

**Transfer Opacity: syntactic resistance to contact-conditioned change on  
the basis of Chaucer's Boece.**

**0. Introduction.** The question I would like to pose in this paper is not so much why certain factors of another language were carried over into English, in this case from Middle French, but why certain factors were not. I will present one fragment here of a complex mosaic of facts concerning the interaction of negation and indefinites in Middle English. The mosaic hangs together as it were, in the light of syntactic theory. So this is the point that I would really like to make, that contemporary syntactic theory helps us gain insights into the grammar of historical texts or periods. This is important for the theory, as a testing ground for current hypotheses, as well as for the specific discipline, historical linguistics. Elsewhere similar claims are being made for second language acquisition, where great advances in our understanding have been made recently in error analysis on the basis of current generative theory.<sup>1</sup>

The structure of the paper will be to 1) contrast the use of negation for negative interrogatives in Chaucer's and Jean--de Meun's translation of Boethius. Consolation of Philosophy; 2) show how the facts for Chaucer's text fit in with the use of negation elsewhere in Chaucer (and other ME texts) and with the facts for negative interrogatives from a variety of other languages; 3) review two accounts for the use of negation in Early Middle English negative interrogatives by Jack and LaBrum; and 4) contrast these with the syntactic, picture we can glean from the ME texts

looked at.

### 1. **Boece.**

The first set of data is, the following:

Although according to Hanna and Lawler in the Riverside edition of Chaucer's Boece, Chaucer translated liberally, from the Latin and French texts, "often, preferring the syntax and wording of French" (1152), there is a particular construction in the French text that he avoids -- multiple negation in negative interrogatives (NI). A negative interrogative is a negative marker that invites a positive response by the listener, such as

(1) "Demestow nat," quod sche, "that alle thing that profiteth is good?"

"Yis," quod I [i.e.Boethius] (IV, 7,34ff)

(2) "Ne jugez tu pas donques que ce qui profite soit bon?"

"Oui", dis je (17f)]<sup>2</sup>

Negative interrogatives are popular with Boethius in this text as Philosophy asks the suffering prisoner a number of leading questions to help him achieve solace. Of the 43 NIs found in the prose section of Boece with single post-verbal negation, 23 correspond to sentences with multiple negation in the Jean de Meun text. Five such example's from the prose sections of Book I are:

(3) a. Art nat thou he. . . ? (Prose 2, line 4)

- b. Ne es tu pas cil qui. . .? (2f)
- (4) a. Knowestow me nat (2, 11f)  
 b. Ne me cognois tu pas? (6)
- (5) a. . . .shulde I nat parten. . . . (3, 14)  
 b. ne ne partiroie. (8f)
- (6) a. And scheweth it nat ynoghe. . . (4, 10)  
 b. . . .et n'est pas assés apparent. . .? (6f)
- (7) a. Was noght Fortune aschamed of this? (4,133f)  
 b. N'ot donques ici fortune point de honte? (70f)

A negative interrogative, then, presents a type of constraint against the otherwise very frequently used multiple negation. For instance, Einkenkel observes that the section of Boece that he examined for negation shows 77 instances of multiple negation as opposed to 7 and 16 for verbal negation and negative incorporation (as in 'I have no book') respectively (1912: 244). Einkenkel also observes a lack of double negation in the negative questions he encounters in this section.

Later I will return to the comparison between Jean de

Meun and Chaucer. It will be necessary to deal there with the contrast between NIs and questions with negative propositions and with potential counter-examples.

## **2.0. Negative Interrogatives in Chaucer and Cross-Linguistically**

2.1. Another work of Chaucer's presents in an equally dramatic way the presence of a constraint against NC in NIs. In Troilus and Criseyde (TC) we find a total of 47 NIs, none of which exhibit NC in the Riverside edition.<sup>3</sup> This remarkable fact is further bolstered by two other factors: (i) nine of the 47 instances of NIs also have an indefinite article. It can easily be shown in the same text, however, that there is a constraint against the cooccurrence of the indefinite article and clausemate negation, unless the indefinite is generic, specific or expresses figurative negation (and is not an instance of sentential negation) .<sup>4</sup> We must conclude that the same 'barrier' that disallows negative concord in NIs in Boece and Troilus and Criseyde exceptionally permits the cooccurrence of negation and the indefinite article. Secondly, if we examine the 19 extant complete TC MSS and 16 fragments annotated by Windeatt (1984), a look at the NIs under discussion shows that with three exceptions, there are no examples of NC in a NI in any of the variant

