an oath that he knew no better.' (colaw2cn,
 LawIICn:15.1.42)
- (17) Ac ic þe halsige ðæt ðu me no leng
but I you entreat.PRS.1SG that you me no longer
 ne lette...
NEG impede.PRS.SBJV.2SG
 'But I entreat you that you no longer impede me...' (coboeth,
 Bo:36.105.31.2056)

It has a continuous tradition of attestation ever since (*OED*, s.v. *no*, adv.¹). We will see that developments with *nāwiht* were consistent with (and perhaps promoted by syntactic analogy with) the existing pattern with *nā*.

4. Incipient Jespersen's cycle as attested in contemporary varieties

Abundant presence of negative indefinite pronouns in the contexts identified in section 2 above provides a pathway for the initiation of full-scale Jespersen's cycle. It seems likely that items 'leak' from these contexts, extending their distribution to more and more predicates before coming into general use with all predicates. We expect negative indefinites

to occur in the bridging contexts in most languages, limited only by the lexical idiosyncrasies of individual verbs and verb classes. This is not as such evidence of Jespersen's cycle. Any leakage beyond these predicates is, however, evidence for reanalysis of the pronoun as an adverb, that is, for the first reanalysis involved in the shift to stage II of Jespersen's cycle discussed above. German *nichts* has been in this position for some time. It occurs both with predicates taking an extent argument, such as verbs of succeeding in (18), and verbs of harming in (19), but also with a number of others, such as *arbeiten* 'work' and *schlafen* 'sleep', in (20) and (21).

- (18) aber das hat mir nichts geholfen.
but that has me.DAT nothing helped
 '...but that didn't help me at all.' (Bayer 2009:16)
- (19) Das hat ihm nichts / nicht geschadet.
that has him.DAT nothing not damages
 'That did him no damage.' (Bayer 2009:11)
- (20) Karl hat nichts gearbeitet.
Karl has nothing worked
 'Karl has done no work.' (Bayer 2009:11)
- (21) Von Freitag auf Samstag hab ich aber fast
fromFriday to Saturday have I however almost
 nichts geschlafen.
nothing slept
 'However, between Friday and Saturday I hardly slept.' (internet example, Bayer 2009:12)

Bayer (2009:10) concludes that these uses go back to the early modern period (sixteenth century) at least.

Dutch *niets* is probably more conservative than German *nichts*, and, while it is robustly possible with a range of predicates allowing extent arguments, illustrated for a verb of succeeding in (22) and for a verb of harming in (23), spread beyond those contexts seems to be quite limited. Of the internet examples of spread of *niets* outside of extent-argument contexts cited by Bayer (2009:14-15), all were rejected by most or all native speakers consulted. The example in (24) was at the more acceptable end of the range:

- (22) De verklaring hielp niets.
the explanation helped nothing
 'The explanation didn't help at all.'
- (23) Dat heeft het huis niets beschadigd.
that has the house nothing damaged
 'That hasn't damage the house at all/one bit.'
- (24) %Ik heb dus bijna niets geslapen, steeds maar
I have thus almost nothing slept always but
 herhaald in mijn hoofd wat er gezegd was.
repeated in my head what there said was.
 'So I almost didn't sleep at all, but kept on repeating in my mind
 what had been said.' (Bayer 2009:14, revised judgment)

Finally, Slovene *nič* 'nothing' is found as an extent argument with verbs of succeeding in (25) and caring in (26), and again has 'leaked' to some other contexts, including emphatic negation of the imperative of imperfective verbs in (27) and emphatic negation of some other scalar verbs in (28):

- (25) Nič ni pomagala razlaga.
nothing NEG.be.PRS.3SG help.PAST.PTCP explanation
 'The explanation didn't help at all.'
- (26) Zanja se ni brigal nič...
Zanja REFL NEG.be.PRS.3SG care.PAST.PTCP nothing
 'Zanja didn't care (at all)...' (Nova Beseda Corpus, IC HMP 1571)
- (27) Nič ne jokaj.
nothing NEG cry.IMP.2SG
 'Don't cry (one bit).' (Nova Beseda Corpus, IC HMP 179)
- (28) Nič ni spala.
nothing NEG.be.PRS.3SG sleep.PAST.PTCP
 'She didn't sleep at all.'

