

On the development of marked negation systems

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Abstract

We describe a stage in the development of Dutch negation: in the first half of the 17th Century, the remnants of a double negation system were actively and effectively removed from the language by influential writers and grammarians. Logicism thus established a pattern of singular negation which is typologically rare.

1 Introduction

In languages¹ such as modern English, modern Dutch and classical Latin,² sentence negation is expressed by the negative marking of one element in the sentence:

(1) English

- a. Nobody saw anything
- b. I didn't read any books

(2) Latin

- a. Quis est homo qui non fleret
who is man who not cries
'who wouldn't cry'
- b. noli me tangere
not-will me touch
'do not touch me'

(3) Dutch

- a. Niemand heeft iets gezien (cf. (1a))
nobody has anything seen
- b. Ik heb geen boeken gelezen (cf. (1b))
I have no books read

Sentences containing more than one negation are either judged ungrammatical, or the negations cancel out, which results in a non-negative meaning:³

(4) English

- a. Nobody saw nothing
- b. I didn't read no books

(5) Latin

- a. Nemo negat ...⁴
Nobody denies
'Everybody knows'

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²Plautus legt, als ik me goed herinner, in zijn comedies bepaalde volkse figuren dubbele ontkenningen in de mond omwille van het humoristisch effect.

³Denial or litotes: cf. van der Wouden (1994b) and van der Wouden (1994a).

⁴Hoffmann (1987).

(6) Dutch

- a. Niemand heeft niets gezien
nobody has nothing seen
- b. Ik heb nooit geen boeken gelezen
I have never no books read

But in other languages, such as Middle Dutch,⁵ Middle English,⁶ Attical Greek,⁷ French,⁸ modern standard Italian,⁹ Russian,¹⁰ Hungarian,¹¹ many non-European languages¹² and in many non-standard variants of English, German, etc., we find negative concord.¹³ In cases of negative concord (of which there are various variants, cf. van der Wouden & Zwarts (1993) and van der Wouden (1994b)), negation is expressed by the negative marking of more than one element:

(7) French

- a. Personne n'a vu rien (cf. (1a))
Nobody not-has seen nothing

(8) Non-standard German

- a. Hat den keener keenen schwamm nich¹⁴
Has then nobody no tinder not?
Doesn't anybody have any tinder?

(9) Non-standard English

- a. It ain't no cat can't get in no coop¹⁵

Recent typological studies (Dahl 1979; Haspelmath 1993) have shown that the first, 'logical' negation pattern is extremely rare among the world's languages: the second one, rather than the first, should be seen as the unmarked case.¹⁶

In this paper, we will discuss how language planning and/or prescriptive linguistics have helped to establish such an illogical negation system within the Dutch standard language. We will demonstrate this development in the writings of one writer, the very important playwright

[picture]

Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679), the Dutch Shakespeare.

⁵Stoett (1923).

⁶Jespersen (1917).

⁷Erasmus (1512)

⁸Muller (1991).

⁹Zanuttini (1991).

¹⁰Grenoble (1992).

¹¹de Groot (1994).

¹²Kahrel & van den Berg (1994).

¹³Labov (1979), Ladusaw (1991), van der Wouden & Zwarts (1993).

¹⁴Jespersen (1917).

¹⁵Labov (1979).

¹⁶Cf. also Peres (1995).

2 Jespersen's cycle and Dutch

As in English and German, earlier versions of Dutch showed negative concord. The decline and fall of negative concord in these languages can be described by means of Jespersen's cycle (Jespersen 1917:4):¹⁷

The history of negative expressions in various languages makes us witness the following curious fluctuation: the original negative adverb is first weakened, then found insufficient and therefore strengthened, generally through some additional word, and this in its turn may be felt as the negative proper and may then in course of time be subject to the same development as the original word.

This development can be seen in Latin and French (Jespersen 1924:335-6):

- (10) a. ne dico
b. non dico
c. jeo ne di
d. je ne dis pas
e. je dis pas

In English, five steps can be distinguished as well:¹⁸

- (11) a. ic ne secge
b. I ne seye not
c. I say not
d. I do not say
e. I don't say

In English, *en/ne* is extinct in Shakespeare's time already: I didn't find any reference to it in e.g. Singh (1973). In other words, this type of double negation is lost earlier in English than in Dutch.

