**Introduction**

It would be difficult to deny the existence of recurrent topics and research areas in English linguistics and, even more, in the general linguistic panorama. They are generally fields of study that stand out for their complexity and universality. They normally show relevant implications for the entire grammatical system and they tend to be susceptible of analysis from multiple perspectives and approaches. Without doubt, one of these major linguistic areas is negation. Several scholars (Jespersen 1917; Poldauf 1979; Horn 1978; Tottie 1991, Wouden 1997) to mention just a few, have already referred to the linguistic and extralinguistic reasons and factors that justify the study of negative polarity as it is connected not only with Linguistics but with a wide range of disciplines. There is such a variety of bibliography of negation, mostly bearing on negation in English, and this number has certainly been increased in the last two decades with many contributions dealing with the syntactic and socio-pragmatics of English negation at both the micro and macro levels of language. However, there are still some areas of this field which deserve closer study.

Multiple negation – the use of two or sometimes several negative markers in a statement – often provokes disapproval, and is viewed by many speakers as somehow illogical: two negatives surely do not make a positive? This prescriptive view of language – the notion that linguistic rules should apply according to logic or mathematics – stems from eighteenth-century attempts by the so-called grammarians to make the English Language conform to a certain set of rules. In many cases these rules applied to the classical languages of Ancient Greek and Latin, but not to English, which is after all ostensibly a Germanic language. You only have to consider the French constructions *ne… pas* or *ne… jamais* to realize other languages allow multiple negation quite happily and, closer to home the construction *neither*… nor seems to escape disapproval.

Multiple negatives were considered perfectly acceptable in most forms of Early and Middle English. Although modern Standard English speakers studiously avoid this, multiple negatives thrive in most non-standard dialects of English, often serving to intensify or enhance the negative impact of a statement.

I used many theoretical books to do my course paper, such as: «Negation in English and Other Languages» by Otto Jespersen; «Negative Contexts: Collocation, Polarity, and Multiple Negation» by Ton van der Wouden and others, where I have found all necessary information for my investigation.

The object of the course paper is the phenomenon of multiple negation through the history of English.

The aim of the course paper lies in investigation multiple negation in different periods of the history of English and to find and analyze multiple negation in the «Morte Darthur» by Thomas Malory.

multiple negation english classification

**1. Multiple negation in the history of English**

* 1. **Old English and Middle English periods**

Multiple negation is a quite common phenomenon in most European languages (Horn, 1978; Dahl, 1979; Payne, 1985). Structures of this kind are frequent in the languages of the Slavic family (e.g. Russian, Macedonian, Czech, Bulgarian, Lithuanian) as well as in the Romance languages (e.g. Portuguese, Sardinian, Frulian, Galician, Catalan, Italian, Spanish, French). However, multiple negation does not normally apply to modern Germanic languages, such as Danish, German, Dutch, Icelandic, Swedish, Frisian, as well, of course, as English itself.Surprisingly enough, in the particular case of English, a survey of its historical development shows that multiple negation was common in Old, Middle and Early Modern English (cf. Traugott, 1992:268; Barber, 1993:119).

The two or more negative words are used to negate the sentence.

1. Ne they be nat in commune … nor one man hath nat al vertues. (Elyot, Governor)
2. Withstand not the knowen trueth no longer. (Martin Marprelate)
3. I haue one heart, one bosome, and one truth,

And that no woman has nor neuer none

Shall mistris be of it, saue I alone. (Shakespeare, Twelfth Night

These negatives do not cancel one another out, but reinforce one another: the more negatives there are, the more emphatic the negation is. In late Middle English, negation is often achieved by putting *ne* early in the sentence, and *nat* after the verb. This is still found in the early sixteenth century, as in example (1). As *ne* fell into disuse, it becomes common to negate a sentence with *nat* (or *not* alone). Nevertheless, multiple negation continues to be found alongside simple *not* throughout the sixteen century, as in 2 and 3.