MSS. The three exceptions involve a single occurrence of ne. . . not in Caxton (1V:486) and n-. . . not in two other MSS (H5; IV:528/ D; V:40). The resultant construction in Caxton would destroy the meter. In addition, however, the rules for negation have changed significantly by the time of Caxton. Basically, then, we have two isolated examples of NC in the 47 instantiations of NIs in all of the variant MSS, both involving bound pre-verbal n-.<sup>5</sup> This finding is remarkable, for we find a large amount of variation in cases of negative concord vs. single negation, and most particularly in the case of pleonastic pre-verbal ne\_. (As one example, in the 49 sentences that the Riverside edition of TC has ne cooccurring with a negative determiner, there are altogether 190 instances in the variant MSS of ne being omitted and nine instances of the determiner being omitted.)

2.2. To evaluate this construction from a semantic viewpoint initially, the negation has scope over the question marker and not the proposition, i.e. 'Is it not the case that X' rather than 'Is it the case that not X.' But this does not say anything about what the facts should be in the actual syntax. What would be necessary for that would be a mapping formula that would predict the kind of

locality constraints under review. Yet cross-linguistically, negative interrogatives have an interesting impact on the syntax. In languages that have multiple negation, negative interrogatives provide an environment where positive polarity items, i.e. indefinites or adverbials that normally do not cooccur with negation, are used exceptionally in the same clause with negation, as in the following examples:

German:

- (8) Hat **nicht sogar** Helmut Lothar gratuliert?  
has not even Helmut Lothar congratulated  
'Didn't even Helmut congratulate Lothar?'  
(Kirschner 1983)

Serbo-Croatian:

- (9) Milan **ne** voli **ikoga**?  
Milan not see someone 'Didn't  
Milan see someone?'  
(c.f. Progovac 1988, 1991)

Portuguese:

- (10) Você **não viu alguém?**  
you not see someone  
'Didn't you see someone?'

Hungarian:

(11; Nem lattal valakit)

not saw-you someone? 'Didn't  
you see someone?'

In these cases, which are simply the ones that I have investigated, a constraint against the cooccurrence of an indefinite or adverbial with clause-mate negation is overridden in a negative interrogative. Thus, in all of the examples above, the underlined element does not normally occur with negation. When it does collocate with negation in this particular environment, it has the pragmatic force of referring to a specific individual and suggesting the occurrence of the event. This is true in the German example, (8), where the use of sogar rather than einmal suggests that Helmut does not normally congratulate people, but this time even he joined in. The fact that positive polarity items can collocate with negation is part of the impact of an NI on the syntax in all of these languages. In the corresponding declaratives to (9) - 11) above we would find the negative indefinites: nikoga, ninguem and senkit, respectively (and also in the 'genuine' questions, when the existence of a specific person is not presupposed).

French exhibits a similar behavior with regard to what Muller calls 'semi-negation' such as personne. Borillo says

that the use of the indefinite quelqu'un in the following sentence is equivalent to the use of personne:

- (12) a. Ne reconnais-tu pas quelqu'un? Si 'Don't  
you recognize someone? . . .Yes'  
(Borillo 1979, exs. 43/44)

In the following pair, however, Muller notes that the use of quelqu'un renders more explicit an interpretation where the negation signals an orientation towards an affirmative response (1987: 9):

- b. Est-ce que tu n'as vu **personne**?  
c. Est-ce que tu n'as pas vu **quelqu'un**?

This would approximate the difference between the English negative polarity item (NPI) 'any' and the indefinite 'someone' in English questions with negative force. Ladusaw (1980) predicts that in English a positive indefinite cannot be used in a negative question that explicitly anticipates a positive response, in other words a negative interrogative, as the lexical item must be able to be used in the expected response.<sup>6</sup> Thus for him, the first of the following two sentences could only be interpreted as a question with a negative proposition:

- (13) a. Didn't you see anyone?

b. Didn't you see someone?

