

Sentential negation and clause structure in Old English

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1. Introduction

In this article I will consider a minor pattern of sentential negation in Old English that foreshadows the later Middle English pattern with *ne ... not*. Although it is an infrequent one, the pattern shows that multiple sentential negation must have been an option in the grammar of English rather earlier than has been assumed so far. The facts I give for this pattern are largely new, and have been culled from a corpus of major Old English prose texts. I will show that the make-up of the pattern gives us interesting evidence about the architecture of the Old English clause, and illuminates in particular the position of personal pronouns, and that of the finite verb.

In section 2, I will define what I view as sentential negation, and outline the assumptions made for the analysis of negation. I will also lay out some of the issues with respect to Old English clause structure for which my new facts will turn out to be illuminating. Sections 3 and 4 will then present the Old English negation evidence and discuss it in the context of Old English clausal structure. Section 5 is the concluding section.

2. Sentential negation

The historical development of negation in Old and Middle English is in many ways a good illustration of what has come to be known as “Jespersen’s cycle” (Jespersen 1917, 1924), as in (1):

- (1) Stage 1: negation is expressed by one negative marker
 Stage 2: negation is expressed by a negative marker in combination with a negative adverb or noun phrase
 Stage 3: the second element in Stage 2 takes on the function of expressing negation by itself; the original negative marker becomes optional
 Stage 4: the original negative marker becomes extinct

It is important to note that this cycle concerns primarily the negation of whole sentences, and this is what makes the scenario sketched by Jespersen an attractive and plausible one for the early history of English negation. Sentential negation is predominantly marked by preverbal *ne* immediately preceding the finite verb. Here are two examples of this:

- (2) a. *ne sende se deofol ða fyr of heofenum, þeah þe hit*
 not sent the devil the fire from heaven though it
ufan come
 from above came
 ‘The devil did not send fire from heaven, though it came from above’ (ÆHom.i.6.13)
- b. *He ne andwyrde ðam wife æt fruman*
 he not answered the woman at first
 ‘He did not answer the woman at first’ (ÆHom.ii.110.33)

It may be useful to add a brief word about how to distinguish Old English sentential negation from other instances of negation, such as constituent negation. In practice, this is no easy matter.¹ When there is, morphologically, a constituent negation, we nearly always find a multiple negation with *ne* on the left of the finite verb (Mitchell 1985: 663 ff). This is illustrated in (3):

- (3) a. ... *þæt he na sibban geboren ne wurde*
 that he never afterward born not would-be
 ‘that he would not be born afterward’ (Oros.139.11)

- b. ... *þæt heora nan ne mehte nanes wæpnes gewældan*
 that of-them none not could no weapon wield
 ‘that none of them could wield any weapon’ (Oros.103.25)

Presumably this indicates that what is morphologically a constituent negation has scope over the whole clause. In (3a), *na* is morphologically the negator for the adverb *sibban*; in (3b), two constituents are negated: *heora nan* and *nanes wæpnes*. In both cases, we also find the negator *ne* on the immediate left of the finite verb. Although this results in a semantically negative sentence, we seem to have here a morphological constituent negation where the negation has sentential scope. This is not what we will term sentential negation here. We will restrict that term to sentences which can (but need not) have more than one negative element, but where the second negative does not negate a constituent. See (4):

- (4) a. *þonne ne miht þu na þæt mot ut ateon of ðæs*
 then not could you not the speck out draw of the
mannes eagan
 man's eye
 ‘then you could not draw the speck out of the man’s eye’
 (ÆHomP.XIII.153)
- b. *Ne bið na se leorningniht furðor þonne his lareow*
 not is not the apprentice further than his master
 ‘The apprentice is not ahead of his master’ (ÆHomP.XIII. 134)

In both of these cases, the element *na* cannot be interpreted as modifying the constituent it precedes; in (4a), *na* does not modify *þæt mot*, in that the sentence does not mean: ‘it is not the speck that you can draw ...’; similarly in (4b) it does not modify *se leorningniht*, so that the sentence does not mean: ‘it is not the apprentice who ...’. Rather, it is the whole sentence that is being negated by both negation elements.