All three items considered in this section show a distribution somewhat beyond the bridging contexts identified in section 2. They are all in constructions which are not normally thought of as currently undergoing

Jespersen's cycle in their respective languages (although this could of course change in the future). None has turned into a general negative adverb, let alone a sentential negator, yet all clearly have the potential to do so. It is in the context of these examples that we can consider the development of Old English *nāwiht*, asking specifically whether it conforms to the general pattern of diachronic development that we have been sketching so far, and, if it does, how far has it progressed in comparison with these other cases?

5. Old English

We now turn to consider the status of Old English *nāwiht* (and its variants *nōwiht*, *nāht*, and *nōht*, the last two being by far the most common in all uses) on the basis of textual evidence. As a pilot study to test the feasibility of the general approach outlined above, all instances of the pronoun were extracted from the first eight texts with relevant examples in the York Corpus of Old English (YCOE), namely Ælfric's *Homilies* (Supplemental), *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, Alcuin's *De virtutibus et vitiis*, Alexander's Letter to Aristotle, Apollonius of Tyre, Bede's *Ecclesiastical history of the English people*, the Benedictine Rule, and the *Blickling Homilies*. Texts are cited using the corpus's system of identity tags. This produced 121 instances of the item, which were then analysed to see if they provided unambiguous evidence for reanalysis of *nāwiht* as a negative adverb, or whether they could be treated as instances of the types discussed above, specifically extent arguments and modifiers of adverbs or adjectives.

Not surprisingly, in the majority of cases (65 out of 121), *nāwiht* is found in argument position. Of the 45 cases where it is a direct object, 4 involve verbs that might reasonably be judged to be optionally intransitive, namely *singan* 'sing' (twice), *geseōn* 'see' and *cweðan* 'say':

- (29) Cedmon, sing me hwæthwugu. Ða ondswarede he &
Cædmon sing me something then answered he and
 cwæð: Ne con ic noht singan; & ic forþon
said NEG can I nothing sing and I therefore
 of þeossum gebeorscipe uteode, & hider gewat,
from this entertainment withdrew and to here left
 forþon ic naht singan ne cuðe.
because I nothing sing NEG could
 'Cædmon, sing me something.' Then he answered and said: 'I cannot sing anything; and for this reason I withdrew from this enter-

tainment and left for here, because I could not sing (anything).'
(cobede, Bede_4:25.342.29.3447)

- (30) heo styccemælum swa micel & swa ðicco wæron,
they gradually so great and so dark were
þæt ic noht geseon meahte
that I nothing see.INF could
'they gradually became so dark that I could not see anything'
(cobede, Bede_5:13.426.9.4284)

In a further 3 instances, *nāwiht* is the direct object of a (pre-)modal:

- (31) þa ne dorste se heahgerefa naht ongean þa
then NEG dare.PAST.3SG the high.reeve nothing against the
hæðengyldan
heathens
'then the high reeve dared not [do] anything against the heathens'
(oelive, +ALS [Agnes]:211.1857)

In accordance with the discussion in section 2, we can interpret these as providing bridging contexts for reanalysis in the form of acquisitional ambiguity (Willis 1998:41) because both transitive and intransitive interpretations are moderately plausible. However, they do not provide positive evidence that reanalysis had actually already taken place during the Old English period.