Jespersen (1940:426–429) describes the rise of multiple negation as follows, Originally, sentences were negated with the negative particle *ne,* as in *Ic ne secge* «I do not say». As *ne* is arelatively inconspicuous element, being regularly reduced and fused with the verb, it came to be strengthened with another negative, such as *na «*'no», *nalles* «not at all» or *noht*, from *nowiht* «nothing». Both types, *Ic ne secge* and *Ic ne secge noht* occurred during the period of Old English for which we have written records. The use of the double negative was normal, less than 35 per cent of the total negative statements occur with multiple negative particles.

The second stage in the development ofnegation continues into the Middle English period, though with the multiple negative construction becoming increasingly common. Jacobsson (1970:19) even callsbit «the typical Middle English form». In the course of the Middle English period a decline sets in, and in the Morte *Darthur* we find this illustrated.

The multiple negation was already dying out in the Middle of the Early Modern period, however. It is rarely found in Standard English after the time of Shakespeare, except that it continues to be possible to use a second negative after initial *nor*, as a following extract from Congreve’s *Love for Love* (1965).

*Foresight:* Why if I was born to be a Cuckold, there’s no more to be said –

*Sir Sampson:* Nor no more to be done, Old Boy.

Gabriella Mazon discussed the nature and acceptability of the phenomenon of multiple negation. After alluding to different elements that may account for the stigmatization of this negative type, she shows that multiple negation in written English seems to grow less and less frequent than the time when it was censured by prescriptivist grammarians (Lowth, Campbell, Clarke, and Greenwood) and that very few occurrences appear in the eighteenth century. From this she concludes that «the statement that is often found to the effect that multiple negation was excluded from the standard as a consequence of the grammarians’ attacks is not correct, since the phenomenon had been on its way out of this variety for some time already» (2004:22–30).

**1.2 Decline of multiple negation**

In the course of the seventeenth century, however, the multiple negative began to go out of educated use. Undoubtedly, the chief cause of its gradual disappearance was the influence of classical literary Latin, then considered the most nearly perfect language. The fact that Cicero and Caesar did not multiply negatives in the most emphatic statements of negation weighed heavily with those who aspired to write well.

Multiple negation began to disappear rapidly in the first pars of sixteenth century, but it was not fully completed even by the first half of eighteenth century. In the disappearing of this phenomenon the significant differences emerged between the two London localities, i.e. basically between the City and Westminster. It was the court with its professional administrations that took the lead in the process. The letter sources suggest that the rest of London did not catch up with the court until towards the end of the sixteenth century. A passage from letter composed in 1523 by Thomas Cromwell, the king’s chief minister, is sited below showing the pattern of negation that was later to be codified as part of standard English. It may be contrasted with a passage from the correspondence of Sabine Johnson, a London merchant’s wife, writing to her husband in 1545. The divergent evidence on the loss of multiple negation supports the view that, in the Early Modern English period, supralocal processes did emanate both «from above» and «from below», in terms of social status as well as social awareness.
(Tieken, 1999:295–297)

…and wher as I accordinglye haue not in lyke wise remembrid and rescribid it hath bene for that I haue **not** hade **anuthing** to wryt of to your aduauncement. (Thomas Cromwell; CEEC, Cromwell I, 313)

Har answer was that she would **not** set har myend to **no** man tell she was delyvered and choirched (churched), and than as God shall provyde for har; (Sabine Johnson; CEEC, Johnson, 396)

According to Jespersen's account of the development of negation in English, multiple negation disappears simultaneously «the disappearance of *ne* precipitates the corrosion of multiple negation». It is certainly true that multiple negation is no longer a feature of formal standard English; this must have been the case for some time prior to its use being prohibited by the normative grammars of the eighteenth century. Greenwood (1711:160) appears *to* have been the first grammarian to comment on the use of double negation, observing that «Two *Negatives,* or two Adverbs of Denying do in English affirm», and it first came to be objected to around the middle of the century. Throughout the eighteenth century multiple negation is rarely found in the more formal types of language, such as informative prose styles and even the less public styles of certain letter writers. Nevertheless, the comments of the eighteenth-century grammarians suggest that multiple negation was still common in the spoken language of the period (Tieken 1999:281).