The *OED* characterizes *ne* as *obs.*; the most recent quotation given is from Byron's *Childe Harold* (1812):

- (12) A youth who ne in virtue's ways did take delight

This occurrence of *ne* must, without any doubt, be seen as archaic.

The latest 'normal' examples of *ne* given in the *OED* are from Caxton:

- (13) a. Ne doubte ye not for I shall vendre you anone al hole (1485)
b. It was not long after that brenne ne come ageyne with a grete navye (1480)

¹⁷Cf. also Stoett (1923), Coombs (1976), van der Horst & van der Wal (1979), Bossuyt (1982), de Haan & Weerman (1984), van der Horst & van der Wal (1984), Horn (1989), BurrIDGE (1993), Rowlett (1994), Hoeksema (1995) etc.

¹⁸Cf. Beukema (1994) for complications.

Jespersen's cycle has worked in Dutch as well. In the oldest stages we know of, negation was expressed by *en* or *ne*. Here is a late occurrence of this type of sentential negation:¹⁹

- (14) om ick *en* weet wat Goden// Vermaken [...] (Pascha 1612: 1243-4)
to I EN know what Gods please
'to please whatever Gods'

This negative particle was strengthened, for example by an inherently negative word such as *niets*, *nergens*, *niet*:²⁰

- (15) 't*En* lustme *niet* met reuck de kercken te stofferen, (Hip 1628: 139)
it EN pleases-me not with smell the churches to decorate

The next step (and the final one, so far) is that the strengthening element carries all negative load: the original negation, *en*, becomes optional and, later, superfluous. Here is an example of Vondel's own revision of the very same drama, thirty years later:

- (16) Het lustme *niet* met reuck de kercken te stofferen, (Hip 1658: 139)
it pleases-me not with smell the churches to decorate

¹⁹Such relicts are most persistent with certain verbs such as *weten* 'know' and *doen* 'do' (Stoett 1923; Hoeksema 1995).

²⁰Etymologically, these words consist of a negative element *ne* and an indefinite *iets*, *ergens*, *iet*.

3 Developing standard Dutch

As regards the standard language, this development of the negation system is reaching its last, marked phase in the first half of the seventeenth Century (in certain dialects, the type of negative concord involving *en* is alive and kicking until today: cf. Koelmans (1967) for an overview and Haegeman (1995) for a detailed description of the West Flemish dialect, which is a case in point).

Actually, this is exactly the period in which the standard language is given shape. Influential literary and scholarly writers such as Vondel and Hooft meet to discuss matters such as spelling, grammatical cases, and grammatical gender. In this same period the official protestant Bible Translation is produced, sponsored by the State Government; it is published in 1637.²¹

The standard view at this time is that classical Latin comes most closely to an ideal language. And as Latin has a considerable number of grammatical cases, an artificial division between dative and accusative is constructed. Since adverbs in Latin show no morphology, there is a ban on the declension of adverbs until this day. And after the model of the unary negation system in Latin, the last rests of the double negation system are actively and effectively removed from the standard language.

The first grammar in which double negations of this type are explicitly forbidden dates from somewhat later, viz. 1653, and was written by Leupenius:²²

Daar het een groot misbruik is dat *en* somtyds genomen wordt voor een ontkenninge / gestelt synde by *geen* of *niet*: soo wordt gemeenlyk geseidt / *gy en sullt niet dooden, gy en sullt niet steelen, gy en sullt geen overspel doen*: doch dat is teegen den aard der ontkenningen: want daar twee ontkenningen by een komen / doen sy soo veel als eene bevestiginge: nu *geen* en *niet* syn ook ontkenningen / daarom kan *en*, als een ontkenninge, daar by geen plaatse hebben. Tis ook overtollig / want het kann veel korter en soeter naagelaaten worden. Wat ongemakk geeft het te seggen / *gy sullt niet dooden, gy sullt geen overspel doen, gy sullt niet steelen?*