In a further 14 cases, *nāwiht* functions as an extent argument within one of the three categories of verb discussed above, namely verbs of succeeding (7 cases), verbs of harming (4 cases) and verbs of caring (3 cases). With verbs of succeeding, all examples found are with verbs from the root *fram- (*fremian/fremman* and *fromian/framian*, both meaning 'profit, avail, benefit' in various argument realizations):

- (32) þæt eal his hogu and gleawscipe naht framað...
that all his care and wisdom nothing avail.PRS.3SG
'all that care and wisdom of his will be of no help'
(cobenrul, BenR:28.52.11.645)

- (33) & he nowiht fromade in his lare
and he nothing succeed.PAST.3SG in his teaching
 ‘and he had no success in his teaching’
 (cobede, Bede_3:3.162.24.1566)

The view that *nāwiht* here expresses extent is confirmed by the very frequent Old English pattern with such verbs where the extent of the success is indicated explicitly, typically with *micclum* ‘greatly’ or *lytel* ‘little’:

- (34) Oncnaw nu and ongit þæt hit þe sceal lytel
recognize now and understand that it you.DAT shall little
 fremigen, þæt þu toþohtest.
avail.INF that you intended
 ‘Now recognize and understand that it will help you little, what you intended.’ (conicodC, Nic_[C]:30.29)

The extent argument may be questioned using *hwæt* ‘what’, a fact that confirms that this argument position may be expressed nominally:

- (35) Hwæt fremað þam blindan seo beorhta sunbeam?
what avail.PRS.3SG the blind.DAT the bright sunbeam.NOM
 ‘How/what does the bright sunbeam help the blind person?’
 (coaelive, +ALS [Julian_and_Basilissa]:274.1107)

Not included in these 7 instances is one example, given in (36), with the verb *spōwan* ‘succeed’, where *nāwiht* could be a subject or an extent argument. The parallel with the use of *hwōnlīce* ‘little’ in (37) would suggest the latter interpretation (with a null expletive subject), but we cannot be certain.

- (36) Ac ðaþa him naht ne speow, þa het he
but when them.DAT nothing NEG availed then ordered he
 spannan oxan to...
harness.INF oxen to
 But when nothing worked for them, then he had oxen harnessed to [her]... (coaelive, +ALS [Lucy]:106.2232)

- (37) þeah ðe us hwonlice speowe
though PRT US.DAT little succeed.PRS.SBJV.3SG
 'though we may succeed little'
 (coaelive, +ALS [Agatha]:32.2030)

The 4 examples with verbs of harming involve the verbs *derian* 'harm', *hearmian* 'harm', and *sceþþan* 'harm, scathe'. Examples are given in (38) and (39).

- (38) ...þæt he Sceottas hine noht sceðþende ne
that he Scots.ACC him.ACC nothing harming NEG
 afuhte...
attack.PAST.SBJV.3SG
 '...that he should not attack the Scots [who were] not harming him...' (cobede, Bede_4:27.358.8.3599)
- (39) & se deofol ne mihte naht derian þam menn.
and the devil NEG could nothing harm.INF the man.DAT
 'and the devil could do the man no harm.'
 (coaelhom, +AHom_18:293.2654)

Finally, the 3 cases with verbs of caring involve the verbs *besorgian* 'be concerned, troubled (about)', *belimpan* 'concern, relate to' and *gebyrian* 'suit, pertain'. An example is given in (40).

- (40) We þeah rædað, þæt munecum eallunga to
we though read.PRS.1PL that monks.DAT altogether to
 windrince naht ne belimpe...
wine-drinking nothing NEG concern.PRS.SBJV.3SG
 'We nevertheless read that drinking wine does not concern monks together at all.' (cobenrul, BenR:40.64.21.794)

These cases with extent-argument verbs form a not insignificant proportion of the total (14 out of 121). As with the cases with optionally transitive verbs, they provide a plausible basis for the first reanalysis of Jespersen's cycle, but, in and of themselves, provide no evidence that this reanalysis has actually taken place.

