Grammaticalization and Jespersen's cycle of Negation

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Grammaticalization Theory (Heine, Kutev 2002: 2)

Grammaticalization describes the development from lexical forms to grammatical forms and from grammatical to even more grammatical froms.
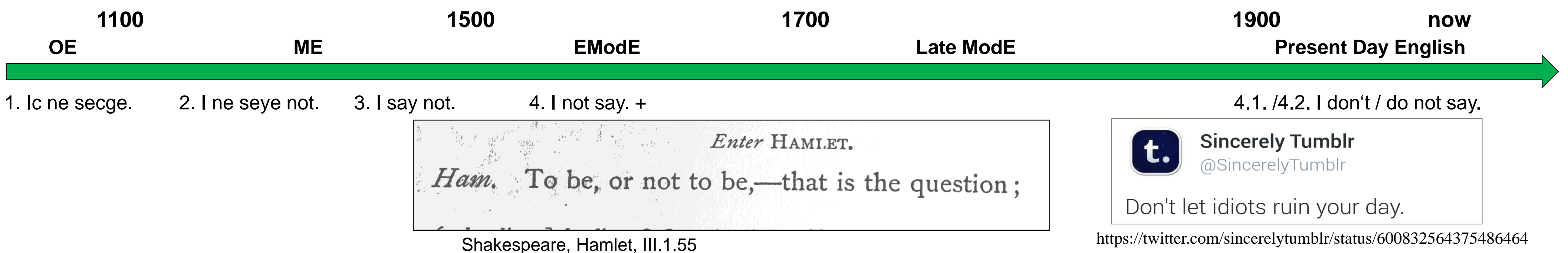
It is concerned with the genesis and the development of grammatical forms, and its primary goal is to describe how grammatical forms and constructions arise and develop through space and time and to explain why the structures are the way they are..

Four mechanisms of grammaticalization:

1. Desemanticization (or „semnatic bleaching") - loss in meaning content
2. Extension or context generalization – use in new contexts
3. Decategorization – loss in morphosyntactic properties characteristic of lexical or other less grammaticalized froms
4. Erosion or „phonetic reduction" - loss in phonetic substance

OE: *ne án wiht (nicht + ein + Wicht (= Mensch))*
OE   *ne + Verb + ne án wiht*
ME: *ne + Verb + naught / nought*
ModE: *ne + Verb + not*

Figure 1.   Jespersen's Cycle visualized through a timeline.

Jespersen's 1917 Negative Cycle

Definition of Jespersen's Cycle: (Blake, 1988: 90)

„[A]ll languages have a tendency to place the negative element early in the sentence, though it will not necessarily, or even usually, carry the principal stress. The absence of stress can result in this element becoming weak. When that occurs, the negation may be strengthened by the addition of a further negative element later in the sentence, and this later element may in time completely replace the original one. This process of weakening and strengthening can commence again."

1. „Classic" Old English: *ne*, always preceding the finite verb

2. Late Old English and throughout the Middle English period: *ne* strengthened by *not*; finite verbs placed between *ne* and *not*

3. Beginning in the Late Middle English period: *ne* in the *ne... not* periphrastic negation is commonly left unexpressed; finite verbs placed in front of *not*

4. Beginnig in the 15th century: two parallel alternatives arise in the domain of „lexical" verbs:

   1. The inflected lexical verb follows *not* (this type, which was never very frequent, disappears in the second half of the 18th century)

   2. The uniflected lexical verb follows *not* while a finite form of the dummy verb do precedes not (survives as the only way of marking clausal negation with lexical verbs; not develops an enclitic form -n't from around 1600)

1100	1500	1700	1900	now
OE	ME	EModE	Late ModE	Present Day English

1. Ic ne secge.   2. I ne seye not.   3. I say not.   4. I not say. +   4.1. /4.2. I don't / do not say.

Enter HAMLET.

Ham. To be, or not to be,—that is the question;

Shakespeare, Hamlet, III.1.55

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English	French
1. Ic ne secge. 2. I ne seye not. 3. I say not . 4. I not say. 4.1. I do not say. 4.2. I don't say.	1. Jeo ne di 2. Je ne dis (pas) 3. Je ne dis pas (standard written French) 4. Je (ne) dis pas (standard spoken French) 5. Je dis pas (colloquial French) "I don't say"

Figure 1.:   Comparing the development of negation in the English and French Language.

Controversy about „I not say."

There is a discussion among linguists whether the negation in the manner of „*I not say.*" developed due to Jespersen's Cycle or whether it was a trait of a poets' language.

Shakespeare and Jonson used this kind of negation frequently, but it was not only part of their emphatic and poetic language. It was also a characteristic of the spoken language in everyday situations at that time.

Another proof for „*I not say*." being part of the negational development can be seen, when looking at children learning French as their mothertongue. This kind of negational pattern is short lived and only lasts for about a month. In English History it was also a relatively short period, being a pattern only used in the 16th and 17th century. (Beukema 1999: 13-17)

Other aspects of Jespersen's Cycle

Frens Vossen and Johan van der Auwera (2014: 52-53) found out, that other languages, meaning austronesian languages, further developed their negation system by expanding to triple negation. Let's look for example at the development of negation in Aarschot dialects.

Single	*en*		
Double	*en … niet*		
Single or Double	*niet*	or	*en … niet … niet*
Double or Triple	*niet … niet*	or	*en … niet … niet*

Languages that don't really follow Jespersen's Theory

English and French both follow Jespersen's Theory of Negation and both are at the same stage. But there are other languages that don't follow his theory whose development stop at a certain stage.

The Italian and the Spanish language stopped developing at Stage 1. (Beukema 1999: 11)

Italian   *Gianni **no** parla.*   (Gianni doesn't speak.)

Spanish   ***No** hablo español.* (I don't speak spanish.)

German for example stopped at Stage 3. (Jespersen 1917: 10)

   *Ich singe **nicht**.*   (I don't sing.)

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