It is a very bad habit that *en* is sometimes taken for a negation, if it occurs together with *geen* 'no' or *niet* 'not': thus one usually says, *gy en sullt niet dooden, gy en sullt niet steelen, gy en sullt geen overspel doen* 'thou en shalt not kill, thou en shalt not steal, thou en shalt not comit adultery'; but that is against the nature of the negations: for if two negations come together, they do so much as one affirmation: now *geen* 'no' and *niet* 'not' are negations as well; therefore *en*, being a negation is not in its place there. It is superfluous too, since it can

²¹*Biblia, Dat is: De gantsche H. Schrifture, vervattende alle de canonijcke Boecken des Ouden en des Nieuwen Testaments. Nu eerst [...].* Leiden, Ravensteyn, [1637].

²²Leupenius (1653:51).

be left out much shorter and sweeter. What problem is there in saying *thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steel?*

These ideas are not all adopted at the same time: the ban on double negations, for instance, is accepted relatively late. The aforementioned *Statenvertaling*, the Bible Translation from 1637, still used the negation with *en*. And the same holds for the greatest and most influential writers of this period: we find a considerable amount of double negations in their earlier works. For example, in P.C. Hooft's drama *Achilles en Polyxena* which dates from around 1600, all negative words are accompanied by negative *en*, unless the meter forbids it.²³ However, when he publishes his letters from 1645-1647, all negations are (changed into) unary.²⁴

A comparable development can be seen in Vondel's plays: the later tragedies contain less instances of *en* than the earlier ones.²⁵ When the author revises certain plays in the fifties, he removes, among other things, the double negations:²⁶ Consider the following contrast between two versions of the same play, both edited by the author himself;

- (17) a. 't*En* lustme *niet* met reuck de kercken te stofferen, (Hip 1628: 139)
it EN pleases-me not with smell the churches to decorate
b. Het lustme *niet* met reuck de kercken te stofferen, (Hip 1658: 139)
it pleases-me not with smell the churches to decorate
- (18) a. *Ten* leed *geen* seven jaer, of Palamedes schaeu, (Pal. 1625: K1-2)
By nacht, de tenten ging der Rechteren doorwaeren:
It didn't take seven years before the ghost of Palamedes started to haunt
the tents of his judges
b. *Het* leed *geen* seven jaer, of Palamedes schaëu, (Pal. 1652: K1-2)
Ging 's nachts de tenten van zijn rechteren doorwaeren:

Thus, the overall picture is clear: the double negation with *en*, which was already on its way back from the most prestigious dialects, was removed from the standard language by the influential writers and the grammarians. In some of the peripheral dialects, however, this negation system survives until today.

Closer inspection, however, of all plays by Vondel, shows that this development is not a simple, gradual process.

²³d'Angremond (1943:50).

²⁴van der Wal (1992:217).

²⁵Cf. van Helten (1883:160):

De partikel *en*, in vereeniging met *niet*, *niemand*, enz. is bij **V.** nog lang niet zeldzaam [. . .]. Grooter is evenwel het aantal malen, waarin *en* wordt weggelaten, vooral in de latere werken.

This research would have been impossible without the kind cooperation of Ben J. Salemans, who made available an electronic version of Salemans & Schaars (1990).

²⁶Vondel (1927-1940:II, 866).

4 The rise, decline and fall of *en* in Vondel's tragedies

Between 1612 and 1668, Vondel published 32 drama's: some original, some translated, some devoted to biblical material, others to classical, mythological or other subjects; within this period, there is a development from the Latin (Senecan) to the Greek tragedy style.

Below is an overview of the number of occurrences of *en* in Vondel's plays, related to the number of lines in each play (Kenny 1982):

The distribution of the negative particle *en* in the drama's of Vondel, on a linear time axis