A further very large group of examples involves constituent negation of adverbs or adjectives, or narrow-focus negation of the same categories. Sentential negation refers to cases where an entire proposition is negated. Klima (1964:261-270) develops various (partially English-specific) tests for sentential negation. The first test involves the form of tag questions: negative clauses allow pragmatically neutral affirmative tags; thus, the tag in (41) offers a natural continuation, while the tag in (42) is pragmatically marked and is either rhetorical or presupposes an affirmative answer.

- (41) Writers will never accept suggestions, will they? (Klima 1964:263)
 (42) #Writers will often accept suggestions, will they?

Other tests involve possible continuations: a negative clause may be continued using a negative appositive tag with *not even*, may have *either* rather than *too* added to them, and may be continued using a *neither*-tag. These are illustrated along with ungrammatical affirmative counterparts in (43)-(48). In each case, the first negative example retains its grammaticality under the test condition, confirming its negative status, while the second, affirmative parallel sentence is ungrammatical, failing the test.

- (43) The writer will not accept suggestions, not even reasonable ones.
 (Klima 1964:262)
 (44) *The publisher often disregards suggestions, not even reasonable ones. (Klima 1964:262)
 [Publishers will usually reject suggestions,]
 (45) ...and writers will not accept them either/*too. (Klima 1964:261)
 (46) ...and writers will always reject them too/*either.
 (47) Writers don't accept suggestions, and neither do publishers.
 (48) *Writers often accept suggestions, and neither do publishers.

Alternatively, Payne (1985:200) proposes that instances of sentential negation allow paraphrases of the type 'I say of X that it is not true that Y', where X refers to contextually bound elements and Y to contextually free elements, and where either may be zero. Thus, the first

clause of example (47) passes this test in virtue of the fact that it may be accurately paraphrased as 'I say of writers that it is not true that they accept suggestions'.

Instances of sentential negation often have focus on one particular constituent (focus of negation), indicating that, if this constituent were changed appropriately, then the sentence would be true. Focus of negation may be indicated by intonation or by various syntactic means, often by placing a negative particle in front of the focused element. These cases are still instances of sentential negation. Thus, with intonationally expressed focus on *to Paris* in (49), the sentence may still be accurately paraphrased as 'I say of Mary that it is not true that she is going to Paris this weekend'. However, focus gives rise to the implicature that some other phrase in place of *to Paris* would yield a true proposition, for instance, 'Mary is going to Aarhus this weekend'.

(49) Mary isn't going to Paris this weekend.

Clauses that contain negative elements, but which do not pass the tests for sentential negation, involve negation whose scope is more restricted than the proposition expressed by the clause (constituent negation):

(50) There are some pretty villages not far from here.

This example fails the Klima tests for sentential negation and cannot be accurately paraphrased as 'I say of pretty villages that it is not true that there are some far from here'. The negative marker *not* here has scope only over the adjective phrase *far from here*, and the sentence as a whole is affirmative. For further discussion and exemplification of the distinction between constituent negation and narrow-focus negation, see Jäger (2008:20-23) and Willis, Lucas & Breitbarth (2013:4-6).

Some 35 of the cases examined involved either constituent negation (22 cases) or narrow-focus negation with focus on adverbs or adjectives (12 cases). These have frequently been analysed previously as instances of *nāwihht* as a negative adverb expressing standard sentential negation, but, when they are taken as a whole, it is clear that this is erroneous. Consider, for instance, (51), which Rissanen (1999:190) assumes involves *nawuht* as a negative adverb (and which he therefore treats as evidence bearing on the relative order of pronominal subjects and negation in inversion contexts).

- (51) ne dorste he nawuht hrædlice ut ofðære ceastre
NEG dared he nothing quickly out of the city
 faran up on ða muntas.
go.INF up on the mountains
 ‘He didn’t dare go at all quickly out of the city up to the mountains.’
 (cocura, CP:51.397.32.2708)

In the data examined, there were many similar examples to this, justifying the conclusion that it is the presence of the adverb or adjective that is the crucial property of the construction, and that *nāwiht* therefore forms a constituent with the following adverb or adjective. This of course means that they are irrelevant for determining the principles of Old English word order at the clausal level.

