

What the Dutch Jespersen Cycle may reveal about Negative Concord

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1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to provide the outlines of an analysis for the correspondence between two phenomena concerning negation, namely the occurrence of a negative prefix and the interpretation of expressions with multiple negative elements. There seems to be a large correlation between the stage of the *Jespersen Cycle* a language or variety is in and the extent to which negative elements may deny each other.

This study is based on Dutch data, but every claim and hypothesis is checked cross-linguistically. I have used data from historical varieties, current dialectal varieties and idiolectal varieties.

This paper is built up as follows: first I will discuss how the Dutch Jespersen cycle developed and show that every language can be described in terms of its Jespersen stage. In the second section I will briefly describe the backgrounds of double negation and negative concord. In the third section I will show the correspondence between the two phenomena and formulate three hypotheses on the basis of the Dutch data and check these hypotheses with several other languages. Finally, I will provide a proposal by means of which the correspondence may be accounted for.

2 The Dutch Jespersen Cycle

The full description of a Jespersen Cycle is described in Jespersen (1917). Applied to Dutch and slightly simplified it looks like (1):

- (1) *The Dutch Jespersen Cycle*
- a. Stage I Negation is only expressed by a negative prefix *en* or *ne* on V_{fin} .
 - b. Stage II Negation is expressed by a negative prefix *en* or *ne* on V_{fin} and an optional negative adverb *nie(t)*.
 - c. Stage III Negation is obligatory expressed by a negative adverb *nie(t)* and a negative prefix *en* or *ne* on V_{fin} .
 - d. Stage IV Negation is obligatory expressed by a negative adverb *nie(t)* and an optional extra negative prefix *en* or *ne* on V_{fin} .
 - e. Stage V Negation is only expressed by a negative adverb *nie(t)*.

Dutch seems to have undergone a complete Jespersen Cycle. Unfortunately there are hardly any reminiscents of Old Dutch left. Therefore one cannot investigate the introduction of *nie(t)* in Old Dutch¹. Almost every instance of a single negative preverbal negator is found in Middle Dutch texts. Examples of the occurrence of a single prefix *en* can be found in (2). Other examples of the different

¹ Because of the lack of data supporting the claim that Old Dutch was a Stage 1 language, Postma (2001) argues that Old Dutch was a Stage 3 language too. He interprets occurrences of single negation in Middle Dutch as licensors of some kind of polarity items. However, he does not give any positive evidence for this claim.

stages of the Dutch Jespersen Cycle can be found in (3)-(6).²

- (2) Stage I
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Her <i>ne</i> minno thich | Old Dutch |
| He neg-loves you | Wachtendock Ps. |
| 'He doesn't love you' | (9 th century) |
| | |
| b. Si <i>ne</i> weten wat best doen | Special |
| They neg-know what best do | context in |
| 'They don't know what good to do' | Middle Dutch |
| | |
| c. Wi <i>ne</i> hebben wat eten | Special |
| 'We neg have what eat' | context in |
| 'We don't have anything to eat' | Middle Dutch |
- (3) Stage II
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| a. K' <i>en</i> weet (<i>nie</i>) | Conservative |
| I-neg know (not) | expressions in |
| I don't know | West Flemish |
| | |
| b. Z' <i>en</i> doet (<i>nie</i>) | Conservative |
| She-neg does (not) | expression in |
| 'She doesn't' | West Flemish |
- (4) Stage III
- | | |
|---|--------------|
| a. Maer dat <i>en</i> mach <i>niet</i> sijn | Middle Dutch |
| But that neg may not be | |
| 'But that may not be (the case)' | |

² For obtaining these data I made use of Burridge (1993), Van Gestel, e.a. (1992), De Haan & Weerman (1980) and Van der Horst & van der Wal (1977),

- b. dat sie *niet en* predicten Middle Dutch
 that they not neg-preach
 'that they didn't preach'
- (5) Stage IV
- a. Ghy (*en*) sult *niet* dooden 17th century
 You neg-shall not kill Dutch (1653)
 'You shall not kill'
- b. Valère (*en-*)eet *nie* 's oavens West Flemish
 V. neg-eats not in the evening
 'V. doesn;t eat in the evening'
- c. da Valère 's oavens *nie* (*en-*)eet West Flemish
 that V. in the evening not neg-eats
 'that V. doesn't eat in the evening'
- (6) Stage V
- a. Jan loopt *niet* Standard Dutch
 John walks not
 'John does not walk'
- b. dat Jan *niet* loopt Standard Dutch
 that John not walks
 'that John does not walk'