year	drama	# <i>en</i>	# lines	2/3	
12	12pas	60	2911	20.6	
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20	20hie	12	3141	3.8	
21					
22					
23					
24					
25	25pal	32	3105	10.3	
26	26hec	19	1940	9.8	
27					
28	28hip	18	1803	9.4	
29					
30					
31					
32					
33					
34					
35	35sof	47	1692	27.8	
36					
37	37gys	53	2480	21.4	
38					
39	39ele, 39mae	18	4516	4.0	
40	40jod, 40egy, 40geb	39	6819	5.7	
41	41pet	0	2133	0.0	
42					
43					
44					
45					
46	46stu	2	2420	0.8	
47	47lee	4	2909	1.4	
48	48sln	4	2434	1.6	
49					
50					
51					
52					
53					
54	54luc	2	2895	0.7	
55					
56					
57	57sls	3	2672	1.1	
58					
59	59jep	1	2568	0.4	
60	dab,dah,edi,sam	5	9519		
61	61ado	3	2404	1.2	
62					
63	63bat,63faet	8	4375	1.8	
64	64adb	3	2291	1.3	
65					
66	66ifi	1	2141	0.5	
67	67noa,67zun	6	4258	1.4	
68	68fen,68her	8	4289	1.9	

Contrary to what we expect on the basis of our discussion of the general development of negation in Seventeenth Century Dutch, there is no monotonous decline of the number of occurrences of *en*, but rather a light rise followed by a steep fall around 1637.

Should this effect be considered significant? Here are some arguments that it should.

4.1 Comparable negations

The frequency of *en* in the total of Vondel's tragedies is comparable to that of *niemand* 'nobody' and *nooit* 'never', as will be clear from the graph below:

The frequency of a number of negative words in Vondel's drama's

zelden 'seldom'	13	
nergens 'nowhere'	43	
weinig 'few'	50	
geenszins 'not at all'	115	
luttel 'little'	132	
nimmer(meer) 'never(more)'	174	
niemand 'nobody'	226	
en	336	
nooit 'never'	387	
zonder 'without'	515	
noch 'neither/nor'	1222	
geen 'no'	1904	
niet(s) 'not/nothing'	3808	

The pattern of *en* with the peak around 1637 does not show up in the case of *nooit* and *niemand*.

Here is a picture of the frequency of *niemant* 'nobody' in every 1000 lines.

year	drama	# lines	# <i>niemant</i>	1000*4/3	picture
12	12pas	2911	4	1.37	
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20	20hie	3141	7	2.22	
21					
22					
23					
24					
25	25pal	3105	13	4.19	
26	26hec	1940	8	4.12	
27					
28	28hip	1803	3	1.66	
29					
30					
31					
32					
33					
34					
35	35sof	1692	5	2.96	
36					
37	37gys	2480	12	4.84	
38					
39	39ele,39mae	4516	13	2.88	
40	40jod,40geb,40egy	6819	24	3.52	
41	41pet	2133	6	2.82	
42					
43					
44					
45					
46	46stu	2420	6	2.48	
47	47lee	2909	12	4.13	
48	48sln	2434	5	2.05	
49					
50					
51					
52					
53					
54	54luc	2895	12	4.15	
55					
56					
57	57sls	2672	11	4.12	
58					
59	59jep	2568	3	1.17	
60	60dab,60dah,40edi,60sam	9493	25	2.63	
61	61ado	2404	5	2.08	
62					
63	63bat,63faet	4375	9	2.06	
64	64adb	2291	6	2.62	
65					
66	66ifi	2141	6	2.80	
67	67noa,67zun	4158	13	3.13	
68	68fen,68her	4289	19	4.43	

The distribution of the number of occurrences of *nooit* 'never' per 1000 lines shows the same pattern: statistical noise instead of large peaks around 1637.

year	drama	# lines	# <i>nooit</i>	1000*4/3	picture
12	12pas	2911	13	4.46	████████
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20	20hie	3141	17	5.41	██████████
21					
22					
23					
24					
25	25pal	3105	18	5.8	██████████
26	26hec	1940	7	3.61	██████
27					
28	28hip	1803	14	7.76	██████████
29					
30					
31					
32					
33					
34					
35	35sof	1692	12	7.09	██████████
36					
37	37gys	2480	17	6.85	██████████
38					
39	39ele,39mae	4516	19	4.21	████████
40	jod,geb,egy	6819	41	6.01	██████████
41	41pet	2133	6	2.81	████
42					
43					
44					
45					
46	46stu	2420	19	7.85	██████████
47	47lee	2909	15	5.16	████████
48	48sln	2434	9	3.70	██████
49					
50					
51					
52					
53					
54	54luc	2895	9	3.11	██████
55					
56					
57	57sls	2672	11	4.12	████████
58					
59	59jep	2568	17	6.62	██████████
60	dab,dah,edi,sam	9493	45	4.74	██████████
61	61ado	2404	20	8.32	██████████
62					
63	63bat,63faet	4375	19	4.34	████████
64	64adb	2291	7	3.06	██████
65					
66	66ifi	2141	8	3.74	██████
67	67noa,67zun	4158	20	4.81	████████
68	68fen,68her	4289	24	5.60	██████████