Multiple negation may have been banned from the written language, but its use in the more informal types of spoken English hardly appears to have been affected by the grammarians strictures. In the eighteenth century it regularly occurs in informal written language, as for example in journals and private letters, and today it is still widely used, though mostly in different constructions. The use of multiple negation is stigmatised, and many speakers of standard English, if asked, would deny that they make use of multiple negation in their speech. Nevertheless, in the more informal, colloquial registers the use of multiple negation is widespread. Some present-day English examples are the following:

1. «I didn't want to talk female intimacies. Not with her.» (Margaret Drabble, *A Summer Birdatge,* Penguin, 1963 [1975]:28)
2. It never did happen to me before, he said, not like that (David Lodge, Nice Work, Penguin, 1988 [1989]:301)
3. «Mt Vine's a pretty big operation.»

«Not for me he isn't» (J.F. Donleavy, A Fairy Tale of New York, Penguin, 1973 [1975]:64)

1. We should never have got married, I don't think. (Love Hurts, comedy series broadcast on BBC, 21/1/91)

In terms of the distinction into logical and non-logical types of multiple negation, examples (4) – (7) should all be characterised as belonging to the non-logical category; after all the negatives do not cancel each other out. Instead, they usually produce a distinctly emphatic effect, and as emphasis is frequently taken to be one of the functions of multiple negation, these sentences must be regarded as instances instances of multiple negation. They are even fairly acceptable from a normative point of view, possibly as a result of their not being easily recognisable as instances of multiple negation. In any case, they represent types of multiple negation which are different from those usually found in the eighteenth century and before; the earlier types survive mostly in non-standard dialects of English, or working-class speech according to Hughes and Trudgill (1979:14), and they are generally avoided by speakers of standard English.

Most kinds of *double negative* are inappropriate in spoken and written Standard English, except in jocular use: *Don’t never say that again. I can’t do nothing about it.* Eighteenth-century grammarians decided that since two negatives made a positive in mathematics and logic, they must do so in spoken and written English too. This was not always so, however, and the *double negative* remains one of the best illustrations of what was once a perfectly acceptable locution being driven by the decisions of grammarians, not out of the language, but out of Standard use. Chaucer used *double* and even *triple negatives,* and so did Shakespeare: these were simply powerful, heavily stressed, multiple negatives. And many speakers still use these constructions today, even though they are now shibboleths that mark speakers of Vulgar English.

Hughes and Trudgill (1990:13) observeshyperbolically that «in Vulgar American the double negative is so freely used that the simple negative appears to be bandoned». Single negatives «appear tobe affectations when encountered». Fries, however, seemsto have taken these words more literally than they were probably intended, commenting that «such a complete use of the multiple negative construction as he displays will only be heard from those who consciously attempt to caricature Vulgar English'. For a description of multiple negation in Black English Vernacular, in which it is particularly common.

Lowth (1762:126) alludes to the phenomenon of double negation in particular, and his rule number 16 specifically states that «two negatives in English, destroy one another, or are equivalent to an affirmative». As can be gathered from this citation, the foundation of his rules is reason; in other words, Language is treated in logical terms. As a consequence, multiple negation is objected to, since it goes against the rules of Logic, according to which two negative premises or propositions affirm rather than negate.