Within these examples, there are two distinct patterns, which reflect a clear distinction in interpretation between constituent-negation readings and sentential-negation readings with narrow focus on the adverb or adjective. The distinction between the two types is in fact reminiscent of the behaviour of the narrow-focus/constituent negator *nalles* in Old High German (Jäger 2013:182-185). In the first pattern, *nāwiht* occurs in the absence of the sentential negator *ne* and the interpretation of the clause taken as a whole is not negative; that is, it cannot be paraphrased as ‘I say of X that it is not true that...’. This constituent-negation use is illustrated in (52)-(54). Here it is clear that these sentences are affirmative; for instance, in (52), the monastery was indeed founded.

- (52) þæt mynster wæs geworden & getimbred noht
the monastery was founded and built nothing
 micle ær from Hegiu
much before by Hegiu
 ‘The monastery was founded and erected, not long before, by He-
 giu...’ (cobede, Bede_4:24.332.23.3338)
- (53) Ða wæs in sumum tune noht feorr sum ging ðearfa...
there was in some hamlet not far some young pauper
 ‘There was in some hamlet not far (away) a certain young
 pauper...’ (cobede, Bede_5:2.388.14.3858)

- (54) *Ða wæs æfternoht monegum gearum æfter his
there was after not many years after his
onweggewitnesse of Breotone
departure from Britain
'That was after not many years after his departure from Britain...'
(cobede, Bede_3:5.170.9.1664)*

In all but one case, the constituent negated is one of the following: an adverb, as in (52); an adjective, mostly either *feorr* 'far' in apposition to another noun phrase, as in (53); or one of the quantifiers *lytel* '(a) little', *manig* 'many' or *micel* 'great, much'.³ Old English had *n(e)alles* and *nā* available as constituent negators for other grammatical categories (both also being used with adverbs) (Mitchell 1985:668-671).

In other cases, *nāwiht* + adverb accompanies a verb preceded by the sentential negator *ne*. In these cases, the sentence overall is negative, and hence we are dealing with sentential negation; however, *nāwiht* indicates narrow focus of the negation on the adverb. This type is illustrated in (55) and (56). Both these examples are readily paraphrased as straightforward instances of sentential negation, for instance, 'The place won't stay empty long' or 'I say of that place that it is not true that it will stay empty long'. In these cases, therefore, *ne* marks the scope of negation, while *nāwiht* marks its focus. In all cases *nāwiht* modifies an adverb rather than an adjective, typically *lange* 'long (in time)' or *eaðe* 'easily'.⁴

³ On the syntax of quantifiers in Old English, see Carlson (1978) and Lightfoot (1979:168-86). Lightfoot follows Carlson in proposing that items whose Present-day English reflexes are quantifiers were indistinguishable from adjectives in their distribution in Old English (and hence termed 'pre-quantifiers'). This is by no means uncontroversial, with Fischer & van der Leek (1981) presenting various evidence that the distributional similarities between the two sets of items are more limited, suggesting a categorial distinction already in Old English. Wood's (2007:171-182) argument in favour of distinct determiners (and hence DPs) on the basis of word-order asymmetries among pronominal elements in Old English also implies that quantifiers represent a distinct syntactic category alongside determiners in the language. If adjectives and quantifiers are indeed already distinct, then we need to say that modifier *nāwiht* occurs freely with quantifiers, but to a much more limited extent with adjectives.