Because of the lack of data of Old Dutch, I checked the occurrences of a single negative prefix in Middle Dutch. Middle Dutch is a stage III language, but contains several expressions with single negatives. For some of these expressions, there are specific explanations (like with paratactic negation), but other expressions belong to the

domain of conservative expressions, i.e. older expressions that have remained in a newer stage of the language. Investigating conservative expressions is a possible way of trying to recover some of the secrets of Old Dutch (cf Hoeksema 1997). The same happens for the alleged stage II. Since it cannot be investigated whether stage III like expressions in Early Middle Dutch could have done without the negative adverb *niet*, it is impossible to look for stage II expressions in early Middle Dutch. Therefore we use the same method of conservative expressions. Examples of conservative expressions are found in Haegeman (1995).

Middle Dutch is a good example of a stage III language and provides enough data. West Flemish is still spoken and Standard Dutch is stage V.

3 Multiple negation in Dutch

Ton van der Wouden distinguishes in his 1997 dissertation four different kinds of multiple negation: Negative Concord, Double Negation, Emphatic Negation and Weakening Negation. The definitions are in (7).

(7) *Multiple Negation* (Van der Wouden 1994)

- a. Negative Concord (NC): two or more negative expressions form only one semantic negation;
- b. Double Negation (DN): two negative elements yield a positive interpretation together;

- c. Weakening Negation (WN): a second negative element weakens the first one;
- d. Emphatic Negation (EN): a second negative element enforces the first one;

Although Standard Dutch is considered to be a Double Negation language, many varieties, such as Middle Dutch (9a) or west Flemish (9b) are Negative Concord varieties. And even in colloquial Standard Dutch, one may find many examples of Negative Concord as in (9c).

(9) NEGATIVE CONCORD

a. *Historical variation: Middle Dutch*

1. *Nyemant en moet upten kerchoeve hout zaghen*
No-one neg must on-the churchyard wood saw
'No one should saw wood on the churchyard'
2. *Niemen en had mi niet gesien*
No-one neg had me not seen
'Nobody has seen me'
3. *Si het oc so dat si nehebben no wif no kind:*
Be it also so that they neg-have nor wife nor child
'In case they have neither a wife or a child.'

b. *Dialectal variation: West Flemish*

1. *da Valère me niets ketent en-was*
that V. with nothing content en-was
'that V. was not pleased with anything'

2. da Valère *niemand niets* geeft
that V. no one nothing gives
'that V. does not give anyone anything'
3. da Valère *nooit van niemand nie* ketent (*en*)-was
that V. never of no one not content neg-was
'that V. was never pleased with anyone'

c. *Idiolectal variation: Colloquial Dutch*

1. Je geeft me *nooit geen* aandacht
You give me never no attention
'You don't give me any attention'
2. Er zijn *nergens geen* bloemen
There are nowhere no flowers
'There are no flowers (at all)'

We now see that Dutch, taken as a set of different varieties, is not merely a DN language. Standard Dutch is a good example of a DN variety, but one cannot longer claim that Dutch is a DN language in general. A surprising result is that Double negation is not only restricted to the non-NC varieties (in 10a), but also occurs in certain syntactic configurations in NC-varieties, like West Flemish: if an *n*-word occurs at surface structure to the right of the adverb *nie(t)*, Double negation is applied, otherwise, the sentence yields a NC reading (10b). In fact it is even possible to construct a sentence that has both NC and DN (10b2). So far, I have not discovered any examples of DN in Middle Dutch, but this not excluded.

(10) DOUBLE NEGATION

a. *Standard Dutch*

1. dat Jan met *niets niet* tevreden was DN
that John with nothing not content was
'that John was not pleased with nothing'

2. dat Jan *niemand niets* geeft DN
that John no one nothing gives
'that John gives everyone something'

3. dat Jan *nooit over niemand niet* tevreden was³
that John never not about no one content was
'that John was not content about anyone ever'

4. [?]dat Jan *nooit niet over niemand* tevreden was
that John never not about no one content was
'It was always the case that John was content
about no one'
'It was never the case that John was content
about some people'

b. *Dialectal variation: West Flemish*

1. da Valère *nie van niemand* tevreden (*en-*)was DN
that V. not of no one content (neg-)was
'That V. wasn't pleased with no one'

³ Actually (10a3-4) are examples of triple negation. Combining two n-words leads to a positive and the combination with the third one turns the sentence into a negation again.