Traditional grammar also holds that double negatives combine to form an affirmative. We will therefore interpret the sentence *He cannot just do nothing* as an affirmative statement meaning «He must do something» unless we are prompted to view it as dialect or nonstandard speech. We will also assign an affirmative meaning to constructions that yoke *not* with an adjective or adverb that begins with a negative prefix such as *in –* or *un-,* as in *a not infrequent visitor, a not unjust decision.* In these expressions the double negative conveys a weaker affirmative than would be conveyed by the positive adjective or adverb by itself. Thus, *a not infrequent visitor* seems likely to visit less frequently than *a frequent visitor.* A double (or more accurately, multiple) negative is considered unacceptable in Standard English when it is used to convey or reinforce a negative meaning, as in *He didn't say nothing* (meaning «he said nothing» or «he didn't say anything»). Such constructions are standard in many other languages and in fact were once wholly acceptable in English. Thus, Chaucer could say of the Friar, *«Ther nas no man nowher so vertuous»*. In spite of this noble history, grammarians since the Renaissance have objected to the double negative in English. In their eagerness to make English conform to formal logic, they conceived and promulgated the notion that two negatives destroy each other and make a positive. This rule, vigorously advocated by teachers of grammar and writing, has become established as a fundamental of standard usage. · The ban on multiple negatives also applies to the combination of negatives with adverbs such as *hardly* and *scarcely.* It is therefore regarded as incorrect to say *I couldn't hardly do it* or *The car scarcely needs no oil.* These adverbs have a minimizing effect on the verb. They mean something like «almost not at all.» They resemble negative adverbs such as *not* and *never* in that they are used with *any, anybody,* and similar words rather than *none, nobody,* and other negatives. Thus, in standard usage one says *You barely have any time left,* just as one says *You don't have any time left,* but *You barely have no time left* is considered an unacceptable double negative. Nevertheless, multiple negatives continue to be widely used in a number of nonstandard varieties of English and are sometimes used by speakers of all educational levels when they want to strike a colloquial or popular note, as when President Reagan taunted his political opponents by saying *«You ain't seen nothing yet.»* · The ban on using double negatives to convey emphasis does not apply when the second negative appears in a separate phrase or clause, as in *I will not surrender, not today, not ever* or *He does not seek money, no more than he seeks fame.* Commas must be used to separate the negative phrases or clauses in these examples. The sentence *He does not seek money no more than he seeks fame* is unacceptable, whereas the equivalent sentence with *any* is perfectly acceptable and requires no comma: *He does not seek money any more than he seeks fame.*

**2. Approaches to the multiple negation classification**

According to Palacios Martinez (2001:480), different studies on the expression of negation in several non-standard varieties of English also draw our attention to multiple negative structures. Crystal (1995:326), for example, records the existence of treble and quadruple negatives in the English spoken in Farnworth, a municipal borough in the Greater Bolton area, north of Manchester. Trudgill (1990:13) also mentions that many non-standard dialects of British English such as Cockney have retained the old negative form, so that it is possible to come across expressions such as I *don 't* want *no* dinner. We also learn that in general Scottish English, multiple negation seems to be excluded from the system; however, in the Glasgow dialect, multiple negation is quite common. Finally, Labov (1972a, 1972b) and Baugh (1983) among others explain in great detail the expression of multiple negation in Black English Vernacular. Fascinating examples like the following are recorded: It *ain't no* cat *can't* get in *no* coop; Back in them times, there *ain't no* kid around that *ain't-wasn't* even thinkin' about smokin' *no* reefers (Labov, 1972:130); It *ain't no* way *no* girl *can't* wear *no* platforms to *no* amusement park (Baugh, 1983:83).

The rise and decline of multiple negation has been one of the central issues in the study of English negation and called forth active discussions, but there seems to be no agreement about the date when the decline of multiple negation begins to take place. This is mainly because the definitions of multiple negation vary from one scholar to another depending on the period(s) under discussion.

From all the studies available on multiple negation, Jespersen's account is no doubt the most complete, thorough and illustrative. He first refers to cases where negation expresses a positive meaning (e.g. *not without* some doubt), and then he explains what he calls «cumulative negation» or structures of double negatives as they are found in present-day non-standard English (such as He *didn't* find *nothing).* In his view, the existence of these constructions may be explained by the emotional character of repeated negation. As a separate variety of multiple negation he treated what might be called «resumptive negation». This is especially frequent when *not* is followed by a disjunctive combination with *neither…nor* or a restrictive addition with *not even*: «he cannot sleep neither at night nor in the daytime» or «he cannot sleep, not even after taking an opiate». A special case of «resumptive negation» is seen when *not* is softened down by an added *hardly*, which in itself would have been sufficient to express the idea: «He wasn’t changed at all hardly» (R. Kipling).

Closely connected with «resumptive negation» is paratactic negation: a negative is placed in a clause dependant on a verb of negative import, e.g «deny, forbid, hinder, doubt», as if the clause had been an independent sentence, or as if the corresponding positive verb had been used in the main sentence, e.g. «It *never* occurred to me to *doubt* that your work… would *not* advance our common object in the highest degree».