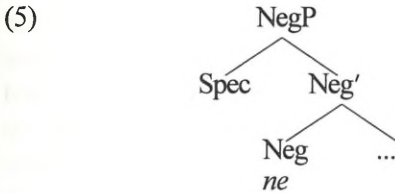
Examples such as those in (4) have not received much attention in the literature. Mourek (1903) makes a distinction between “qualitative” (sentential) and “quantitative” (constituent) negation. Mitchell (1985) follows Einkenel (1912) in wondering whether the distinction reflects a reality in Old English grammar and scraps it altogether, thereby glossing over the distinction as made

here between cases as in (3) and those in (4). While I agree with Mitchell and Eienkel that the distinction is not always easily made, I nevertheless think that it is possible to isolate the instances as in (4) by considering for each case whether the negator can reasonably modify the constituent or not, and this is precisely what leads to the distinction between (3) and (4): in (4) an interpretation as constituent negation does not seem to be reasonable. If this is correct, we have a pattern of multiple sentential negation in Old English that is several centuries earlier than it is customary to assume: for instance, Jack (1978a,b,c) traces the development of Middle English multiple sentential negation on the assumption that it is a novel pattern in Middle English.

The pattern of multiple sentential negation as in (4) is a minority pattern in Old English. I have therefore found it necessary to collect data from a large corpus of major Old English prose texts. I chose prose texts for the usual reasons: it is fairly uncontroversial to assume that the prose more closely reflects the grammatical options in Old English. The texts chosen that are generally taken to represent Early Old English (ninth century) are: *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately (1980); *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies*, ed. Carnicelli (1969), *King Alfred's Old English version of Boethius' 'De Consolatione Philosophiae'*, ed. Sedgfield (1899); *King Alfred's West-Saxon version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. Sweet (1885); the early part of the Parker MS of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, from *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. Plummer (1892–1899). From the tenth century were chosen: volume I of the *Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. Thorpe (1846); both volumes of *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. Skeat (1881–1900); both volumes of the *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. Pope (1967); the *Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. Bethurum (1957); the later part of the Parker MS of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, ed. Plummer (1892–1899). All the texts have been exhaustively searched via the machine-readable version of the textcorpus composed for the Old English dictionary project in Toronto, available through the Oxford Text Archive. This has yielded some 330 examples of the required pattern. Perhaps the number is marginally lower because of the difficulty of separating constituent negation with sentential scope from sentential negation as discussed above. I have tried as much as possible to eliminate ambiguous examples, but nevertheless some examples of the former may have crept in.

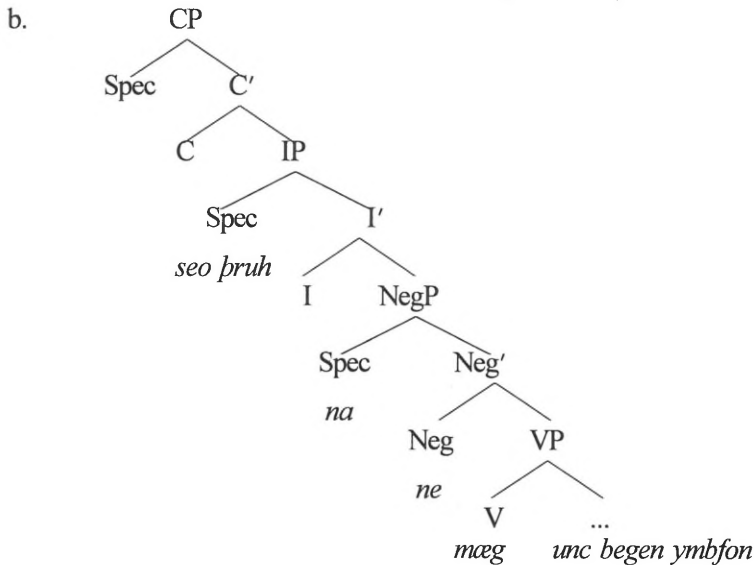
I now outline the assumptions that I make for the analysis of negation. Follow-

ing the line of argument started by Pollock (1989) in the Principles and Parameters framework, I assume that like other lexical and morphological information, negation is represented in a separate projection which is defined according to the general X'-schema (5).



