Exceptive negation in Middle Low German*

Anne Breitbarth

For Josef, who first taught me about negation,
explanatory adequacy, and the value of small empirical puzzles.

1 Background

Languages employ a wide variety of constructions to express an exception to a matrix situation. Two common strategies in European languages are what we could label a comparative and a negative strategy, respectively:

(1) Comparative:
   a. English *unless* < *on less* (Traugott, 1997)
   b. French *à moins que* 'to less that/than'
   c. German *es sei denn* < *ez (en) sî danne* 'it (NEG) be than'

(2) Negative:
   a. Portugese *a não ser* 'to NEG be'
   b. Dutch *tenzij* < *het en zij* 'it NEG be'

The Dutch and German constructions are in fact, historically, two sides of the same coin: Deriving from a biclausal structure involving a negative particle (*het/ez ni sî/wari* [$_{CP}$ *daz/dat*…] 'it NEG be/were [$_{CP}$ that…]') in OHG / ODu, this structure has evolved into a subordinating complementiser in the case of Dutch, complete with clause-final verb placement (3), but into a frozen expression ('connector', Pasch et al., 2003) in German, taking a *dass*- or V2-CP-complement (4).

(3) Wij zullen de trein niet halen, tenzij er een wonder gebeurt.
   we will the train not catch unless there a miracle happens

* This squib is a side product of work undertaken as part of the projects *The development of negation in the languages of Europe and the Mediterranean* (University of Cambridge, AHRC grant AR119272), *Layers of Structure* (Ghent University, FWO Odysseus grant Haegeman-G091409), and an FWO postdoctoral grant (Ghent University, FWO12/PDO/014).

(4) Wir werden den Zug verpassen, es sei denn, es geschieht ein Wunder/dass ein
we will the train miss it be than/then it happens a miracle/that a
Wunder geschieht.
miracle happens

In this squib I look at the development of the same construction in historical Low German (Old Saxon and Middle Low German), discuss the role of the negative particle, sketch a formal account, and speculate about the path of the development.

2 Development

In Old Saxon (OS), only biclausal exceptives are found, that is, there is a negated (subjunctive) form of *wesan* 'be' followed by a subject *that*-clause containing the actual exception. In total, there are six occurrences, all in the *Heliand* (none in the other texts and fragments), (5).

(5) a. ni uuari [that it gibod godes selbes uuari]
NEG were that it order God.GEN self were
'unless (lit. were it not that) it were something ordained by God himself' (Heliand: 205-206)

b. ef nu uuerðen ni mag mankunni generid, quað he, ne sî [that ik mînan
if now become NEG can mankind saved said he NEG be that I mine
geƀe / lioƀan lîchamon for liudio barn]...
give dear body for men.GEN children
'If now mankind cannot be(come) saved, he said, unless I give my dear body for the children of men ...' (Heliand: 4760-4763)

OS, being a partial null subject language (Walkden, 2014), did not have overt expletives or correlates of subject clauses. Middle Low German (MLG) did, hence the expected form of the exceptive constructions should be a biclausal structure with a correlate of the subordinate clause containing the exception, thus either *en si it dat/ en were it dat* with verb-initial (like V1-conditionals) or *it en si dat/ it en were dat* with V2-order.

However, while there are biclausal V2-exceptives (all with past subjunctive *were*) in my MLG corpus (Breitbarth, 2014), as in (6), the vast majority of exceptive clauses (ca. 90%) are monoclausal. These monoclausal exceptives appear to be a structural blend of the biclausal ones: they are V2, the verb is in the subjunctive, preceded by the negative particle *en/ne*, but the verb (not always a copula, (9)) and preverbal constituent—not always a subject (7), not always a pronoun (8), more often a referential than an expletive pronoun (9)—clearly belong to content of the exception, that is, the subordinate clause in a biclausal structure.