To speak about «resumptive negation», it is a second class of emphatic negation comprises, the characteristic of which is that after a negative sentence has been completed, something is added in a negative form with the obvious result that the negative result is heightened….In its pure form, the supplementary negative is added outside the frame of the first sentence, generally as an afterthought, as in ‘I shall never do it, not under any circumstances, not on any condition, neither at home nor abroad’, etc.

This type of negation can be divided into three categories:

Type I:

(1) a. He cannot sleep, neither at night nor in the daytime.

b. He cannot sleep, not even after taking an opiate.

c. He has no money, not so much as a dime

d. Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

Type II

The second type is not cited by Jespersen or Van der Wouden (as a separate type), nor elsewhere, except among a listing of types of «multiple negations’ in (Lawler 1977):

(2) a. I can’t go to the party, not with my clothes looking like this.

b. No, you may not borrow the car, not without doing your homework first.

c. You won’t be offered the job, not if I have anything to do with it.

d. I don’t have time to meet with you, not this afternoon anyway.

e. Would you use a shotgun to kill an elephant? Not and live to tell about it.

f. Can linguists study negation? Not and stay sane they can’t. (Lawler)

Type III

1. That isn’t really legal, I don’t believe.

Type III is different from types I and II in that the second negated phrase contains a propositional attitude verb, and the proposition expressed by the main clause plays the role, semantically, of the object of that verb. Types I and II have no propositional attitude verb in the second phrase; rather, that phrase most resembles an adjunct to the main clause. (Dowty, 2008)

Jespersen (1940:451), referring to the double (or treble) attraction, states that «in Elizabethan English this particular kind of repeated negation is comparatively rare, while the «resumptive accumulation» is frequent».

On the other hand, Iyeiri (2001:128, 138, 142), whose major concern is Middle English, classifies multiple negation into the following three types:

Type I multiple negation with the negative adverb *ne* (*ne…not*)

*Nare* noman ells dead ne sic ne unsele (Poema Morale, 201)

Type II multiple negation with conjunctive *ne/nor*

*Ne* ƥu ne cumest noʒt in Scotlonde (The Owl and the Nightingale, 908)

Type III multiple negation with the combination of *not, neither, never, no*, ets.

Ne *neuer* shal *none* be/born fairer than she (Reynard the Fox, 79/8)

As an overall conclusion, Iyeiri (2001:155) remarks that **«**muchof the declining process of multiple negation, in fact, takes place during the Middle English period».

Seright's(1966) study is much more restricted than Jespersen's. He confines himself to the analysis of standard double negative constructions, such as It is *not inconceivable* or It is *not impossible.* These sentences contain a negative verb or clause negation followed by a case of local negation, *inconceivable* and *impossible,* which constitute two examples of morphological or affixal negation. In his view, numerous instances of such standard double-negative constructions can be found and, in contrast to the examples typical of non-standard English such as They *don't* do *nothing,* they are generally «limited to the speech of the educated» (Seright, 1966:123). Mention is also made of sequences such as *Not* to mash *nor* break the grains, which contain a negative correlative conjunctive. Seright(1966) insists that the use of double negatives of this type is quite wide. (Palacios Martinez, 2001:480)

Rissanen (1999:272) observes that multiple negation was common in the sixteenth century. It must be noted here that Rissanen's definition of multiple negation is broad, as is evident from the four examples he gives:

(1) They cowd *not fynd no* londe at iiij score fadom (Torkington, 62)

(2) that the Capper *nor none other persone shalnot* take by hym self or any other persone to his use… (*Statutes, III* 34)

(3) I am not asham'd of my Name–*nor* my Face *neither.* (Vanbrugh, II.III)

(4) that no woman has; *nor neuer none* Shall mistris be of it, (Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, III.I)