4.2 Some plays are more negative than others

Another possible explanation for the strange distribution of *en* in Vondel's play might be the following: the plays that show the peak are more negative than the other ones, and that is what causes the peak.

Again, this hypothesis must be dispensed with immediately: the distribution of the most frequent negative words, *niet* 'not' and *geen* 'no' is flat when compared to that of negative *en*.

The frequency of *geen* 'no' per 1000 lines

year	drama	# lines	# <i>geen</i>	1000*4/3	picture
12	12pas	2911	40	13.74	████████
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20	20hie	3141	57	18.1	██████████
21					
22					
23					
24					
25	25pal	3105	59	19.0	██████████
26	26hec	1940	25	12.9	████████
27					
28	28hip	1803	74	41.0	████████████████████
29					
30					
31					
32					
33					
34					
35	35sof	1692	34	20.1	██████████
36					
37	37gys	2480	62	25.0	██████████
38					
39	39ele,39mae	4516	88	19.4	██████████
40	40jod,40geb,40egy	6819	139	20.4	██████████
41	41pet	2133	28	13.1	████████
42					
43					
44					
45					
46	46stu	2420	79	32.6	██████████
47	47lee	2909	92	31.6	██████████
48	48sln	2434	72	29.6	██████████
49					
50					
51					
52					
53					
54	54luc	2895	78	26.9	██████████
55					
56					
57	57sls	2672	98	36.7	██████████
58					
59	59jep	2568	76	29.6	██████████
60	40edi,60sam,60dah,60dab	9493	219	23.1	██████████
61	61ado	2404	84	34.9	██████████
62					
63	63bat,63faet	4375	162	37.0	██████████
64	64adb	2291	72	31.8	██████████
65					
66	66ifi	2141	39	18.2	████████
67	67noa,67zun	4158	157	37.7	██████████
68	68fen,68her	4289	70	16.3	████████

The distribution of *niet* 'not' in Vondel's drama's

year	drama	# <i>niet</i>	# lines	2/3	
12	12pas	128	2911	44.0	
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20	20hie	128	3141	40.8	
21					
22					
23					
24					
25	25pal	141	3105	45.4	
26	26hec	106	1940	54.6	
27					
28	28hip	69	1803	38.3	
29					
30					
31					
32					
33					
34					
35	35sof	108	1692	63.8	
36					
37	37gys	139	2480	56.0	
38					
39	39ele, 39mae	307	4516	68.0	
40	40jod, 40egy, 40geb	401	6819	58.8	
41	41pet	108	2133	50.6	
42					
43					
44					
45					
46	46stu	95	2420	39.3	
47	47lee	152	2909	52.3	
48	48sln	106	2434	43.5	
49					
50					
51					
52					
53					
54	54luc	98	2895	33.9	
55					
56					
57	57sls	137	2672	51.3	
58					
59	59jep	117	2568	45.6	
60	dab,dah,edi,sam	530	9519	55.6	
61	61ado	113	2404	47.0	
62					
63	63bat,63faet	224	4375	51.2	
64	64adb	127	2291	55.4	
65					
66	66ifi	114	2141	53.2	
67	67noa,67zun	143	4258	33.6	
68	68fen,68her	217	4289	50.6	

Moreover, if we compensate for the fact that some plays might be more negative than others by computing the frequency of *en* relative to that of *geen* or *niet*, the peaks of *en* become only more dramatic:

The distribution of negative *en* compared to that of negative *geen* in the drama's of Vondel.