The evidence that the negation element *ne* is a head comes primarily from the fact that it is always on the immediate left of the finite verb (V_{fin}). It is accordingly assumed that it is a head that incorporates V_{fin}, as in example (6).²

- (6) a. & *seo þruh ne mæg na unc begen ymbfon*
 and the tomb not can not us both surround
 ‘and the tomb cannot hold us both’ (GD.226.4)



The second sentential negator *na* is assumed to be a specifier element: the primary evidence for this is its fixed position, which will be considered below. This is a tensed clause, which has as its main verb *mæg*. VP is dominated by NegP. NegP has *ne* as its head. NegP is dominated by IP, which defines the tense and agreement characteristics of the sentence. The Specifier of IP hosts the subject, *seo þruh*, as in any tensed clause. CP defines the conjunction positions. The base position of the verb is signalled by that of the non-finite verb. Finite *mæg* moves to the I position in order get its finiteness characteristics tense and agreement. On its way, it moves through the head position of NegP, picking up *ne*, which moves along with it.³ This is why *ne* always appears on the immediate left of the finite verb; it also serves to account for the fact that in clauses with V-movement, we always find the order *ne + Vfin ... + na*. In clauses without such movement, the order *na + ne + Vfin* is frequently attested, as in (7).

- (7) *þæt hie it na gebetan noldan*
 that they it not atone-for not-wanted
 ‘that they did not want to atone for it’ (Oros.38.17)

3. Sentential negation with two negation elements

We will now introduce the evidence provided by the patterns involving sentential negation with two negation elements. We will focus this discussion on the pattern with *na* and its primary variant *no* as the second sentential negator. The most important reason for this is that *na/no* seems to function unambiguously as a negative constituent or sentential modifier. This is where it differs from other negatives that might potentially function as the second sentential negator, like *naht/noht/nowiht/ nawiht*.⁴ These often function as modifiers, but their use as such is often difficult to separate from their use as a negated noun. It is therefore often unclear whether they occupy a nominal position or a (negative) adverbial position, and I leave more detailed consideration of these for further research. We will further restrict the discussion to those cases where *na/no* is clearly in a high position close to Vfin in main clauses, since this is where its main interest lies from the point of view of word order. There is some evidence in Old English that there is a second relatively fixed position for the (second) negative

adverb, close to the non-finite verb. We will have to leave the study of this pattern, too, for further research.

In (8), I give a sample of illustrations of the pattern with a second, “high” sentential *na*:

- (8)
- a. *Ne het he us na leornian heofonas to wyrcente*
not ordered he us not learn heavens to make
‘He did not bid us learn to make the heavens’ (ÆLS.XVI.127)
 - b. *þonne ne miht þu na þæt mot ut ateon of ðæs mannes eagan*
(ÆHomP.XIII.153)
 - c. *... ne meahtest þu hi na forleosian*
not could you them not lose
‘you could not loose them’ (Boeth.3.7.17.20)
 - d. *Nis na se halga gast wuniende on his gecynde swa swa he*
not is not the holy ghost existing in his nature as he
gesewen wæs
seen was
‘The Holy Ghost is not in his nature existing as he was seen’
(ÆHom.i.322.17)
 - e. *Ne bið na se leorningcniht furðor þonne his lareow*
Not is not the apprentice further than his master
(ÆHomP.XIII.134)
 - f. *Ne sæde na ure Drihten þæt he mid cynehelme oððe mid*
not said not our Lord that he with diadem or with
purpuran gescryd, cuman wolde to us
purple clothed come wanted to us
‘Our Lord said not that He would come to us with a diadem or
clothed with purple’ (ÆLS.XXXI.762)
 - g. *Ne wende na Ezechias Israhela kyning ðæt he*
not thought not Ezechias Israel’s king that he
gesyngade, ða ...
sinned, when ...
‘Ezechias, king of Israel, did not think he was sinning when ...’
(CP.39.2)

One very striking observation stands out when we consider these examples, which are representative of the corpus: when the subject is a pronoun, as in (8a–c), it appears on the left of *na*; when the subject is a noun, as in (8d–g), it appears on the right of *na*. Furthermore, object pronouns optionally occur on the left of *na*, as in (8a–b). This observation provides a new perspective on the discussion of the status of personal pronouns in Old English. Let us consider the background of these issues first.