Baker (1970) analyses what he calls «logical double sentences». From the perspective of the generative theory of that time, he formulates a polarity-reversal rule to explain the grammaticality of sentences such as There *isn 't* anyone in this camp who *wouldn't* rather be in Montpelier. The polarity-reversal rule operates on the cycle of the subordinate clause as it changes the derivational feature associated with would rather to [+ negative]. Its operation on the cycle of the main clause changes the polarity of would rather from [+ negative] to [– negative] and the polarity of anyone from [– negative] to [+ negative]. Attention is also paid to what he defines as *pseudo-negative sentences,* that is, verbal complements found with predicates such as *surprised, disappointed, relieved, glad, sorry, lucky, odd* or *strange,* which provide suitable environments for *any, ever,* and other elements normally required in negative contexts (e.g. We're *surprised* that *anyone* bought anything at all; John is *sorry* that *anything* happened; It's *strange* that *anyone* could solve the mystery in such short order). (Palacios Martinez, 2001:481)

Horn (1991), for his part, discusses the expression of litotes by means of double negative constructions. By litotes is meant the «a two-component structure in which two negations are joined to give a positive evaluation. Thus «not unkindly» actually means «kindly», though the positive effect is weakened and some lack of the speaker's confidence in his statement is implied. The first component of a litotes is always the negative particle «not», while the second, always negative in semantics, varies in form from a negatively affixed word (as above) to a negative phrase.

Litotes is especially expressive when the semantic centre of the whole structure is stylistically or/and emotionally coloured, as in the case of the following occasional creations: «Her face was not unhandsome» (A.H.) or «Her face was not unpretty».

The function of litotes has much in common with that of understatement – both weaken the effect of the utterance. The uniqueness of litotes lies in its specific «double negative» structure and in its weakening only the positive evaluation.

Pragmatically, the use of double negatives as in *«It's not impossible»* may be justified, according to Horn, by a series of motivations: politeness (the speaker does not want to commit oneself to a particular option), irony (the speaker acts as if hesitant or unsure on purpose), weight or impressiveness of style (the speaker intends to convey formality to the interlocutor), absence of corresponding positive (there is no word to refer to the opposite term), parallelism of structure (a similar construction was used before), quality (the speaker is neither sure nor unsure about what is being said) and minimisation of processing (in contexts of direct rebuttal or contradiction as a reply to a previous assertion).

Finally, Wouden (1997) devotes part three of his book on negative contexts to the study of multiple negation in different languages. For this scholar the addition of a negative to an already negative construction may lead to the following possibilities: (I) the structure containing various negatives may be

equivalent to a single one as in some varieties of sub-standard English, e.g. I *didn 't* see *nobody nowhere;* (II) the two negatives may weaken each other as in the case of litotes above, e.g. She's *not* an *unattractive* woman; (III) the two negatives cancel each other out as in logic, giving as result *no* negation, e.g. Neighbours should *not* be *uncooperative;* and (IV) the two negatives intensify each other, e.g. He *never* stops working, *not even* at Christmas. As can be easily gathered from the previous account, Wouden's analysis of multiple negation is mainly semantic rather than syntactic; the following taxonomy of multiple negation is derived from each of the four possibilities explained above: (I) negative concord, (II) litotes, (III) denial and (IV) emphatic negation. (Palacios Martinez, 2001:481–482)

**3. Analysis of Maylory’s *Morte Darthur***

The term «multiple negation» or «double negation» are often used ambiguously. Thus, for example they may be taken to refer to sentences like *Not many of the boys didn’t talk to John*, as in McCawley (1973:206). Though this is unmistakably a negative sentence, its effect is quite the opposite, the force for the assertion having been somewhat weakened by the use of two negatives instead of a straightforward affirmative (cf. Jespersen 1940:449). In popular terms, the negative in this sentence «cancel each other out» and are interpreted as a resulting positive, as in logic or mathematics. Seright (1966:124) suggested that the use of this tipe of multiple negation, which included constructions like *it is not unlikely that*…, is characteristic of educated usage; according to Patridge (1971:88) it is a type of construction peculiar to literary English.

Alternatively, the terms are used to describe negative sentences with more than one negative in which the negatives do not cancel each other out. For this type of negation Joly adopts the term «compound negation», as opposed to «simple negation».