⁴ There is one difficult case where the status of the element modified by *nāwiht* is unclear, namely the following (with emendation following Bosworth & Toller 1921, s.v. *unwæstmfest*):

- (55) Forðæm ic þæt cuðlice wat, þæt seo stow noht lange
because I that truly know that the place nothing long
 æmettig ne wunað...
empty NEG remain.PRS.3SG
 ‘Because I truly know what the place will not long stay empty/
 won’t stay empty long.’ (cobede, Bede_4:31.376.21.3765)
- (56) And þa gewilnunge naht lange ne ylde
and the desire nothing long NEG delayed
 ‘And that desire delayed not long/didn’t delay long.’ (coapollo,
 ApT:1.10.8)

Again, we can analyse *nāwiht* and the adverb as forming a constituent, following the crosslinguistically more general patterns discussed in section 3 above. The function and syntax of *nāwiht* in this use is therefore very similar to that of *any* and *no* in the following Present-day English examples:

- (57) The house won’t stay empty any longer.
 (58) The house will stay empty no longer.

Finally, there are 6 examples which do not fit straightforwardly into the categories postulated above and where we must therefore seriously

-
- (i) Seo Elizabeth þonne wæs unwæstmfæst [on lichaman, ac wæstmfæst]
the Elizabeth yet was barren in body but fertile
 þara godcundra mægena,
the divine strength
 þeah þe heo þæs bearnes lata wære; heo
though COMP she the child.GEN late be.PAST. SBJV.3SG she
 þonne þæs bearnes noht lata ne wæs.
yet the child.GEN nothing late NEG be.PAST.3SG
 ‘This Elizabeth was barren in body but fertile in divine power, even though she might be late of child; yet she was not late of child.’ [Translation of Latin *Erat quidem Elisabeth sterilis corpore, sed fecunda virtutibus; tarda soboli, sed non tarda Deo* ‘Elizabeth was indeed barren in body, yet rich in virtue; late with offspring, but not late with God.’] (coblick, LS_12_[NatJnBapt[BiHom_14])

Here, *nawiht* (*noht*) modifies *lata*, which is listed by Bosworth & Toller (1921, s.v. *lata*) as the only attestation of a noun meaning ‘one who is late or slow’. However, an error for the more common adverb *late* ‘slowly, late’, under the influence of Latin *tarda*, cannot be excluded, in which case the example would fit the more general pattern described here. The translation is in any case partially corrupt, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions on the basis of it.

consider an adverbial analysis for *nāwiht*, plus one miscellaneous example (involving *noht þon læs* 'nonetheless') which need not be considered further. In one of these, given in (59), *nowiht* may be the object of *fore*, the latter acting as a postposition, hence '(not) on account of anything'.

- (59) & hie seopþan ealle worlde wean & ealle
and they afterwards all world.GEN sorrow and all
 þreatas oforhogodan,
threats disregard.PAST.3PL
 & him nowiht fore ne ondredon...
and them nothing for NEG be.afraid.PAST.3PL
 '...and they afterwards disregarded all the world's sorrow and
 all threats, and they did not frighten them at all...' (coblick,
 HomS_46_[BIHom_11]:119.57.1514)

In one other, given in (60), the syntax is rather unclear. In his edition, Skeat takes *naht* to be the object of *hæbbende* (i.e. 'having none of their treasure'). Constituent negation (motivated by the contrast with *mid þam sange* 'with the song') could also be at work. On either interpretation, it is unlikely to be adverbial.

- (60) þa wurdon þa oþre awrehte mid þam
then become.PAST.3PL the others concerned with the
 sange and naht heora
song and nothing their
 gold hordas þe hi healdan sceoldon hæbbende
gold hordes REL they keep.INF should.3PL having
 næron
NEG.be.PAST.3PL
 'Then the others were concerned with the song and were not pos-
 sessing their gold hordes which they should have guarded.' (coae-
 live, +ALS_[Martin]:1481.6947)

This leaves us with four examples that provide good evidence of use of *nāwiht* as an emphatic negative adverb, involving the verbs *gefrēdsan* 'feel, perceive' (two instances), *tweōgan* 'doubt', and *gemunan* 'remember, bear in mind':