2. da Valère *nooit nie van niemand* tevreden was
 NC & DN
 that V. never not of no one content was
 'That V. wasn't ever pleased with no one'

Let us now have a look at the two other categories Van der Wouden defines in his dissertation. Weakening Negation (WN) is described as the occurrence of two negative elements, such that their common negative reading is not as strong as a single negative reading, but it surely has a negative connotation. A good example is the so-called *litotes* (cf 11a). Its meaning is the denial of unfriendly and can henceforth mean 'friendly' or 'friendly nor unfriendly'. The latter meaning however is the standard meaning for examples such as (11a). According to Horn (p.c.) this is due to pragmatic effects. So if (11a) is an instance of multiple negations, it is a subclass of DN.

But the question whether (11a) is an instance of multiple negation is harder to answer. These examples can be regarded as too single negation (as in 11b), whereby the predicate happens to bear a negative connotation. At least we may conclude that WN does not exist as a class of its own. Either it is a subclass of DN, or it is an instance of single negation.

- (11) WEAKENING NEGATION
- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| a. Hij is <i>niet onaardig</i> | Standard Dutch |
| He is not unfriendly | |
| 'He is not unfriendly' | |
| | |
| b. Hij is <i>niet slecht</i> | Standard Dutch |
| He is not bad | |
| 'He is not bad' | |

The final category of multiple negation discussed by Van der Wouden is Emphatic Negation (EN). Many examples of EN are found in idiolectal varieties of Dutch, whereby the (single) negative reading is enforced. Normally one of the two elements receives additional stress (see 12). Although their function is rather different from standard Negative Concord, their semantic behaviour is quite the same: two negative elements yield one semantic negation. Therefore I argue that EN forms a special subclass within the class of NC.

(12) EMPHATIC NEGATION

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| a. Ik heb het <i>NOOIT</i> niet gedaan | Idiolectal Dutch |
| I have it never not done | |
| 'I have never done it at all' | |
| | |
| b. Ik heb <i>niks</i> geen zin vandaag | Idiolectal Dutch |
| I have nothing no desire today | |
| 'I don't feel like anything at all today' | |

Thus we have reduced the categorization of multiple negation forms four classes to two classes: Negative Concord and Double Negation. This allows us to formulate the semantics of multiple negation in terms of complementary readings. If we take DN as default⁴, it is always the case that whenever a NC reading is not at possible, DN still applies. This allows us to formulate the following taxonomy of negation. Single negation can be

⁴ In every language DN applies between different sentences. NC is only possible within one and the same sentence, and almost always even within one and the same clause.

simplex (consisting of one element) or complex (consisting of two elements). Multiple negations are either DN or NC.⁵

(13) *A taxonomy of negation*

Single Negation (SN)	Complex Negation (CN) <i>en/ne ... nie(t)</i>	
	Simplex Negation	preverbal element: <i>en/ne ...</i>
		negative adverb: <i>nie(t)</i>
Multiple Negation (MN)	Double Negation (DN)	
	Negative Concord (NC)	Negative Spread (NS)
		Negative Doubling (ND)
		Negative Spread and Doubling (NSD)

4 The Correspondence between the Jespersen Cycle and Negative Concord

Let us now look at the correspondence between the data in section 1 and section 2. As we have seen the data from these sections suggest a correspondence between the two phenomena. The way single (sentential) negation is expressed seems to determine the interpretation of multiple

⁵ It is not clear how one should classify examples with a negative preverbal element and a negative quantifier. Is it Complex (Single) negation, or Negative Concord. The question is however disappears after the next section, where we will make strong claims about the relation between the occurrence of negative prefixes and NC.

negations. After all, in every variety that we have seen that has (at least) one single negative clitic, this variety exhibits Negative Concord. If the variety also has a negative adverb (*nie(t)*), then Double Negation is possible too. This does not mean however that Negative Concord is excluded in such a variety. If the variety shows Complex Negation (stage II-IV) both readings can be assigned, depending on the position of the negative adverb with respect to the finite verb: if the n-word stands to the right of V_{fin} , DN is assigned, if it stands to the left of V_{fin} the two negative elements will yield one negation (NC). Finally when the variety has lost its preverbal negative element, multiple negation can always be assigned a DN reading and sometimes an (idiolectal) CN reading too.