If Ladusaw is correct, the difference between the use of the 'semi-negative' in French and the NPI in English is that the NPI is excluded from this environment in English. What all of the example sentences share is the fact that what Muller calls a 'blockage of negation' occurs in the environment with the negative interrogative. In (8)-(11) and (12b) and (13b) negation does not take scope over the adverbial or indefinite.

### **3.0. Two accounts of single negation in EME NIs and Complications**

3.1. Eienenkel's observation about the lack of multiple negation in questions with negation in Chaucer's *Boece* in little more than a footnote in a voluminous work. More recently, two linguists have observed the lack of multiple negation in Early Middle English (EME) texts. In looking at a number of texts from EME Jack observed in 1978 that:

a formal distinction is introduced by the choice of *ne* or *ne . . .nawt*. NI clauses, in which *ne* is regular, are in this way distinguished from negative imperative clauses and negative declarative clauses with the verb preceding the

subject, in both of which ne.... nawt  
predominates over ne. (Jack 1978c: 307)<sup>7</sup>

This observation is deficient in explanatory adequacy. First of all it does not provide an explanation for how the EME speaker could be motivated to make such a distinction. It cannot be the case, for example, that the speaker stops to ponder whether he is about to formulate a negative imperative or negative interrogative and how often negation should appear. In addition, however, there is no explanation for why the constraint is one-sided, i.e. there is a restriction in negative interrogatives but not in the other two. Finally a third problem is why all the instances of negation in the EME texts are instances of pre-verbal ne. That this is a problem becomes clear when we see that a similar restriction exists in ME against multiple negation in negative interrogatives, but now not restricted to pre-verbal ne. A syntactic account solves all three of these problems: First cross-linguistic evidence that there is a barrier against the scope of negation in a negative interrogative predicts a specific restriction on the collocation properties of negation and indefinites in this environment. Secondly, such a principle would be part of the unconscious grammar of the speaker and would not require reflection. Finally, there is evidence that single

post-verbal `not' still had the force of metalinguistic negation rather than sentential negation.

If this is indeed the case, then it would automatically rule out single post-verbal `not' being used to negate a question.

In her 1982 dissertation LaBrum also offers an explanation for the use of pre-verbal Ilk in EME questions. She believes that the explanation lies in the domain of pragmatics:

The preference for n V alone in VS questions ... may in fact be due to pragmatic factors--the use of minimal negation in sentences of minimal negative content [usually expecting a positive response] (LaBrum 1982: 100).

I think the exact motivation for and implications of `minimal negative content' would have to be spelled out in order for this to go through. I am convinced that there is room in the domain of pragmatics for an explanation for the force and syntactic restriction of negative interrogatives that we have seen at work in stages of English and cross-linguistically. Rather than explain the facts in EME, however, it simply would provide an understanding for a

series of language phenomena. The semanticist Mudersbach, at the University of Heidelberg, has claimed that negative interrogatives have the rhetorical effect that they do because the speaker paints the worst possible scenario that he then invites the listener to reject [pc]. For him the negation in this context is not standard sentential negation at all. The listener understands that and searches in the pragmatics for a possible interpretation.

In contrast with the two accounts cited above, the restriction in the Chaucer texts are well motivated from an understanding of the basic syntax of the texts. In the next section, I would like to discuss the Boece text in greater detail, throwing up the problems in the analysis as well, and then briefly mention other facts from ME texts that corroborate the principle of a negative questions serving as a barrier to the scope of negation.

3.2. First let me explain the system I used to test and confirm the hypothesis about a constraint against double negation in negative interrogatives, I examined all questions that are so designated in the prose sections of Boece in the Riverside edition of Chaucer. Any which appeared to violate the hypothesis, I then checked

against transcriptions of the MS Ii.3.21, University Lib., Cambridge, edited by Furnivall for the Chaucer Society in 1886 and Addit. MS 10,340, British Lib., transcribed by Morris for the Early English Text Society in 1868 (reprinted 1886) [referred to here as Furnivall and Morris]. The latter is particularly helpful due to the paraphrasing of the text in the margins. Also, I consulted a modern edition of the original Latin MS, the Jean de Meun text referred to above and Skeat's 1894 edition of Boethius.