year	drama	# <i>en</i>	# lines	# <i>geen</i>	3/5	picture
12	12pas	60	2911	40	1.5	
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20	20hie	12	3141	57	0.21	
21						
22						
23						
24						
25	25pal	32	3105	59	0.54	
26	26hec	19	1940	25	0.76	
27						
28	28hip	18	1803	74	0.24	
29						
30						
31						
32						
33						
34						
35	35sof	47	1692	34	1.38	
36						
37	37gys	53	2480	62	0.85	
38						
39	39ele,39mae	18	4516	88	0.20	
40	jod,geb,egy	39	6819	139	0.28	
41	41pet	4	2133	28	0.14	
42						
43						
44						
45						
46	46stu	2	2420	79	0.03	
47	47lee	4	2909	92	0.04	
48	48sln	4	2434	72	0.06	
49						
50						
51						
52						
53						
54	54luc	7	2895	78	0.1	
55						
56						
57	57sls	3	2672	98	0.3	
58						
59	59jep	1	2568	76	0.013	
60	40edi,60sam,60dab,60dah	5	9493	219	0.023	
61	61ado	3	2404	84	0.036	
62						
63	63bat,63faet	8		162	0.049	
64	64adb	3	2291	72	0.042	
65						
66	66ifi	1	2141	39	0.026	
67	67noa,67zun	6	4158	157	0.038	
68	68fen,68her	8	4289	70	0.11	

And here is the number of *en* divided by the number of *niet*:

year	drama	# <i>en</i>	# lines	# <i>niet</i>	3/5	picture
12	12pas	60	2911	128	0.47	
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20	20hie	12	3141	128	0.09	
21						
22						
23						
24						
25	25pal	32	3105	141	0.23	
26	26hec	19	1940	106	0.18	
27						
28	28hip	18	1803	69	0.26	
29						
30						
31						
32						
33						
34						
35	35sof	47	1692	108	0.44	
36						
37	37gys	53	2480	139	0.38	
38						
39	39ele,39mae	18	4516	307	0.06	
40	jod,geb,egy	39	6819	401	0.10	
41	41pet	4	2133	108	0.04	
42						
43						
44						
45						
46	46stu	2	2420	95	0.02	
47	47lee	4	2909	152	0.03	
48	48sln	4	2434	106	0.04	
49						
50						
51						
52						
53						
54	54luc	7	2895	98	0.07	
55						
56						
57	57sls	3	2672	137	0.02	
58						
59	59jep	1	2568	117	0.01	
60	40edi,60sam,60dab,60dah	5	9519	530	0.01	
61	61ado	3	2404	113	0.03	
62						
63	63bat,63faet	8	4375	224	0.04	
64	64adb	3	2291	127	0.02	
65						
66	66ifi	1	2141	114	0.01	
67	67noa,67zun	6	4258	143	0.04	
68	68fen,68her	8	4289	217	0.04	

4.3 Different sentence types?

In Middle Dutch, not all sentence types shifted from double negation to single negation at the same time. According to Burridge (1993), V1 contexts were the first where single postverbal negation gained a foothold.²⁷ Do we find the same effect in Vondel's plays? In other words, are the plays with extreme numbers of *en* marked with respect to sentence types?²⁸

The distribution of *en* wrt sentence types in the early drama's of Vondel.

	drama	main cl.	subord.cl.	V1	2/3	2/3	4/2	4/2						
12	12pas	34	35	11	1.0	■	0.3	■						
13														
14														
15														
16														
17														
18														
19	20hie	5	6	5	1.7	■	1	■						
20														
21														
22														
23														
24	25pal	18	16	3	1.1	■	0.2	■						
25														
26														
27	26hec	10	7	6	1.4	■	0.6	■						
28														
29	28hip	13	7	0	1.9	■	0							
30														
31														
32														
33														
34														
35						35sof		27	26	3	1.0	■	0.1	■
36														
37						37gys		28	22	18	1.3	■	0.6	■
38														
39	39ele,39mae	17	12	1	1.4	■	0.1	■						

It seems to me that the numbers we are dealing with here are too small to say anything conclusive about any preference of *en* for a certain sentence type.
































²⁷Cf. also Hoeksema (1995).

²⁸Dit is misschien de juiste vraag om te stellen, maar het plaatje beantwoordt een andere.