Hence based on Dutch microvariation we can formulate the following hypotheses:

- (13) a. *Stage I: @ No DN*
Stage I varieties are lacking Double Negation. Although this claim can hardly be tested for Dutch, tests in corresponding languages such as Czech and Italian show that these languages do not exhibit Double Negation as an instance of multiple negation
- b. *Stage II-IV: @ Both NC and DN*
Varieties that are able to express sentential negation by means of two negative elements show both NC and DN behavior depending on the position of an n-word with respect to the negative adverb *nie(t)*.

- c. *Stage V: ® Always DN (sometimes ambiguous with NC)*

In Stage V varieties the standard reading of multiple negation is Double Negation, although sometimes sentences can be ambiguous between the formal Double Negation reading and an informal idiolectal Negative Concord reading.

These claims are still hypotheses and will be the subject of further research. Within the current research for the Syntactic Atlas of Dutch Dialects (Barbiers 2000) 250 different dialects of Dutch are examined and the results that have been achieved so far, confirm the hypotheses. Of course these hypotheses should not only be tested for Dutch, but also for other languages. Paul Rowlett (1997, 1998) has checked a slightly different hypothesis about the correspondence between the Jespersen stage and the occurrence of NC too for several languages and he gets to the same result, based on some 20 languages.

So let us look at examples from other languages:

(14) *Stage I languages:*

- a. Milan *nevidi* Czech
 Milan neg-sees
 Milan does not see
- b. Milan *nevidi nikoho*⁶
 Milan not-sees no one
 NC: 'Milan does not see anyone'

⁶ For typographic reasons in all Czech examples diacritics have been left out.

(15) *Stage III languages:*

a. Jean *ne* mange *pas*
John neg eat neg
John does not drink

French

b. Jean *ne* mange *rien*
Jean neg eats nothing
NC: 'Jean does not eat anything'

c. Jean *ne* mange *pas* *rien*
Jean neg eats not nothing
DN: 'Jean does not eat nothing'

(16) *Stage V languages:*

a. Hans hat es *nie* gemacht
Hans has it not made
'Hans has not made it'

German

b. Hans hat es *nie* *nicht* gemacht
Hans has it never not made
DN: 'Hans has always made it'

c. *Nie* hat Hans es *nicht* gemacht
Hans has it never not made
DN: 'Hans has always made it'

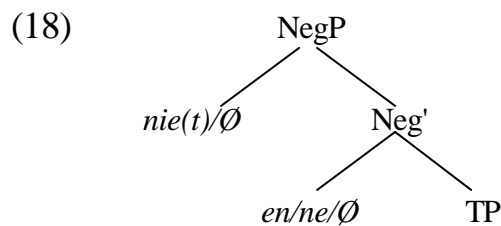
Our results in combination with Rowlett's observations enable us to formulate the table in (17) which shows that a change from one Jespersen stage to the subsequent one, may lead to a change in the interpretation of multiple negation.

(17) *Jespersen Stage & Multiple Negation* (cf Rowlett, 1997, 1998)

Variety/language	Jespersen Stage	NC	DN
Old Dutch, Czech, Italian	I	+	-
Middle Dutch, Standard French	III	+	+
West Flemish, Coll. French	IV	+	+
Standard Dutch, German Colloquial Dutch	V	- +/-	+

5 Outline for an account

In this section I will briefly describe the account I have for the correspondence between the Jespersen stage of a variety and the interpretation of multiple negation within this variety. I adopt Haegeman's structure of NegP (Haegeman, 1995, 1998), in which she considers negative adverbs to be in the specifier of NegP and negative prefixes such as *en* or *ne* in Dutch as heads of NegP. Hence Complex Negation is then considered as a doubly filled NegP⁷.



Before we discuss the syntactic structure of negative quantifiers, we should first have a look at their

⁷ For an alternative analysis in which the negative specifier and the negative head do not occur in one and the same maximal projection, cf Zanuttini (1998).

morphological form. In Dutch ever negative quantifier has the morphological form of $[n-\exists x]$, as demonstrated in (19).

