

# Negative Polarity Items in Subjects in the History of English

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## 1. Introduction

In Present-day English, negative polarity items (henceforth NPIs) like *anyone* are allowed in the object position, but not in the subject position, as illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. John does not like *anyone*.  
b. \**Anyone* does not like John.

This is not a universal phenomenon. In languages like Japanese and Hindi, NPIs can appear in both object and subject positions. The examples in (2) show that the Japanese NPI *sika* is allowed in both the object and subject positions. (3) and (4) are instances of the Hindi NPI *koi-bhii*.

- (2) a. John-ga Mary-*sika* aisa-nai.  
John-NOM Mary-only like-Neg  
'John likes only Mary.'  
b. John-*sika* Mary-o aisa-nai.  
John-only Mary-ACC like-Neg  
'Only John likes Mary.'

- (3) *Koi-bhii nahii* aayaa  
Anybody SN came  
'Nobody came.' (Vasisht (2004 : 141))

- (4) *Koi-bhii nahii* khaat-aa th-aa sabzii  
Anyone SN eat.IMP.MASC be.PAST.MASC vegetables  
'No one used to eat vegetables.' (Vasisht (2000 : 113))

The difference between the Present-day English type NPI licensing and the Japanese and Hindi type NPI licensing is curious, and what is more intriguing to me is whether NPIs are allowed in the subject position in the history of English, and if so, what caused the loss of this phenomenon. This paper will show that the phenomenon of NPIs in the subject position did exist in Old English and will provide an analysis for the loss of it.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 overviews some studies on NPIs in subjects in the history of English. Section 3 carries out a diachronic survey of NPIs in the subject position, based on historical corpora. Section 4 discusses the change of the acceptability of NPIs in subjects from OE to ME from a perspective of features. Section 5 offers concluding remarks.

## 2. Previous Studies

Although there is not much syntactic work dedicated to the historical study of NPIs in subjects, some facts concerning this phenomenon is provided in de Swart (1998, 2010) and Mazzon (2004).

### 2.1. de Swart(1998, 2010)

De Swart (1998) suggests that in Old English, an NPI containing the morpheme *any* - could appear in the subject position and the subject precedes the sentence negation, as shown in (5) and (6). According to de Swart, the examples are cited from Wulfstan's *Canons of Edgar*, and Larbrum (1982) quoted them in support of her claim that the indefinites are in the scope of negation. De Swart states that all the examples that she found are in lawlike environments and they denote a generic use of *any*, which is not observed in Present-day English. The corpus search in de Swart (1998) shows that the majority of examples containing *any* in the subject position are subordinate clauses, but some are main clauses.

(5) And we lærað þæt *ænig* mæssepreost ana ne mæssige  
 And we teach that any mass-priest alone not should hold mass  
 'And we teach that no priest should hold mass alone.' (de Swart (1998 : 178))

(6) An riht is þæt *ænig* christen mon blod ne þycge  
 And right is that any Christian man blood not should-drink  
 'And it is right(law, good conduct)that no Christian man should drink blood.'  
 (de Swart (1998 : 178))

Furthermore, de Swart (2010) observes that NPIs can precede the preverbal negation *ne* in Old English as shown in (7) and (8).

- (7) *P*æt hi æfre on *ænine* man curs ne settan  
 that they ever on any man curse<sub>SN</sub> lay  
 ‘that they ever on any man curse not lay’ (de Swart (2010 : 18))
- (8) *Ængum* ne mæg se cræft losian  
 anyone<sub>SN</sub> may his craft loose  
 ‘anyone not may the skill abandon’ (de Swart (2010 : 18))

## 2.2. Mazzon (2004)

Mazzon (2004) gives some examples in which the subjects contain NPI *any*. They are attested in Old English. Mazzon suggests the possibility of the influence from the Latin original texts on this issue.