4.4 Subject matters, translations, style levels, or registers?

Factors such as subject matters, translations, style levels, or registers cannot be held responsible for the strange peak in the number of *en* around 1635 either.

In the tables below, we contrast plays with biblical subjects with the tragedies that deal with other matters, such as history and mythology. The differences do not seem to be of any significance.

play	# <i>en</i>	vss.	1000*2/3	picture
Biblical subjects				
12pas	60	2911	20.6	
20hie	12	3141	3.8	
35sof	47	1692	27.8	
40jod	15	2433	6.2	
40egy	6	1893	3.2	
41pet	0	2133	0.0	
48sln	4	2434	1.6	
54luc	2	2895	0.7	
57sls	3	2672	1.1	
59jep	1	2568	0.4	
60dab	1	2591	0.4	
60dah	1	2249	0.4	
60sam	1	2139	0.5	
61ado	3	2404	1.2	
64adb	3	2291	1.3	
67noa	4	2010	2.0	
Other subjects				
25pal	32	3105	10.3	
26hec	19	1940	9.8	
28hip	18	1803	9.4	
37gys	53	2480	21.4	
39ele	6	2249	2.7	
39mae	12	2267	5.3	
40geb	18	2493	7.2	
46stu	2	2420	0.8	
47lee	4	2909	1.4	
60edi	2	2540	0.8	
63bat	3	2361	1.3	
63fae	5	2014	2.5	
66ifi	1	2141	0.5	
67zun	2	2148	0.9	
68fen	4	2550	1.6	
68her	4	1739	2.3	

The social status of the *dramatis personae* or their function in the play doesn't play a role either, as can be seen from the following samples:
































- In *Pascha* of 1612, which deals with the struggle between Mozes and the Egyptian Pharao, (almost) all characters use double negations, both the good guys (Moyses, Aaron) and the bad guys (Pharao, Hooftman): even God uses double negations with *en* once in a while!²⁹
- In the biblical play *Sofompaneas* (1635) we find double negations in the speech of the good hero Iosef, the bad protagonists Iudas, Ramses and Farao, and the vulgar messenger.³⁰
- And in *Gysbreght* of 1637, which is about a (mythical) episode in the history of Amsterdam, it is also the case that characters of all levels use double negations, both the good guys and the bad guys: from Gysbreght, the hero of the play, and his wife Badeloch, to his enemy Egmond and even his spy Vosmeer; and the archangel Rafael uses double negations as well.³¹

²⁹Rey 18, Pharao 15, Moyses 12, Caleb 8, Iosua 6, Fama 6, Aaron 5, Choor 5, God 4, Hooftman 1, Tiphus 1, Serax 1. Numbers have not been compensated for number of lines per actor.

³⁰Iosef 16, Iudas 11, Rey 9, Bode 6, Ramses 5, Simeon 3, Farao 2. Numbers have not been compensated for number of lines per actor.

³¹Gysbreght 15, Badeloch 12, Rafael 6, Diederick 6, Willebord 6, Arend 5, Egmond 4, Vosmeer 3, Rey 2, Vooren 2, Gozewijn 1, Vlughtelingen 1. Numbers have not been compensated for number of lines per actor.

And it is also irrelevant for the usage of *en* whether a play is original or translated:

play	# <i>en</i>	# lines	1000*2/3	
Original				
12pas	60	2911	20.6	
20hie	12	3141	3.8	
25pal	32	3105	10,3	
28hip	18	1803	9.4	
37gys	53	2480	21.4	
39mae	12	2267	5.3	
40jod	15	2433	6.2	
40egy	6	1893	3.2	
40geb	18	2493	7.2	
41pet	0	2133	0.0	
46stu	2	2420	0.8	
47lee	4	2909	1.4	
48sln	4	2434	1.6	
54luc	2	2895	0.7	
57sls	3	2672	1.1	
59jep	1	2568	0.4	
60dab	1	2591	0.4	
60dah	1	2249	0.4	
60sam	1	2139	0.5	
61ado	3	2404	1.2	
63bat	3	2361	1.3	
63fae	5	2014	2.5	
64adb	3	2291	1.3	
67noa	4	2010	2.0	
67zun	2	2148	0.9	
Translated				
26hec	19	1940	9.8	
35sof	47	1692	27.8	
39ele	6	2249	2.7	
60edi	2	2540	0.8	
66ifi	1	2141	0.5	
68fen	4	2550	1.6	
68her	4	1739	2.3	