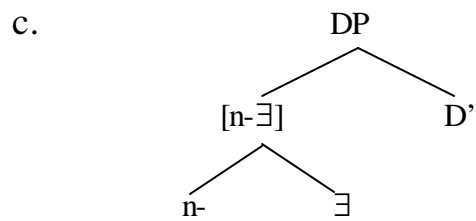
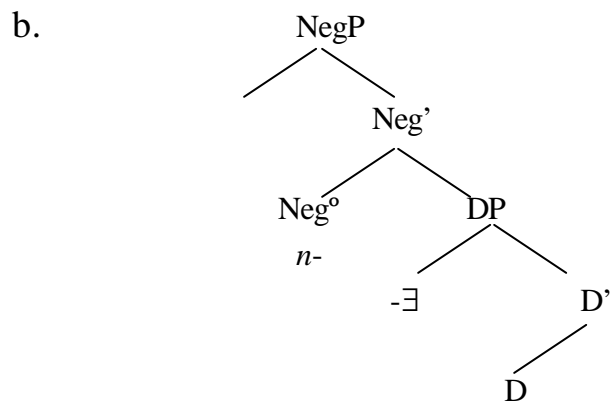
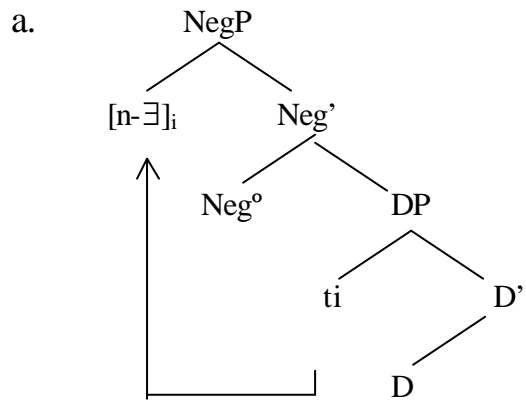
(19) *Morphological Form of N-words*

- | | | | |
|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
| a. iemand | niemand | somebody | nobody |
| b. ooit | nooit | ever | never |
| c. iets | niets | something | nothing |
| d. ergens | nergens | somewhere | nowhere |

Negative quantifiers can be assigned different structures. Is it a base-generated syntactic unit with an underlying morphological structure, or does the n-word form a syntactic complex unit, consisting of an existential quantifier and a negative prefix. Thus the following question arises: are (Dutch) negative quantifiers morphologically or syntactically complex?

There are three kinds of possible structures for n-words: (i) they are base generated base-generated and have no under-lying morphological structure; (ii) they consist out of a negative head (Neg°) that is attached to an existential quantifier in Spec,DP; or (iii) it is a morphologically complex unit existing out of an existential quantifier and a negative prefix that is inserted in Spec,DP as such and therefore syntactically not complex. For each class of structures there are possible structures. I gave an example of each structure in (20a-c).

(20) *Morphosyntax of N-words*



The examples above differ in two respects. Do they have a NegP or not and where is the locus of negation? Is it in a head position or in a spec position. In (20a) the n-word projects a NegP and the negation is located in its spec, (20b) shows a NegP too, but the negation is in head position and (20c) is an example, without a NegP, but with the negative element in a (morphological) head position (cf Giannakidou 1997, 2000).

This distinction of structures as in (20) has many consequences for the scope of the negative elements. I elaborate on Beghelli & Stowell (1997), who claim that ‘NQP’s take scope in the spec of NegP, where their [+Neg] feature is checked via Spec-Head agreement with the (silent) Neg^o head as in Zanuttini (1997).’

This means that if a NegP is lacking (when the negation is a morphological head), negative elements cannot have scope over the complement of their hosting DP, they assign only a negation to the quantifier, not their complements. This phenomenon can be illustrated with the scopal effects of negative adjectives. (cf 21): a negative adjective (morphologically denied) does have a negative meaning, but does not deny its syntactic complement.