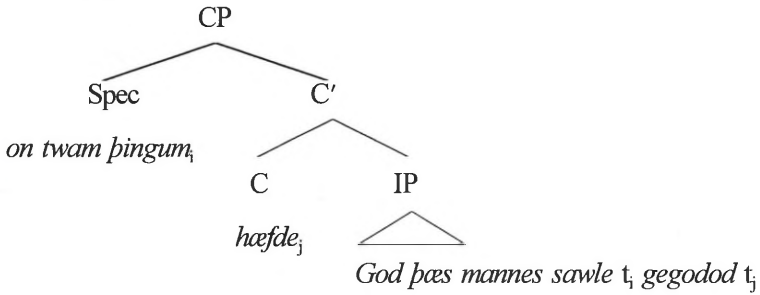
3.1. Issues of clause structure and the status of Old English pronouns

Old English clause structure cannot be considered without regard to the verb second (V2) constraint. While Old English can be reasonably analysed as an SOV language, it is also clear that the sentence has some satellite positions in main clauses that are reserved for some first constituent and V_{fin}. Some initial illustration of this is given by the following sentences:

- (9) a. *hwī wolde God swa lytles þinges him forwyrnan*
 why would God so small thing him deny
 ‘why should God deny him such a small thing?’
 (ÆHom.i.14.2)
- b. *On twam þingum hæfde God þæs mannes sawle gegodod*
 in two things had God the man’s soul endowed
 ‘With two things God had endowed man’s soul’
 (ÆHom.i.20.1)

Observe that these examples illustrate the phenomenon of subject-auxiliary-inversion that we still find in Present-Day English. In Old English, however, it is not restricted to interrogative and negative-initial contexts, as (9b) illustrates. Such constructions have been analysed by van Kemenade (1987) as involving preposing of the first constituent and V_{fin} to the satellite sentential positions in CP as in the following adapted structure:⁵

(10)



But not all Old English main clauses conform to this pattern. In sentences introduced by an interrogative constituent, a negative element, or the short adverbial *þa*, subject-verb inversion is indeed canonical, as (9a) and (11) illustrate:

- (11) a. *For hwam noldest þu ðe sylfe me gecyðan þæt ...*
 for what not-wanted you yourself me make-known that ...
 ‘wherefore would you not want to reveal to me yourself that...’
 (ÆLS.XXXIII.307)
- b. *þa foron hie mid þrim scipum ut*
 then sailed they with three ships out
 ‘then they sailed out with three ships’ (ChronA.AD 897)
- c. *Ne sceal he noht unalyfedes don*
 not shall he nothing unlawful do
 ‘he shall not do anything unlawful’ (CP.60.15)

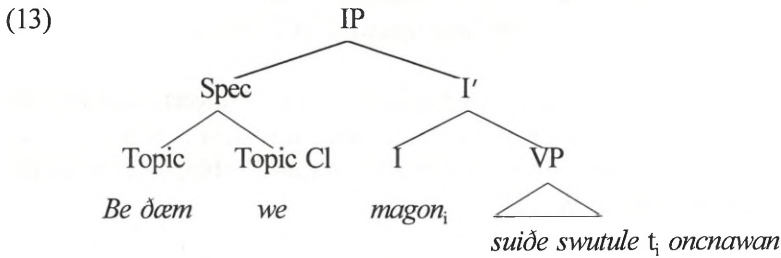
The same is not true for main clauses introduced by a non-subject other than an interrogative or negative, or *þa*. While in these cases, inversion is near-canonical when the subject is a noun, as in (9b) above, pronominal subjects occur on the left of the preposed Vfin, as in (12):

- (12) a. *Forðon we sceolan mid ealle mod & mægen to*
 therefore we must with all mind and power to
Gode gecyrran
 God turn
 ‘therefore we must turn to God with all our mind and power’
 (Blickling.97)

- b. *Be ðæm we magon suiðe swutule oncnawan ðæt ...*
 by that we may very clearly perceive that ...
 'by that, we may perceive very clearly that ...' (CP.181.16)