There are quite a few sentences in the Boece text that are clearly to be interpreted as negative questions, i.e. a genuine question with a negative proposition, and that these often do exhibit negative concord, such as the following:

(14) what schulde thilke glorie ben, whan he **...nys** ryght **naught** in **no** wise? (II,7,149ff)

(15) "And that to governen this world," quod sche, **"ne** schal he **nevere** han nede of **noon** help fro withoute?"  
(III,12,58ff)

(16) "Thou **nilt nat** thanne denye," quod sche, "that  
the moevement of goynge **nys** in men by kynde?"  
**"No,** forsothe," quod I.

"Ne thou **ne** doutest **nat**," quod sche, "that  
thilke naturel office of goinge **ne** be the  
office of feet?"

"I **ne** doute it **nat** quod I (IV, 2, 97-104)

In (15), The topic of discussion is God. If negative concord were allowed in negative interrogatives, the sentence would be ambiguous. But presumably when Boethius responds a little later "Yys, thus it moot nedes be", he is unambiguously affirming the negative proposition, i.e. God does not need any help. Thus Morris' paraphrase of this question: "have we not seen that God... needs no external aid nor instrument" elicits the affirmation of a negative proposition. In Sentence (16) note that the same multiple negation used in the question is used in the response.

In Book I there were 11 negative interrogatives with post- verbal not (2: 4, 11f; 3: 14, 23f; 4: 10, 23f, 102, 133; 6: 57, 59, 61) and one with never. There was one negative interrogative with both ne and post-verbal not, but I would interpret ne in this case as the conjunction

and not the pre-verbal sentential negation (4: 12f). There were six questions that involve negation somewhere in the proposition. Of these four exhibit negative concord (4: 146f, 5: 30f; 6: 26f, 48) and two pre-verbal ne (4: 200, 232).

The negative interrogatives in Chaucer correspond to affirmative interrogatives in Jean de Meun as well (4: 14; 6: 32f,,3 , 35) and to negative interrogatives with single negation (2):

- (17) a. Ne estrivasmes nous ainse. . .? (3, 14f)  
 b. "Pour quoi", dis je, "ne m'en remembreroit il?" (6, 32)

In Book II, there are 12 negative interrogatives (NI) with post-verbal not, half of which show negative concord (NC) in the Jean de Meun text and 19 questions with negation somewhere in the proposition (NQ). In these latter there were five cases of NC, and five instances of pre-verbal n used alone.<sup>8</sup> This is apparently the environment alluded to by Eienkel when he says that Boece favors pre-verbal ne.

After Book 2, I no longer catalogued the negative questions and just focused on the NIs and potential counter-examples to the hypothesis as stated. At times it is difficult to decide between a negative interrogative and

a question with a negative proposition. One sentence in Book III shows a discrepancy between Furnivall and Morris, with negation lacking altogether in the latter (the former is essentially the same as Riverside):

- (18) Ne [But] aminges hem ther thei weren born.  
[ne] duren [nat] thilke dignytes alwey? (4,  
 78ff)

In the original Latin text, we find the construction with num, suggesting a questioning eliciting a negative response, and hence not a negative interrogative:

- (19) Sed hoc apud exteras nationes: inter eos vero,  
apud quos ortae Bunt, num perpetuo perdurant?

Philosophy's point, of course, is that dignity does not last perpetually, being also subject to the wheel of fortune. But still, in this section she is imagining Boethius' possible response so it is not entirely straight forward from the context what the intended rhetorical effect is to be.

Having put aside questions with a negative propositions, there are still exceptions to the rule that NIs do not exhibit NC in Chaucer's Boece. In taking a

closer look, however, it is clear that the exceptions themselves have a syntactic explanation. The most frequent environment, for example, is that of left dislocation. That the use of left dislocation can cause violations of syntactic rules is seen in the study of C. Allen (1980). In this study, Allen motivates a rule that in OE pied piping is obligatory in Wh-relatives (se and se the) and prohibited in relatives with the complementizer the. Free relatives are seen to categorize with the second group. There is one systematic exception to this last generalization -- in cases of left dislocation of the relative clause, we find pied piping and a resumptive pronoun as in<sup>9</sup>

(20) And to swa hwilcere leode swa we cumath.

and to so which-dat. people-dat. as we come

we cunnon thaere gereord

we know their language

'and whatever people we come to, we know their  
language'