5 Towards an explanation

The question why Western European languages have been subject to Jespersen's cycle has been asked often, and many answers have been suggested (Jespersen 1917; Vennemann 1974; Weerman 1992; Coombs 1976; van der Horst & van der Wal 1979; Bossuyt 1982; de Haan & Weerman 1984; Burridge 1993). Jespersen himself talks about weakening of the negative element. Others have pointed at changes in word order (Vennemann 1974),³² the reduction of the richness of the morphological system (Weerman 1992; van Gestel *et al.* 1992),³³ with the isomorphic principle that dictates that there exist a one to one correspondence between form and meaning, with 'Sprachbunds' and 'areal features' (Bernini & Ramat 1992; Ramat & Bernini 1990)³⁴ etcetera.

Whatever the general explanation of the gradual loss of the double negation system with *en/ne* may be (if any such thing exists), it will not be applicable to the very fast development we have seen in the writers of Joost van den Vondel. In my view, logicism or, more general, language planning, is the only possible explanation for the rapid changes in his language. Without any doubt, Vondel first increases the number of *en* occurrences on purpose, after the model of (somewhat older and at that time more prestigious) writers such as P.C. Hooft.

Later he had meetings with Hooft and others in which language matters were discussed.³⁵ Together they came to the conclusion that negation in Dutch should be single on logical and/or aesthetic grounds. And together they removed the negative *en* from their language, again on purpose.

In time, the language of Vondel, Hooft and their colleagues developed into the standard language as it is spoken today. Double negation with *en* is completely extinct, apart from some rests in peripheral dialects. But if these writers had decided differently during their meetings, standard Dutch might have looked like West Flemish or Afrikaans: comparable Germanic languages, with V2, some flexion (but not much), and a double negation system.

This story doesn't imply that this type of language planning is always successful, as we know from Spanish. The first Spanish grammar in Spanish forbids the double negation: Antonio de Nebrija writes in his *Gramatica de la lengua Castellana* of 1492 (ed. Madrid 1946):

Nuestra lengua enesto peca mucho poniendo dos negaciones por una, como si dixessemos *no quiero nada* dizes a la verdad que quieres algo.

Our language sins heavily in this regard, putting two negations instead of one, as if one were to say *no quiero nada* (not want nothing)

³²How about other SOV or SVO languages? (Haspelmath 1993) How about the claims concerning universal SVO structures (Haegeman 1995:Ch. 1)?

³³If that is correct, then why can Latin and standard classical Greek have unary negation? How about Attic?

³⁴How about the neighbour languages French - German - Polish?

³⁵Cf. Brandt (1986 (1682)), Zwaan (1939:3), Vondel (1927-1940).

one would really say that one wants something.

In today's Spanish, however, *no quiero nada* is still the common way to express that one doesn't want anything. This example shows that language planning doesn't work always. But, at the same time, it might very well be the case that the Académie Française should be held responsible for the fact, that *ne* survived in standard French until today.³⁶

³⁶Cf., however, Sturm (1981):

Mit seinem Verschwinden aus der Sprache würde eine Redundanz beseitigt sein. [So what?] Der eventuelle Verlust von NE scheint möglich [Uiteraard!], ist aber sicherlich noch weit entfernt, weil es syntaktische, phonetische und stilistische Kontexte gibt, die seine Beibehaltung nahezu fordern. (203)

Auch der Einfluß der Schriftsprache darf bezüglich des NE nicht unterschätzt werden. Interferenzen zwischen geschriebener und gesprochener Sprache haben eine außerordentlich sprachkonservierende Bedeutung, so daß die Negationspartikel NE als stets latent vorhandenes Negationselement immer dann eingesetzt wird, wenn sie eine auch nur beschiedene Aufgabe zu erfüllen hat. (204)

6 Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have discussed some details of the history of the negation system in Dutch. It was argued that rational and goal-oriented decisions of a few important writers from the first half of the 17th Century played an important role in the development of the standard dialect.

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