- (9) *þe ænig* mon ne mæg monnum areccan?  
 that any man not can to men explain (OE *Martyrology* 156)  
 ‘that no one can explain to others?’ (cf. Mazzon (2004 : 39))
- (10) *Ængum* ne mæg se cræft losian.  
 anyone not may the skill abandon (Liles (1972 : 131))  
 ‘No one can abandon the skill.’ (cf. Mazzon (2004 : 39))

### 3. Corpus Search

In this section, I will show that NPIs are allowed in the subject position only in Old English based on the historical corpora YCOE, PPCME 2, and PPCEME. The examples with *any* in the subject position are searched. The results are shown in Table 1.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1 *Any* in subjects in the history of English

OE					OE (-1150)
Words searched					1,450,376
<i>Any</i> in subjects					60
ME	M1 (1150-1250)	M2 (1250-1350)	M3 (1350-1420)	M4 (1420-1500)	ME (1150-1500)
Words searched	258,090	146,603	485,988	265,284	1,155,965
<i>Any</i> in subjects	0	0	0	0	0
EModE	E1 (1500-1570)	E2 (1570-1640)	E3 (1640-1710)		EModE (1500-1710)
Words searched	576,195	652,799	565,016		1,794,010
<i>Any</i> in subjects	0 (5) <sup>2</sup>	0 (2)	0		0 (7)

#### 3.1. Old English

As shown in Table 1, 60 examples with NPIs in the subject position are attested in Old English. In order to investigate whether these sentences are influenced by the Latinate original texts, it is necessary to examine the origin of these examples and identify whether they are translated from texts written originally in Latin. The information of these 60 examples is shown in Table 2.

<sup>1</sup> One may notice that my survey has a limitation in that only *any* is included in the survey. It is true that *anyone*, *anybody*, *anything*, etc. should also be included for a more comprehensive study. However, this thesis only takes *any* as the representative, hoping to capture the relevant phenomenon in the history of English.

<sup>2</sup> The numbers in the parentheses indicate the number of the instances in which non-NPI *any* is attested in the subject position. See section 3.2 for the details.

Table 2 Information of 60 examples with *any* in subjects in OE

Number of the examples	Text name	Dialect	Genre	Latin translation	Era	Word count
17	Canons of Edgar	West Saxon	Ecclesiastical laws	No	O4	2,118
16	Canons of Edgar		Ecclesiastical laws	No	O3	1,765
12	The Homilies of Wulfstan	West Saxon	Homilies	No	O34	28,768
3	Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy	West Saxon	Philosophy	Head : ? Proem : No Body : Yes	O2	48,443
2	Institutes of Polity		Ecclesiastical laws	No	O4	4,896
1	Ælfric's Catholic Homilies I	West Saxon	Homilies	No	O3	106,173
1	Saint Christopher		Biography, lives	?	O3	1,426
1	Gregory's Dialogues	West Saxon/ Anglian Mercian	Biography, lives	Yes	O24	91,553
1	Gregory's Dialogues	West Saxon	Biography, lives	Yes	O23	25,593
1	Laws of Cnut	West Saxon/X	Laws	No	O3	2,386
1	Laws of Æthelred V	West Saxon/X	Laws	No	O3	1,228
1	Laws of Æthelred VI	West Saxon/X	Laws	No	O3	2,096
1	Northumbra Preosta Lagu	West Saxon/X	Laws	No	O3	1,330
1	Martyrology	West Saxon/ Anglian Mercian	Biography, lives	No	O23	25,781
1	Vercelli Homilies		HomS : Homilies HomU : Homilies LS : Biography, Lives	?	O2	45,674

In Table 3, examples attested in Old English with *any* in subjects are divided according to their origin, whether they are Latinate or not.