(6) ... it ne were, dat he worde begrepen vppe der handhaftighen dat enes dodslaghes
it NEG were that he were caught on the actual act of.a manslaughter
'...unless he were caught redhanded committing an act of manslaughter' (Braunschweig: 29/06/1361)

(7) … den genanten kalandes heren ensyn ersten sodane veirundevertich marck
the named kaland's sirs NEG=be.SUBJN first those fourty.four marks
gensliken […] betalt.
entirely paid
'… unless those fourty-four marks have been paid first in their entirety to the named sirs of the kaland society' (Uelzen: 1487)

(8) It en scal nement enne nyen stenwech setten eder hoghen, de rad en
it NEG shall no one a new stone.way set or make.higher the council NEG
si darbi.
be.SUBJN along
'No one shall build a new stone way or make one higher, unless the council agrees.' (Braunschweig: 1349)

(9) Wy en=schullen ok nemande, de zy geistlik edder werlik, in unsen rad kesen
we NEG=shall also no one he be clerical or secular in our council elect
[…], de en=love und swere ersten ome zinen rad gelik unsem.
[…] he NEG=vow and swear first on his council like ours
'We shall also elect no one clerical or secular into our council, unless he vow and swear first on his council as he does on ours' (Uelzen: 1457)

3 Analysis

The question now is how to analyse these 'blended' exceptives (which are also found in Middle Dutch (Burridge, 1993), and, to a lesser extent, in Middle High German (Jäger, 2008). What role does the negation particle play, and how is the exceptive interpretation derived? Wallmeier (2012: 38) surmises that the single preverbal negation particle together with the subjunctive mood on the verb function as a subordination marker. But how?

Concerning the role of the negative particle, it is first of all remarkable that it occurs on its own in these clauses, at a time when MLG was already in the transition to stage III of Jespersen's Cycle, i.e., from a bipartite (*ne/en … nicht*) to a unipartite (*nicht* alone) construction (Breitbarth, 2014). It is evident, however, that *ne/en* in exceptive clauses is not a negative marker with sentential scope: None of the regular expressions of sentential negation ((*ne/en*) … *nicht* or (*ne/en*) … negative indefinite) is ever found in an exceptive clause in the corpus used, and NPI indefinites (e.g. *enig* 'any') are not attested in exceptives either. On the other hand, I do not subscribe to Härd's (2000: 1460) claim that *ne/en* in MLG exceptives is a purely pleonastic negator. I will argue that it does negate something, only that it does not have sentential scope. Rather, I claim that the construction derives the exceptive semantics in a compositional fashion.

The preverbal negative particle in MLG exceptive clauses in fact shows formal and semantic parallels with preposed negation in English yes-no questions (Romero & Han, 2004) (cf. also Cormack & Smith's 2000 EchoNeg) in that (i) it doesn't have sentential scope, but rather appears to be C-related, (ii) it is a clitic, not a full negation particle and (iii) because of a semantic similarity: both English yes-no questions with preposed negations and (MLG) exceptive clauses invoke a positive (epistemic) implicature.

Romero & Han (2004) argue that the clitic negation marker takes scope over the World operator, in case of yes-no questions, it quantifies over the actual world (VERUM / realis). The whole clause is in the scope of another operator, in this case, a question operator Q.

(10) Isn't Jane coming too? = Jane is coming too, isn't she?

(11) [$_{CP}$ Q *n't* [VERUM$_F$ [$_{IP}$ *Jane is coming too*]]

Analogously, I propose to analyse MLG exceptives as in (12). The clitic negation marker takes scope over the World operator, but here, it quantifies over a possible world (potentialis). The whole clause is again in the scope of another operator, this time, an exceptive operator OP$_{exc}$, operating on the restriction of a universal quantifier introduced in the main clause (von Fintel, 1992: 144; von Fintel, 1993).

(12) .. de rad ensi darbi.
[$_{CP}$ OP$_{exc}$ *en* [W [$_{IP}$ *de rad* BE *darbi*]]

(13) ∀x.(EXCEPT the council agree [to x's plans]) → ¬(x shall set a new stone way or make one higher)

I detail, I propose to situate the exceptive operator in SpecForceP, while I locate the world operator in SpecMood$_{irrealis}$P (Cinque, 1999; Kempchinsky, 2009; Haegeman, 2010) (just) below C. I argue that it is lexicalized by the subjunctive morphology on the finite verb of the exception clause. The negative particle *ne/en* is in Fin. Due to its clitic nature, it needs a host and therefore attracts the finite verb. As in declarative V2-clauses, any constituent can occupy SpecFinP.