Such sentences as example of which might be *I ain’t got no time for no liquor* (J.D. Salinger *The Catcher in the Rye* 1975:88, Penguin), are negative in meaning irrespective of the actual number of negatives they contain, because the negatives together serve to negate the sentences in which they occur. In contrast to the first type of multiple negation, which is often referred to as «logical», Seright observes that the second type is found only in «the uncultivated speech» ofthe uneducated (1966:123). «Hie same point of view is found in Quirk *et al*, (1985:799), who distinguish between the two types of double negation by identifying the first type with Standard English and the second with non-standard English. Though double negation is undeniably a feature of non-standard English, of both British and American English dialects,it also occurs in certain forms of the standard. Both types of multiple negation occur in the Morte *Dathur,* though the former is considerably less frequent than the latter. Here are the examples of the logical type of multiple negation:

(1) For I dere say there is no knight in this contrey that is nat in Arthures court that dare do batayle wyth sir Blamour de Ganys (220.3–4)

(2) Had nat ye bene, we had nat loste sir Trystram (282.17–18)

(3)… they founde nother man, nother woman that he ne was dede by the vengeaunce of Oure Lorde (493.37)

It goes without saying that the two types of construction do not happily coexist, particularly in a written text. After all, they each require a completely different interpretation, the one with a positive the otherwith a negative result. In the spoken language, no such problems exist As Labov (l972a:146) remarks: «When anunderlying double negative [i.e. with a positive meaning] is intended, speakers of nonstandard dialects use the same device as speakers of standard English: heavy stress on both negatives», Naturally, such a disambiguating device is not available in the written language. While the second type of multiple negation has been found since the Old English period, the rareness in the *Morte Darthur* of the first type of construction suggests that the logical type of multiple negation is a later development in the system of English negation.

To begin with, this definition lacks precision in that it covert a number of negative constructions which are not strictly speaking instances of multiple negation. To illustrate this point the following examples may be cited from the *Morte Darthur*

(4) for there was nother kynge, cayser, nother knyght that day (C 216.21:22)

(5) and ye shall have no shame nor velony (C 140.22)

(6) and woldyst never be made neyssh nother by watir nother by fyre (C 446.25–26)

Strictly speaking, all three instances would be covered by Barber’s definition – «two or more negative words are used to negate the sentence; these negatives do not cancel each other out». Even so, in a modernised form (4) would be fully acceptable in formal standard English today. It might be paraphrased as «for there was neither king, emperor nor knight that day…» (cf. Quirk et al*.* 1985:763 and 938).

Example (5) would likewise be acceptable in present-day standard English, though instead of *no, neither* would normally be used: «and you will have neither shame nor villainy» (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1985:938). According to Seright (1966:125), the construction would have to be rephrased as «and you will not have either shame or villainy» in order to be fully acceptable.

Example (6) is belonging to the category of resumptive negation. The negative effect in sentences like this is heightened, and the function of the tag seems to that of an afterthought which simultaneously emphasises the negation.

(7) that by no meany I can nat put her fro me (C 525.37–38)

(8) that he sholde never do none inchauntemente uppon hir (C 93.18)

(9) and horse ne harneyse gettvst thou none of myne (C 164.24–25)

(10) but in no wyse he wolde nat juste no more (C 303.17–18)

(11) yette woll I nat wyghte my lady to be in no joupardye (C 94.35–36)

(12) they had no joye to receyve no yeftes of a berdles boy (C 40. 10–11)

These examples were found in direct speech as well as in narrative passages of the *Mort Darthur*. This fact, combined with the frequency with which multiple negation is attested in the text, suggests that at the time it must still have been regarded as a perfectly acceptable device which could be employed in most contexts and registers. In his own prose, mostly prologues and epilogues to the books he printed and therefore written in a highly formal style, Caxton lokiwise used multiple negation. In this respect, usage has clearly undergone aconsiderable change in the course of time. Multiple negation occurs much less frequently in the *Morte Darthur* than during the Old English period, and in the text itself the disappearing process is very much in evidence.