On the basis of this and a wider range of evidence, it was argued by van Kemenade (1987) that Old English personal pronouns are clitic-like elements that are procliticised to Vfin in topic-initial constructions. Such procliticisation is blocked when the first constituent position is occupied by an operator-like element as in the examples in (11). The essence of this analysis is that movement of Vfin is always to the C-position in the structure (10), essentially because the phenomenon of topicalisation plus verb-fronting is restricted to main clauses. There is some topicalisation in embedded clauses in Old English, but it is shown by van Kemenade (1997) that this is restricted to a well-defined set of constructions, including passives, impersonals and the like.

An alternative analysis of V2 and pronouns in Old English has been presented by Pintzuk (1991, 1993). The essence of the proposal is that structures as in (10) are restricted to examples where the pronominal subject is postverbal, i.e. interrogative, negative-initial and *þa*-initial constructions. In Pintzuk's view, topic-initial constructions represent a lower sentential level IP, with the topic in Spec,IP and the pronouns as a clitic adjoined to the topic. This would mean that example (12b) would have a structure like (13):



Pintzuk's clitic analysis is very problematic for reasons that go beyond the scope of this article (but see van Kemenade, forthcoming). Furthermore, there are several arguments against regarding Spec, IP as the relevant topic position. The main argument is that genuine topicalisation is restricted to main clauses in Old English, whereas Pintzuk's analysis predicts that it should also occur in

embedded clauses. This and other arguments are elaborated in van Kemenade (1997). On the other hand, the attractive part of the analysis is that it assigns different positions to V_{fin} between topic-initial and *wh*/Neg/*þa*-initial clauses, and the position I is also available in embedded clauses. It is, however, hard to assign a principled place to clitic pronouns in it.

The combined insights of van Kemenade and Pintzuk can be preserved if we have an analysis where topicalisation is restricted to main clauses, as in (10), and where we can accommodate the position of pronouns in a principled way. This is precisely where the facts concerning double sentential negation as introduced above prove illuminating. We will turn to them in the next section.

4. Multiple sentential negation and clause structure in Old English

In this section, we turn to discussing the negation evidence in more detail. It will lead us to a more articulate sentential structure for Old English than has been assumed so far. But let us reconsider the data first.

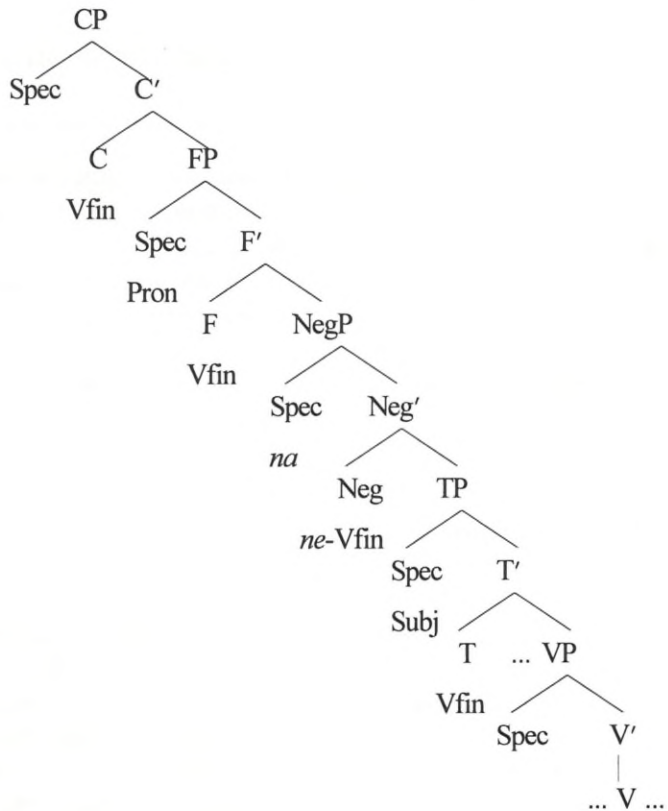
Of particular relevance with respect to word order issues are those examples that are main clauses where *ne* + V_{fin} occurs at the beginning of the sentence. These make up about 220 of the total number of examples. Two illustrative examples are repeated here:

- (14) a. ... *ne meahst þu hi na forleosam*
(Boeth.3.7.17.20)
- b. *Nis na se halga gast wuniende on his gecynde swa swa he*
gesewen wæs (ÆHom.i.322.17)

As noted above, one very striking fact stands out when we consider these examples: when the subject is a pronoun, it appears on the left of *na*; when it is a noun, it appears on the right of *na*.⁶ Furthermore, object pronouns optionally occur on the left of *na*, as observed in connection with (8). This shows that the position for the nominal subject is really different from that of the pronominal subject, and that these two positions are separated by NegP. The regular position for the subject is to the right of *na*, and the position for pronouns on the left of

na is indeed restricted to personal pronouns rather than being a subject position. This observation provides a new perspective on the discussion of the status of personal pronouns in Old English, and on the character of the position of pronouns in topic-initial constructions. Before we go on to discuss this, let us consider a more articulate sentential structure than has been assumed so far for Old English, which is clearly suggested by the negation facts. This structure is in line with recent generative syntactic theorising, such as Pollock (1989) and Belletti (1990), in that each contentful morphological element, e.g. tense inflection, negation, agreement inflection, heads its own projection according to the general phrase structure format. This results in the structure in (15):

(15)



Let us assume that pronominal subjects (and, optionally, objects) inhabit a separate functional projection FP in the structure (15).⁷ Let us suppose furthermore that *na* as a second sentential negation element is in Spec,NegP. This is suggested first of all by its fixed position. The fact that this is a fixed position is suggested furthermore by the fact that *na*, even when it is morphologically a constituent negation, sometimes moves away from its constituent to the characteristic position for *na* as observed above. This is illustrated by the following examples:

- (16) a. *Ne leofað se man na be hlafe anum, ac lyfað be*
 not lives the man not by bread alone but lives by
eallum ðam wordum þe gað of godes muðe
 all the words that go from God's mouth
 'Man does not live by bread alone, but by all the words that
 come from God's mouth' (ÆHom.I.166.111)
- b. *ne lifað na se mann be hlafe anum, ac lifaðh be ðam wordum*
ðe gað of godes muðe
 (ÆHom.I.168.26)
- c. *Nis na godes wunung on ðam grægum stanum, ne on*
 not-is not God's dwelling in the grey stones nor in
ærenum wecgum, ac he wunað on heoforum
 brazen lumps but he dwells in heaven
 'God's dwelling is not in the grey stones, nor in brazen lumps;
 but he dwells in heaven' (ÆLS.VII.135)

The contrast between (16a) and (16b) is interesting. The meaning of (16a) shows the essential constituent negation of *na*: 'man lives [not by bread alone]'. On the next page, we find the same sentence with the same meaning, but with *na* in the position characteristic in (14): on the left of the nominal subject. In (16c), the co-ordinations show that the intended negation is: *na on ðam grægum stanum*, giving the reading: 'God's dwelling is [not in the grey stones], nor in ...'. But *na* occupies the position on the left of the nominal subject, as characteristic of the sentence negation with two negators.⁸ We can account for this fixed position of *na* by assuming that the second sentential negator occupies Spec,NegP. When we have a constituent negation with sentential scope, as in (16), the constituent

negator *na* optionally moves to that position.

In the structure (15), we can account for the basic V2 patterns as discussed above. Recall that the patterns are as follows:

- | | | | |
|------|----|--|------|
| (17) | a. | <i>Wh</i> -element / <i>ne</i> / <i>þa</i> – V _{fin} – Subj ... | (9a) |
| | b. | Topic – V _{fin} – Noun Subj ... | (9b) |
| | c. | Topic – Pron Subj – V _{fin} ... | (12) |

