

Exceptive negation in Middle Low German*

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*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. PORTUGUESE *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

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- (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
 geþe / lioban lichamon 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’ (Braun-
 schweig: 29/06/1361)

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) $\forall x$.(EXCEPT the council agree [to x's plans]) \rightarrow \neg (x shall set a new stone way or make one higher)

In 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 (*si/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=si/uuari_i ... [_{VP} t_i [_{CP} that [_{TP} ...]]]]]] \rightarrow
 b. [_{ForceP} OP_{exc} [_{FinP} ni(+si)=that [_{MoodP_{irr}} W [_{Mood'_{irr}} Mood_{irrealis} [_{VP} V]]]]]] \rightarrow
 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.

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