The definition does not cover negative sentence with correlative pairs or triplets, such as *neither*… *nor* or *neither… nor* … *nor*, asthese negatives do not function independently but only in conjunction with each other, offering alternatives within the sentence. Sentence with a negative such as *not*, *never* or *no* followed be the negative conjunction *nor* are similarly excluded. Such sentences are to be interpreted as containing elliptical phrases or clauses, which offer alternatives to the negative statement made in the preceding clause. Thus, (5) may be expanded as follows: *and you will have no shame, nor will you have any villainy*. Sentence like (9), in which *nor* (or any of its Middle English equivalents) precedes any negative words in the sentences covered bythe definition. The reason for this is the following. As inEnglish a negative is generally found as early in the sentence as possible (Jespersen 1940:426), a sentence which only has the negative conjunction *nor* or even a correlative construction like *neither…nor* as part of one of its opening constituents would already from its very beginning be interpreted as negative, irrespective of whether or not the negative is part ofan elliptical construction with *nor* or with *neither*…*nor.* Any additional negatives further on in the sentence would therefore turn the sentence into an instance of multiple negation. Another example is the following sentence:

(13) for nother sir Bleoberys nother yett sir Palomydes woll not fyght with me on foote (C 244,4–5).

This sentence and all others like it will therefore be treated as instances of double negation, even though the actual number of negatives is more than two: *(nother…nother)… not*.

Most instances in the *Morte Darthur* with more than one negative are fairly straightforward cases either of multiple negation or of simple negation but with more than one negative *(neither… nor*, or sentences with *nor* such as example (5)).

Nevertheless there are a number of problematical cases, each of which will have to be analysed in detail in order to decide whether or not they are to be included in the corpus and if so, how. One example is the following sentence:

(14) I charge yow to saye to them that I commaunde them vpon payne of theyre hedes neuer to demaunde trybute ne taxe of me ne of my londes (C 131.7–9)

This sentence contains two instances of the negative coordinator *ne;* the first introduces an elliptical clause which may be expanded as «nor to demand any taxes». The second *ne* isa different matter, as a modem English paraphrase of the sentence bears out most dearly: «I command them… never to demand any tribute nor to demand any taxes, either of me or ofmy subjects». In this paraphrase the second negative has to be rendered by *or* as part of the coordinate phrase *either…or*. If *neither…nor* had been used, the sentence would have been an example of double negation, viz. of resumptive negation. In other words, *never* holds only the second *ne* within its scope, the first *ne* introducing by means of coordination an elliptical alternative (5).

In the language of the Morte Darthur as well as in many forms of English spoken today multiple negation usually serves a strengthening, rather than emphatic function.

**Conclusion**

A **double negative** occurs when two forms of negation are used in the same clause. In some languages (or varieties of a language), negative forms are consistently used throughout the sentence to express a single negation. In other languages, a double negative is used to negate a negation, and therefore, it resolves to a positive. In the former case, triple and quadruple negation can also be seen, which leads to the terms **multiple negation** or **negative concord**.

Double negatives are generally not used in written varieties of Standard English. Consider the phrase «I do not want nothing!» the intended meaning would be expressed as «I do not want anything!» in Standard English, according to prescriptive rules. However, if there is very heavy stress on «do not» or a specific plaintive stress on «nothing,» Standard English can utilize the form «I do not want nothing» as a way of emphasizing that the speaker would rather have «something» than «nothing» at all.

Although they are not used in Standard English, double negatives are used in various dialects of English, including Southern American English, African American Vernacular English, and most British regional dialects, most notably the East London (Cockney) and East Anglian dialects. This is similar to negative concord found in other languages. Often double negatives are considered incorrect grammatical usages; however, dialects which utilize double negatives do so consistently and follow a different set of descriptive linguistic rules.

Many linguistic scientists for many years investigate the phenomenon of multiple negation in the different periods of history of English language as well as in the Modern English.

In Old English and Early Middle English, there was a variety and diversity of Old English negative forms and some specific phenomena and rules of Old English negation, but in the course of time the situation has been changed.

To sum up, I would like to say, that the decline of multiple negation is a process in the history of English that resulted in diminution of using negation constructions in Modern English, especially in written. Nevertheless, it have not disappeared at all, and continues to exist in non-standard spoken English in many fields of life.

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