(21) Ond thurh swa hwelces bene swa he gehaeled sy,

and through so which-gen prayer as he healed is,

thisses geleafa and wyrctnis seo lefed God

his belief and works be believed God

onfegne

acceptable

'and whoever's<sub>1</sub> prayer he<sub>2</sub> is healed through,  
let his<sub>1</sub> belief and works be believed acceptable  
to God'

(22) Ond on swa hwelcre stowe swa min throwunge  
and in so which-dat. place as my passion  
awriten sy and man tha maersige, afyrr thu.  
written is and one it celebrates drive you  
drihten from thaere stowe blindness

Lord from that place blindness

'and whatever place my passion is written in and is  
celebrated, drive, 0 Lord, blindness from that place'

(Allen 1980: 280)

The feature to be stressed here is the syntactic constellation that enables a circumvention of an established rule. This is an important observation, as it further motivates a syntactic rather than a stylistic or pragmatic explanation. In a similar way, we see that in Boece left dislocation allows a systematic violation of the well motivated constraint against NC appearing in NIs.

Examples, all from Book III, are:

(23) [thou that other-whyle entrest ther thou issest, and other-whyle issest ther thou entrest, **ne** foldest thou **nat** to-gide, by replicacioun of wordes. a manner wonderful cercle or environinge of the simplicitee devyne?

(12, 118ff [158ff in Riverside]<sup>10</sup> )

(24) a. And [the thinges eek that men wenen **ne** haven **none** soules]. **ne desire thei nat.** . .to kepyn that that is hirs (that is to seyn, that is accordyng to hir nature in conservacioun of hir beyng and enduryng)? (11,129ff)

b. [The thinges thanne, quod sche, that **ne** ben **none** goodis whan thei ben diverse, and whanne thei bygynnto ben al o thing. thanne ben thei goodes]--ne cometh it hem **nat** thanne be the getyng of unyte that thei ben maked goodes? Boece. "So it semeth." quod I. (11,33ff)

c. [This thyng thanne, quod sche, that **ne** hath nede of **no** foreyne thyng]. . . **nys nat** that a myry

thyng, and a joyful? (9,70ff)

In addition to these few examples of left dislocation, there were two other environments where multiple negation in a negative interrogative occurred: (i) when one of the negative items was a negative conjunction (1,4,12; IV,2,179ff<sup>11</sup>) and when it was the bound morpheme **n-** in nis (IV,2,172ff; IV,4,100ff). Remember that this latter case was the one counterexample to the lack of multiple negation in negative interrogatives in all of the variant MSS to Troilus and Criseyde. Though accounting for these few exceptions is problematic for the analysis, an important observation is that these exceptions can be described in terms of syntactic environment, indicating that we are dealing with a syntactic constraint and not a variation that can be explained away in terms of stylistic preference.

**4.0 Conclusion.** Kastovsky states this observation as follows in his introduction to Historical English Syntax:

Compared to historical English phonology and morphology, historical English syntax is still a relatively underresearched field. English shares this fate with other philologies, where many a historical

grammar or the grammar of an earlier period never got beyond phonology, or at best phonology and morphology, as was the case, for example, with Luick's Historische Grammatik der Englischen Sprache (1921-1940) or Jordan's Handbuch der mittelenglischen Grammatik (1925).

What the present study shows is that through the refinement of contemporary syntactic theory we are in the position to make significant statements about historical English syntax. What we know about negative interrogatives suggests that they present a boundary for the collocation properties of indefinites and clause-mate negation that otherwise hold. Two other properties of indefinites in ME, the first of which has already been mentioned, also support this view: 1) the indefinite article only appears with clause-mate negation if the indefinite is +specific, +generic or there is figurative negation (and hence not sentential); 2) the negative polarity items 'any' and 'ever' do not cooccur with clause-mate negation but do 'downstairs' from negation, i.e. where a clausal boundary intervenes. For negative interrogatives it seems to be the case that the boundary dictates that multiple negation could be interpreted as multiple instances of sentential negation. This would then explain the possible use of multiple

negation in French if by that time negation was seen as discontinuous rather than each marker having separate force, as was the case in Middle English. And this difference in syntax prevented Chaucer from borrowing this construction along with vocabulary.

1 See, for example, Rutherford 1987.

2 The French passages are taken from the Jean de Meun text edited by Dedeck-Hery and published posthumously in 1952. The numbers in parentheses refer to the lines from that edition. The English passages are taken from the 1987 Riverside Chaucer.