Table 3 Results in terms of *Latin translation*

Latin translation	Yes	No	?
Number of the examples	5	53	2
Number of the texts	3	10	2
Word count	165,589	176,541	47,100
Frequency per 100,000 words	3.02	30.02	4.25

As mentioned in section 2, Mazzon (2004) suggests the possible influence from the Latinate original texts. However, Table 3 shows that the occurrence of the instances with NPI *any* in subjects is not common in the texts of Latin translation. Among the texts where instances of NPI *any* in subjects are attested, the frequency in the texts of non-Latinate origin is about ten times as high as that in the texts of Latin translation. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the phenomenon of NPIs in subjects is not limited to the texts of Latinate origin.<sup>3</sup>

Let us examine the survey results in terms of genre. Table 4 shows that 39 out of 60 examples in Old English are attested in the texts of (ecclesiastical) laws. This to some extent supports de Swart's observation that sentences with NPIs in subjects are attested in lawlike texts. However, it should be noted that not all the examples are attested in lawlike texts. 21 out of 60 examples are attested in the genres of "homilies," "philosophy," and "biography, lives."

Table 4 Survey results in terms of genre

Genre	(Ecclesiastical) laws	Homilies	Others
Number of the examples	39	14	7
Number of the texts	7	3	5
Word count	15819	180615	192796
Frequency per 100,000 words	246.54	7.75	3.63

As for some further characteristics of these 60 instances, 18 instances among them involve the expression *riht is þæt*, and NPI *any* is in the subject position of the clause preceded by the phrase *riht is þæt*. *Riht* means *right, law, canon, or rule*

<sup>3</sup> Another way of calculating frequency is dividing all the one hundred files in YCOE into two folders, with texts of Latin translation in one folder and texts of non-Latin translation in the other folder. And then search the instances of NPI *any* in subjects in the two folders, respectively. By this, two numbers are attained, i.e. the number of the instances attested in texts of Latin translation and the number of the instances attested in texts of non-Latin translation. Next, figure out the number of the words in each folder. Finally, divide the number of the instances by the number of the words. As a result, the statistics that enable us to compare the frequencies in another way are attained. It is unclearly which method of calculating frequency is better. I leave this open here and adopt the way in the text to calculate the frequency in question.

in Old English. In another 17 instances, the NPI *any* is in the subject position of the subordinate clause of *læran*. *Læran* means *to teach*, or *instruct*. Instances involving *riht is þæt*, *læran*, and *forbeóðan* are shown in (11-13) respectively. *Forbeóðan* means *to forbid* or *suppress*.

- (11) And riht is þæt *ænig* gelæred preost ne scende  
 And right is that any learned priest not put to shame  
 þone samlæredan, ac gebete hine gif he bet kunne.  
 the half-learned, but amend him if he better know.  
 ‘And we enjoin that no learned priest put to shame the half-learned, but amend  
 him, if he knows better.’ (cocanedgX,WCan\_1.1.2\_[Fowler]: 12.11)
- (12) And we lærað þæt *æni* wifmanneah weofode ne cume  
 And we teach that any womannear altar not come  
 þa hwile þe man mæssige.  
 when the man say Mass.  
 ‘and we teach that any woman should not come near the altar when one says  
 Mass.’ (cocanedgD,WCan\_1.1.1\_[Fowler]: 44.54)
- (13) And Godes forboda we forbeodað, þæt *ænig* preost  
 and God’s messengers we forbid, that any priest  
 oðre cirican naðer ne gebicgæ ne geþicgæ,  
 other church neither not purchase not take,  
 ‘and we God’s messengers forbid any priest, nor other church, to purchase and  
 take,’ (colawnorthu,LawNorthu: 2.5)

### 3.2. Early Modern English

As shown in Table 1, no examples involving *any* in subjects are attested in Middle English. However, in Early Modern English, seven instances with NPIs in the subject position are attested. They are shown in (14-20). Only (14) is presented with glosses, and the glosses of the rest are omitted.