- (61) ...me þincð þæt ðu plegast and þu mine
me.DAT seems that you play.PRS.2SG and you my
 yrmðe naht ne gefredst.
misery nothing NEG feel.PRS.2SG
 ‘It seems to me that you are playing and you do not perceive/feel
 my misery.’ (coaelhom, +AHom_27:89.3980)
- (62) ...þæt ðu þas dyntas naht ne gefretst...
that you those blows nothing NEG feel.PRS.2SG
 ‘that you do not feel those blows at all’ (coaelive, +ALS_[Julian_
 and_Basilissa]:146.1027)
- (63) Ne twygeo ic þonne mec noht æfter þæs
NEG doubt.PRS.1SG I then me.ACC nothing after the
 lichoman deaðe hræðe gelæd beon to þam ecan
body.GEN death swiftly carried be.INF to the eternal
 deaðe minre sawle & helle tintregu underðeoded
death.DAT my soul.GEN and hell.GEN torments subjected
 ne beon.
NEG be.INF
 ‘I have no doubt that, after the death of this body, I shall be carried
 swiftly to the eternal death of my soul and be subjected to hell’s
 torments.’ [Translation of Latin *Nec dubito me post mortem corpo-
 ris statim ad perpetuam animae mortem rapiendum, ac infernali-
 bus subdendum esse tormentis.*] (cobede, Bede_3:11.190.21.1921)
- (64) Þonne hwæþere æt þære halgan Elizabet seo hire gebyrd
then QU at the holy Elizabeth this her condition
 naht gemunan þe heo hire on ylða þa
nothing remember.INF REL she her.DAT on old.age there
 wære?
be.PAST.SBJV.3SG
 ‘With regard to the holy Elizabeth, ought not her condition in her
 advanced years ever be borne in mind?’ (coblick, LS_12_[NatJn
 Bapt[B1Hom_14]]:163.41.2067)

These suggest relatively minor 'leakage' of the type found in Present-day German; that is, *nāwiht* has begun to be used emphatically with verbs with scalar semantics, but remains at a low frequency in such uses.

function	no. of attestations
subject	9
direct object	45
[of which, direct object of optionally transitive verb	4]
[of which, direct object of modal	3]
object of preposition	5
complement of 'be' or '(be) worth'	6
total argument	65
extent argument of verb of succeeding	7
extent argument of verb of harming	4
extent argument of verb of caring	3
total extent argument	14
constituent negation of adverb, quantifier or adjective	22
other constituent negation	1
narrow-focus negation of adverb, quantifier or adjective	12
total constituent and narrow-focus negation	35
adverb	6
other	1
TOTAL	121

Table 2. Distribution of functions of *nāwiht* in the Old English texts examined.

6. Conclusion

The overall pattern of uses of *nāwiht* in the texts examined is summarized in Table 2. From this distribution, we have seen that:

- (i) in these texts, *nāwiht* is overwhelmingly used in contexts that do not imply the emergence of an emphatic negative adverb by reanalysis;
- (ii) a substantial proportion of cases do, however, require us to posit the development of a constituent and narrow-focus negator, largely limited to positions modifying adverbs, quantifiers or adjectives;
- (iii) the frequency of potential bridging contexts for emergence of adverbial *nāwiht* is 17% of the total tokens of *nāwiht* (21 out of 121), a substantial body of evidence for an acquirer to base a reanalysis on, lending credence to the role of these contexts in facilitating the early impetus for Jespersen's cycle, both in English and, by extension, crosslinguistically;
- (iv) 'leakage', that is, use of the negative indefinite pronoun beyond the core of extent-argument verbs exists, but at levels similar to what is likely to be found in some present-day languages that are not usually characterized by linguists as being at stage II of Jespersen's cycle.

We can therefore conclude, concurring with Ingham (2013:123-4), that the evidence for adverbial *nāwiht* in Old English is indeed rather limited, and that Old English is a typical incipient Jespersen's cycle language, with the potential of entering stage II (as subsequent Middle English developments amply attest to), but not there yet.

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