If the first constituent is an interrogative constituent, as in (17a), that constituent is in Spec,CP and V_{fin} moves to C (through intermediate head positions as indicated in (15)). If the subject is a noun, it is in Spec,TP in (15); if it is a pronoun, it is in Spec,FP.⁹ This difference in position is not visible on the surface in *wh*-questions. It emerges very clearly, however, in (17b) and (17c). Topics move to Spec,CP like *wh*-constituents (recall that this is shown by the fact that they occur only in main clauses). But they do not draw V_{fin} to C, as seems to be true for all historical stages of English.¹⁰ Rather, V_f moves to the head position of FP.¹¹ There, it is followed by the nominal subject (in Spec,TP) as in (17b), or preceded by the pronominal subject (in Spec,FP), as in (17c). The advantage of this analysis over previous ones is that there is a separate position for clitic pronouns. Their position is not contingent on proclisis to V_{fin} or enclisis to the topic. Rather, they have a position of their own, and their position relative to V_{fin} is determined by the movement requirements on V_{fin}.

5. Conclusion

I have shown in this article that in the Old English period, rather earlier than has so far been assumed, there was already a pattern with double sentential negation. I have looked at this phenomenon primarily from a syntactic point of view, since it tells us a good deal about certain vexed puzzles concerning Old English word order. The position of the standard sentential negation marker *ne* co-varies with the position of the finite verb. The second sentential negator *na/no*, as far as attested in the prose texts considered in this article, occupies a fixed position, with pronouns appearing on the left of it, and nominal subject on the right. I have argued that this distribution supports a “split Infl” hypothesis for Old

English clause structure and throws new light on the positional characteristics of personal pronouns and nominal subjects. Other important evidence that may be derived from this is that it yields a more precise characterisation of the position of the finite verb, especially in root clauses: although in topic-initial root clauses, the position of the finite verb is lower than in interrogative, negative-initial and *þa*-initial clauses, it is nevertheless higher than the second negation element. One interesting observation may be made in conclusion: careful scrutiny of a small pattern in a large corpus of texts may give us the kind of data that are easily glossed over without such detailed research, and in the case in point yields crucial evidence for larger questions of clause structure.

Notes

1. See, for instance, the discussion in Mourek (1903), Einkenkel (1912), and Mitchell (1985: §§ 1596 ff).
2. The outcome of the issues discussed later on in this article will show that Old English clausal structure, as well as the position of subject and V_{fin} , is more complex than this. However, for the purposes of illustrating the points at issue now, i.e. verb movement through the head of NegP, the present simplified structure suffices.
3. In the case of a main clause, *ne* moves along with the finite verb further, in accordance with the V2 rule.
4. Haeberli (1991) states erroneously that all these elements behave in the same way.
5. The coindexed traces t_i and t_j indicate the position from which movement has taken place.
6. This observation was made also by Einkenkel (1912), and followed up in a spirit similar to ours by Haeberli (1991). I am grateful to Eric Haeberli for pointing this out to me. I differ from Einkenkel in separating cases of sentential negation from others. My analysis here differs from that in Haeberli (1991) in that I argue here that there is a fixed

“high” position for *na* when it is a sentence negator and that this position is Spec,NegP. Haerberli assumes a variable position for *na*, adjoined to different functional projections.

7. I use the term FP as short for a neutral Functional Projection, to avoid prejudging its precise status. Perhaps the fact that we find personal pronouns in that position can be brought in line generally with second position facts as observed by Wackernagel (1892) as some sort of agreement phenomenon. Issues of this sort take us far beyond the scope of this article.
8. An anonymous reviewer objects that (16a) illustrates ambiguity between sentential and constituent negation reading. I would therefore like to emphasise the point that this is one case where this ambiguity would be unexpected because (16a–b) are quite clearly cases of constituent negation semantically.
9. This presupposes an analysis of Old English personal pronouns as Germanic-style weak pronouns as in Cardinaletti and Starke (1994).
10. This is in accordance with the observations in Kiparsky (1995). This analysis is an improvement over that of Kiparsky’s in that it does justice to all the V-movement facts.
11. This leaves open the question what it is that forces V-movement to Cl^0 in topic-initial constructions. I assume that CIP is part of the C-system and propose to derive this movement by assuming that topics are a weak trigger for V-movement, in the sense that they require movement of V to some head position in the C-system. This is further motivated in van Kemenade (forthcoming).

Texts examined

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- Homilies of Ælfric*. Edited by J.C. Pope. EETS, 259. Oxford 1967.
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