- (14) but *any* learning learned by compulsion, tarieth not long in the mynde:  
 but any learning learned by compulsion, tarries not long in the mind  
 ‘All learning that is acquired under compulsion has no hold upon the mind.’  
 (ASCH-E1-P1,9V.172)

(15) that is to say yf we wyll afferme that any one epistle of saynt Paule, or *any* one place of his epistles, perteyneth not vnto the vnyuersall chirche of chryst, we take away all saynt Paules authoryte.

(FISHER-E1-H,1,314.11)

(16) As for their attire, *any* man of what degree soeuer that comes amongst them, must not disdaine to weare it :

(JOTAYLOR-E2-H,1,135.C2.215)

(17) for it is found in experience that the best Dogge vpon *any* indifferent bitch will not get so good a whelpe, as an indifferent Dogge vpon the best Bitch ;

(MARKHAM-E2-P2,1,99.137)

(18) And that the defendaunt in *any* plee upon *any* suche accion be not admitted to wage his lawe nor *any* pteccion nor essoynе for *eny* suche defend' untf' be allowed in the same.

(STAT-1500-E1-H,3,28.98)

(19) Provided alwaies That this Act or *any* thing therein contained shall not extend to prohibite the Exportation or carrying out of such Beere or Ale

(STAT-1690-E3-H,VII,459.127)

(20) if *any* Person educated in the Popish Religion or professing the same shall not within Six Months after he or she shall attaine the Age of Eighteene Yeares take the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy

(STAT-1690-E3-H,VII,587.143)

Free choice *any* can be modified by the word *almost*, but not NPI *any*. Since *any* in these seven examples can be modified by *almost*, it is reasonable to consider *any* in these examples as free choice *any*. Thus, based on the corpus search in this section, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of NPI *any* in subjects is attested only in Old English but not in the English thereafter. Next section, I will provide a feature-based account for this observation.

#### 4. A Feature-based Analysis

Following Song (2013), in an Old English example such as (21), *Ængum* in the subject position bears an interpretable focus feature(henceforth an [i-Foc] feature)and an uninterpretable negative feature(henceforth a [*u-Neg*] feature). On the other hand, *ne* bears an uninterpretable focus feature(henceforth a [*u-Foc*] feature)and an



interpretable negative feature (henceforth an [i-Neg] feature). *Ængum* and *ne* enter into an Agree relation, with the uninterpretable features deleted, and the NPI *Ængum* is successfully licensed.

- (21) *ængum*<sub>[i-Foc][±Neg]</sub> *ne*<sub>[±Foc][i-Neg]</sub> *mæg se cræft losian*  
┌───┐  
| |  
└───┘  
Agree

In Old English, in the case where the NPI is in the object position, the licensing mechanism of the NPI is similar, as shown in (22) and (23).

- (22) He *ne* *zēpafodeþæt ænig man ænig fæt ðurh þam templ bære.*  
 he not allow that any man any jar through the temple bear  
 ‘He didn’t allow that any man bear any jar through the temple.’

(c1000 *Ags. Gosp.* Mark xi. 16)

- (23) He *ne*<sub>[±Foc][i-Neg]</sub> *zēpafodeþæt ænig*<sub>[i-Foc][±Neg]</sub> *man ænig*<sub>[i-Foc][±Neg]</sub> *fæt …*  
┌───┐  
| |  
└───┘  
Agree

Chomsky (2000, 2001) stipulates that  $\alpha$  can agree with  $\beta$  iff:  $\alpha$  carries at least one unvalued and uninterpretable feature and  $\beta$  carries a matching interpretable and valued feature;  $\alpha$  c-commands  $\beta$ ;  $\beta$  is the closest goal to  $\alpha$ ;  $\beta$  bears an unvalued uninterpretable feature. Whereas, Zeijlstra (2012) points out the problems of Chomsky’s theory of Agree, and suggests that  $\alpha$  can Agree with  $\beta$  iff:  $\alpha$  carries at least one uninterpretable feature and  $\beta$  carries a matching interpretable feature;  $\beta$  c-commands  $\alpha$ ;  $\beta$  is the closest goal to  $\alpha$ . Following Zeijlstra (2012), in Middle English, *ne* bears a [i-Neg] feature and *ani* bears an [*u-Neg*] feature. *ne* and *ani* enter into an Agree relation and the NPI *ani* is successfully licensed. In Middle English, the [i-Foc] and [*u-Foc*] feature disappeared or changed to semantic negative feature, resulting in the loss of the phenomenon in which an NPI occurs in the subject position.