- (21) [On-aardig] hoef je *(niet) te zijn
Unfriendly need[NPI] you (not) to be
You (don’t) need to be unfriendly

We see that morphological negation cannot license negative polarity items (NPI’s). Although the predicate has a negative meaning (the opposite of ‘friendly’), the affix is not able to fulfil its syntactic requirements of licensing the NPI. Or to put it in other words: on a syntactic level, the

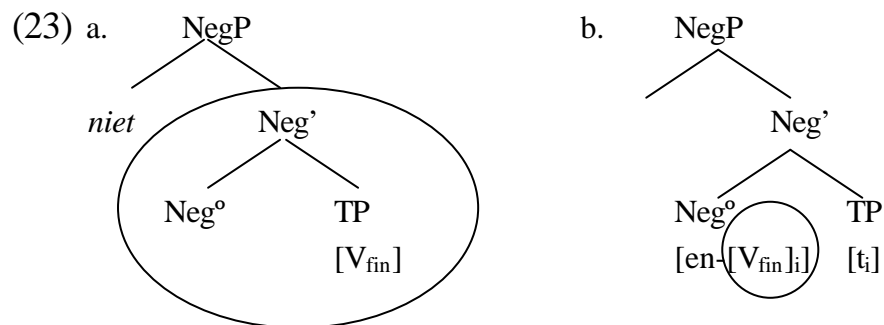
NPI is not within the scope of the negation. Thus it cannot be licensed and the sentence is ill-formed

At this moment we can reformulate the hypotheses from section (3) and (17). We see that all stages that have a negative head in order to express sentential negation show NC behaviour, and all the stages with DN as a possibility have a negative specifier. Since n-words can be categorized likewise, we can now propose the following parameter (22)

- (22) NEGATIVE PARAMETER: negation is realized via a negative HEAD/SPEC
- a. If the parameter is set on SPEC every negative element is located in Spec,NegP. This means that in cases of two n-words in a sentence, there are two XP's each dominated by NegP with an overt specifier, yielding DN.
 - b. If the negative marker is a head, it attaches to the element it denies. This could be on a syntactic level with a negative head projecting NegP dominating XP. This is always the case when XP is TP (hence attaching the verbal chain). When the element to be denied is a quantifier, the negation could also be expressed by a syntactic head (20b) as e.g. in French or by a morphological head as in West Flemish or Middle Dutch (e.g. [*n-iemand*], meaning 'no one'). Note that an attachment is formulated in terms of chains, so a single negative head could licence more than one element, as is the case in French.

NegP universally dominates TP. If the head is overt, it checks its feature against spec,NegP and V_{fin} moves from

T° to Neg° and the negative head gets attached to V. Since Spec,NegP is empty and the negative head is incorporated the scope of the negation is restricted to the verbal cluster. If the specifier is overt, it checks against Neg° and it has scope over the full complement



These scope effects show the semantic necessity of Negative Concord. If head negation is nothing more than the denial of the finite (or the verbal chain), this is not sentential negation. The fact that the meaning of such a sentence corresponds to sentential negation is only due to logical implication. This logical implication works fine for sentences without quantification, but as a consequence of quantifier raising principles, this implication holds no longer when a quantifier is involved. Let us look at the Czech data in (24). The implication holds in (24a), but not in (24b). This sentence has a referential reading. Only by adding a second n-word, the meaning is equivalent to the sentential negation (24c). Obviously, the negation of this second element may not have scope over its complement, because otherwise the verb negation would be cancelled. These results are in line with (22).

- (24) Stage I: Czech
- a. Milan *ne-vidi*
 Milan neg-see
 $(\sim\text{SEE})(\mathbf{m}) \rightarrow \neg\text{SEE}(\mathbf{m})$
 'Milan does't see'
- b. ?Milan *nevidi nekoho*
 Milan not-sees someone
 $\exists x.(\sim\text{SAW})(\mathbf{j},x) \not\rightarrow \neg\exists x.\text{SAW}(\mathbf{j},x)$
 'Milan does not see someone'
- c. Milan *nevidi nikoho*
 Milan not-sees no one
 $(\sim\exists x).((\sim\text{SAW})(\mathbf{j},x)) \rightarrow \neg\exists x.\text{SAW}(\mathbf{j},x)$
 'Milan does not see anyone'

For Stage II-IV varieties, multiple negation may be ambiguous depending on the position of the negative specifier. The negative adverb denies its full complement, the negative quantifier only itself, not its complement. Hence we get the meaning differences between (25b) and (25c). In a Stage V language like Standard Dutch finally, we see that DN is applied for every two (or more) n-words (26).

- (25) Stage III/IV West Flemish
- a. Valère *en-eet nie*
 Valère neg eats
 $(\neg\text{EAT})(\mathbf{v})$
 'Valère does not eat'

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