(14) [$_{ForceP}$ OP$_{exc}$ [$_{Force'}$ Force [$_{FinP}$ *de rad*$_i$ [$_{Fin'}$ *ne=si*$_j$ [$_{MoodP_{irr}}$ W [$_{Mood'_{irr}}$ t$'_j$ [$_{TP}$ t$_i$ t$_j$ *darbi*]]]]]]]

Regarding the diachronic development, sketched in (15), I propose that in the original biclausal structure, the negated copula (*sî/wari*) of the higher clause would move through Mood$_{irrealis}$ to Fin. This movement was lost, and the negative marker was reanalysed as merging directly in Fin. Under adjacency, the complementiser of the subordinate clause could be reanalysed as occupying the higher Fin, too. Once the lower Fin was identified with the higher Fin through the reanalysis of *that*, the lower verb could target the higher Fin, now reanalysed as the Fin head of the same clause, as well. Once verb movement was possible, V2, that is, occupying SpecFinP became possible as well.

(15) a. [$_{ForceP}$ OP$_{exc}$ [$_{FinP}$ *ni=sî/uuari*$_i$ … [$_{VP}$ t$_i$ [$_{CP}$ *that* [$_{TP}$ …]]]]] →
b. [$_{ForceP}$ OP$_{exc}$ [$_{FinP}$ *ni(+sî)=that* [$_{MoodP_{irr}}$ W [$_{Mood'_{irr}}$ Mood$_{irrealis}$ [$_{VP}$ V]]]]] →
c. [$_{ForceP}$ OP$_{exc}$ [$_{FinP}$ XP$_j$ [$_{Fin'}$ *en*=V$_i$ [$_{MoodP_{irr}}$ t$'_i$ [t$_j$ t$_i$]]]]]

Thank you Josef for introducing me to syntax, to negation, and for helping me in every possible way to start a career in linguistics. It is thanks to you that I am still able today to enjoy puzzling over things like MLG exceptives, and am even paid to do it. Happy birthday, and many happy returns.

Sources

Braunschweig L. Hänselmann (ed.). 1862-1912. *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Braunschweig*. Braunschweig: C.A. Schwetschke.

Heliand E. Sievers (ed.). 1878. *Heliand und Genesis*. Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses.

Uelzen T. Vogtherr (ed.). 1988. *Urkundenbuch der Satdt Uelzen*. Hildesheim: Lax.

References

Breitbarth, A. 2014. *The history of Low German negation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burridge, K. 1993. *Syntactic change in Germanic: Aspects of language change in Germanic with particular reference to Middle Dutch*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Cinque, G. 1999. *Adverbs and functional heads*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cormack, A. & N. Smith. 2000. Head movement and negation in English. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 98. 49–85.

von Fintel, K. 1992. Exceptive conditionals: The meaning of 'unless'. In *Proceedings of the North East Linguistics Society 22*, 135–151.

von Fintel, K. 1993. Exceptive constructions. *Natural Language Semantics* 1. 123–148.

Haegeman, L. 2010. The movement derivation of conditional clauses. *Linguistic Inquiry* 41. 595–621.

Härd, J. E. 2000. Syntax des Mittelniederdeutschen. In W. Besch, A. Betten, O. Reichmann & S. Sonderegger (eds.), *Sprachgeschichte. Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und ihrer Erforschung. 2. Teilband*, 1456–1463. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Jäger, A. 2008. *History of German negation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Kempchinsky, P. 2009. What can the subjunctive disjoint reference effect tell us about the subjunctive? *Lingua* 119. 1788–1810.

Pasch, R., U. Brauße, E. Breindl & U. H. Waßner. 2003. *Handbuch der deutschen Konnektoren. Linguistische Grundlagen der Beschreibung und syntaktische Merkmale der deutschen Satzverknüpfer (Konjunktionen, Satzadverbien und Partikeln)*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Romero, M. & C.-H. Han. 2004. On negative *yes*/*no* questions. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 27. 609–658.

Traugott, E. C. 1997. *Unless* and *but* conditionals: A historical perspective. In A. Athanasiadou & R. Dirven (eds.), *On conditionals again*, 145–167. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Walkden, G. 2014. *Syntactic reconstruction and Proto-Germanic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wallmeier, N. 2012. Uneingeleitete Nebensätze mit konditionaler Semantik im Mittelniederdeutschen. In R. Langhanke, K. Berg, M. Elmentaler & J. Peters (eds.), *Niederdeutsche Syntax*, 33–56. Hildesheim: Olms.