- (24) *þe ondfule ne kepte nawt þet ani dealede of his god.*  
 The malicious person not kept destroy that any deal of his God.  
 ‘The bad person doesn’t keep but destroy any deal of his God.’

(CMANCRIW,II.183.2580)

(25) þe ondfule *ne*<sub>[i-Neg]</sub> kepte nawt þæt *an*<sub>[+Neg]</sub> dealede of his god.  
┌──────────┐  
Agree  
└──────────┘

As for Stage Two *ne*, the relevant example, features and the Agree operation are shown in (26) and (27).

(26) ac of hem *ne* speke ic *noht*  
 but of them neg spoke I not  
 ‘but I did not speak of them’ (CMTRINIT,95.1271)

(27) ac of hem *ne*<sub>[+Neg]</sub> speke ic *noht*<sub>[i-Neg]</sub>  
┌──────────┐  
Agree  
└──────────┘

See also (28) and (29) for the instance of Stage Two *ne* with NPI *eny*, as well as the relevant features and the Agree operation.<sup>4</sup>

(28) *ne* þey schulle *not* apele fro *eny* vnrytful dom ;  
 NEG they shall not appeal from any unrightful realm  
 ‘they shall not call any unrightful kingdom.’ (CMAELR3,57.986)

(29) *ne*<sub>[+Neg]</sub> þey schulle *not*<sub>[i-Neg]</sub> apele fro *eny*<sub>[+Neg]</sub> vnrytful dom ;  
┌──────────┐  
Agree  
└──────────┘

Sentential negation which is marked by *not* alone appeared in about 1350. In the Modern English example (30) and the present-day English example (31), *not* bears an [i-Neg] feature and *any* bears a [+Neg] feature and following Zeijlstra (2012) the two enter into an Agree relation. Since *not* only bears an interpretable feature, NPI *any* which bears an uninterpretable feature cannot appear in the subject position.

(30) We present *not*<sub>[i-Neg]</sub> these as *any*<sub>[+Neg]</sub> strange sight.  
┌──────────┐  
Agree  
└──────────┘ (1658 Sir T. Browne *Hydriot*. Ded.)

(31) John does *not*<sub>[i-Neg]</sub> like *anyone*<sub>[+Neg]</sub>.  
┌──────────┐  
Agree  
└──────────┘

<sup>4</sup> The Agree operation in (27) and (29) takes place in the stage of the derivation in which *noht* / *not* c-commands *ne*.

The feature specifications of *any*, *ne* and *not* in the history of English are illustrated in (32-34).

- (32) *any* : semantic features [i-Foc] and [*u-Neg*] → [*u-Neg*]  
 (free choice) (NPI in OE) (NPI after OE)
- (33) Stage semantic features [*u-Foc*] and [i-Neg] → [i-Neg]  
 One *ne* : (without NPIs) (in OE, with NPIs) (after OE, with NPIs)
- (34) *not* : [i-Neg]

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has done a diachronic survey concerning NPIs in subjects in the history of English. The necessity of this survey lies in the uncertainty in the literature concerning the existence of NPIs in subjects in the history of English. The results of the corpus search indicate that NPIs appeared in subjects in Old English but not afterwards. Based on the results of the survey, I have provided a feature based account for the loss of the Old English phenomenon in which an NPI occurs in the subject position in the framework of the minimalist program. It has been proposed that the loss of the Old English phenomenon is due to the loss of the focus feature as a formal feature.

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