3 The factual data here are taken from Shanklin (1990/1992).

4 For studies of figurative negation in historical stages of English, c.f. Hein (1893) and Koskenniemi (1966).

5 The instances of NIs (38) with single negation and the variants not involving the indefinite article are (NV = 'no variants' [i.e. in Windeatt]):

I: 205: NV; 588: NV; 780: affirm interrog (Dg); 843: NV.

II: 226: not>now SMSS; 277: NV; 409: nere I> were I not (H3), >were I (S2); 758: NV; 775: nought> 0 (H2,Ph); 1422: is not> is now (Ph), >is it (Cx); 1465: seye nought> lo (Gg); 1467: NV.

III: 46: NV; 869: NV; 897: NV; [898: ne > 0 (S2), ne > or (J)/ ek> not (S1,Cx)]; 1427: NV.

IV: 250: affirmative interrog (H4); 263: NV; 276: NV; 303: NV; 377: NV; 486 > ne hastow (Cx: [not]? would ruin the meter); 488: NV; 528: nylt > nylt not (H5); [530: ne > 0 (Gg,H5,R,S2)]; 533: non > not (J), >nought (S2); 580: NV; 850: NV; 1095: NV; 1328: NV.

V: 40: nyl > wyl not (H3)/ whi nyl ich it not redresse (D); 41: NV; 43: NV; 46: NV; 49: NV; 1159: NV; 1276: NV; 1523: nat > 0 (A), > now (H3); 1688: NV {non other> no nother (J)}.

The nine instances of NIs with the indefinite article with only two relevant variants were: 11,1752; IV: 489,536,609,1093: many a yer> oftyn in thyn lyf, etc. (Gg,H3,Ph,J); V:45: a>0 (A,H2,Cx), 47,786ff,1708. [In IV: 1329 'in swich an aventure,' we find 'such a' in a NI.

6 "S should pose the question q only when he believes it to be possible for H to express its denotation set without major revision of the form of the question" (Ladusaw 1980: 151).

7 To show the range of texts Jack consulted, here is a table from his work with the results for negative declaratives/ imperatives:

**Table 1: Negative VS-Declaratives and Imperatives in Jack's Corpus***(Jack: 1978c, 302f [Tables 3 + 4])*

	Neg Declara tives (VS)		Neg Imperatives	
	<i>ne</i>	<i>ne. . nawt</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>ne. . nawt</i>
<u>Lambeth Homilies</u>				
Group A	11	8	10	0
Group B	1	3	0	0
<u>Trinity Homilies</u>	4	11	2	5
<u>Vices and Virtues</u>	5	17	5	11
<u>Wooing Group</u>	2	4	0	3
<u>]Catherine Group</u>	17	29	2	12
<u>Ancrene Riwe</u>	12	55	0	21

8 NI: 1: 98; 2: 58, 72f; 5: 11f, 37f, 54f, 56; 6: 29f; 7: 66f, 72, 136f, 155.

NC in NI: 2: 58; 5: 37f, 54f; 6: 29f; 7: 136f, 155.

NQ: 1: 76, 78; 2: 47, 80; 3: 25, 36f; 4: 74, 117, 153, 183; 5: 7, 101, 124; 6: 2f, 64, 66, 76f; 7: 71f, 151.

NC in NQ: 1: 76; 2: 80; 4: 183; 5: 124; 7: 151. NE in NQ: 4: 74, 117; 5: 7; 6: 64, 66.

9 "It turns out that in every single case of pied piping in indefinite wh-relatives, we find this left dislocation with resumptive pronouns." (280)

10 The punctuation for Sentence 23) is taken from Skeat. The Riverside edition has a full stop before *ne* rather than a comma, thus treating the material preceding negation as an apposition to the preceding clause. But the use of left-dislocation seems to license NC in a NI, especially if the left-dislocated element is itself negated, as illustrated by the sentences in 24).

11           (i) Ne knowen thei nat thanne wel that thei forleten the good wilfully, and turned hem wilfully to vices?

(IV, 2, 179ff)

The sentence above follows a series of questions linked by the conjunctions `but', `or' `and'. In the Latin original, the sentence begins with an, used to link questions.

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