

Left peripheral NEG as a discourse particle

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The present little article is in reality only a footnote.¹ But it is a footnote to several topics. First it is a side remark on the use of sentence-initial negative markers in older versions of the Germanic languages, in particular Gothic, Old English and Old High German. Second, it shows that there are instances of sentence initial negative markers also in modern varieties of German, and furthermore that these cases are best treated as instances of discourse particles. These are all topics that I have never before worked on, but they do figure prominently in the work of Liliane Haegeman.

It is generally believed that sentence initial particles, which used to be quite frequent in older varieties of German, have been lost. See, for example, Petrova (2017), particularly section 4 entitled “The loss of left-peripheral sentence particles and the rise of modal particles in German”. In the few pages below I will argue that while there may not be many, there definitely are modal particles (or discourse particles) at the left edge in at least some varieties of present day German.

In some modern varieties of German, sentence initial occurrences of the negative particle (‘nicht’) can be observed. The phenomenon is primarily limited to Austrian German but is marginally also present (or at least perceived as ‘something that some people say’) in other southern varieties of German, see for instance the example (5) from Zurich German (Züritütsch) below. The meaning of this sentence initial negative marker (henceforth NEG₁) is, however, quite distinct from ‘normal’ sentence negation. NEG₁ roughly expresses something rang-

¹ This squib is dedicated to Liliane Haegeman, who spent a short but memorable time in my department at Tilburg University in the early 80s and has remained a friend ever since and whose productivity has never ceased to impress me. Thanks are due to Josef Bayer and Martin Prinzhorn for valuable comments as well as to Elisabeth Kriechbaum for her native judgments. Thanks also to the participants at the memorial meeting of the Models of Grammar Group of Tilburg University in September 2017 in Arezzo for commenting on an earlier version of this contribution.

ing from great surprise to indignation about the (non-negated) state of affairs described in the sentence. Here are some examples with various paraphrases:

- (1) Nicht kommst Du jetzt mit noch einer Fussnote!
 not come you now with yet another footnote
 'Don't tell me you are coming up with yet another footnote!
 'It just cannot be true that you are presenting another footnote!'
- (2) Nicht habt ihr die Kekse schon alle gegessen!
 not have you the cookies already all eaten
 'Don't tell me that you have eaten all the cookies.'
 'I cannot believe that you have eaten all the cookies.'
 'You have already eaten all the cookies? – You must be kidding!'

Sometimes there is a similar alternative with NEG₁ followed by a *that*-sentence:

- (3) a. Nicht kommt mir der Kerl noch einmal ins Haus!
 not comes me that guy another time in the house
 'It just is not going to happen that that guy comes into my house again!'
- b. Nicht dass mir der Kerl noch einmal ins Haus kommt!

Note that (1), (2) and (3a) have V₂ and not VFinal as in (3b). This is reminiscent of Swiss German *wäisch* ('you know/know you'), cf. van Riemsdijk (2001b), which I called a *wh*-prefix. Here's an example:

- (4) a. Wäisch wänn de Hans geschter häi choo isch?
 do-you-know when the Hans yesterday home come has
 'Do you know when Hans came home yesterday?'
- b. Wäisch wänn isch de Hans geschter häi choo?
 know-you when has the Hans yesterday home come
 'You won't believe what time Hans came home yesterday!'

(4a) is a real question, but (4b) is something like a rhetorical question: the speaker knows the answer and is so horrified by the answer (sc. 4am) that he wants to tell the listener. (4a) has a *wh*-question embedded under the question introducing verb *wäisch* ('do you know'), which is also a yes-no question. Accordingly the embedded verb is in the final position. In (4b) the *wh*-question is the main clause (V₂) in which *wäisch* is prefix to the *wh*-word, comparable to *wh*-suffixes like *the*

hell.²

The NEG1 examples, while predominantly found in Austria do not seem completely out in other German-speaking areas. Here is a Swiss German example I find acceptable:

- (5) Nöd häsch scho alles ggässe.
not have-you already everything eaten
'Don't tell me you have already eaten everything!'

But for me the VFinal version is ungrammatical.

- (6) *Nöd dass du scho alles ggässe häsch.

There are other variants that are clearly similar but have a different use, definitely not as discourse particles, and are, as far as I can tell, much less common. The Austrian daily *Der Standard*, for example, has a column called

- (7) Ned sei deppert!
not be stupid
'Don't be stupid!'

The question arises as to what the origin of NEG1 construction is. Old English did have initial negation, as the following example shows:³

- (8) Nat may the woful spirit in myn herte Declare o point of alle my
not can the woeful spirit in my heart declare one bit of all my
sorwes smerte
sorrows painful
'The woeful spirit in my heart cannot clarify one bit of all my painful sorrows'
(ca. 1385, Chaucer CT.Kn. A.2765: MED)

But examples of this sort can also be found in Old High German, as shown in the following examples from Migdalski (2016: 117, ex. (53c); 120 ex.(60)):

- (9) Ni liugu ih dauid.
NEG lie I David
'I will not lie to David' (OHG, Isidor, 612, (Axel-Tober 2007: 62))

² See van Riemsdijk (2001b). I am, of course, tempted to consider the prefix *wäisch* a graft, just like, e.g. *far from* in *a far from simple question*, cf. van Riemsdijk (2001a).

³The example is taken from Koike (2016: 251, ex. (170a)).

- (10) Ni-santa got sinan sun.
 NEG-sent God his son
 'God did not send his son' (OHG, Tatian, 407, 30, (Axel-Tober 2007: 61))

Breitbarth (2013) lists also some examples of initial negation from Old Low German (her example (1a): Old Saxon) and Old Dutch (her example (2a): Old Low Franconian).

- (11) 'Ni bium ic', quað he, 'that barn godes...'
 NEG am I spoke he the child god.GEN
 'I am not the child of God, he said' (Old Saxon. Heliand, 915)
- (12) Ne farlātu tu mi!
 NEG forsake you me
 'Do not forsake me!' (Old Low Franconian. WP LXX.9.2)

Other, later, examples are found in certain Bible or Torah translations of commandments. Here are a few cases I found:⁴

- (13) Aber wenn ist an ihm ein Makel, lahm oder blind, irgendeinen
 but if is on it a flaw lame or blind, any
 schlechten Makel, nicht sollst Du es schlachten für JHWH, deinen
 bad flaw not should you it slaughter for JHWH, your
 Gott.
 God
 'But if it has a flaw, being lame or blind, any bad flaw, do not slaughter it
 for JHWH, your God!'
- (14) Nicht sollst du ehebrechen, nicht sollst du töten, nicht sollst
 not should you commit-adultery, not should you kill, not should
 du begehren, etc.
 you covet
 'Not shalt thou commit adultery, not shalt thou kill, not shalt thou covet,
 ...' (Romans chapter 13)
- (15) Nicht darf er sich laben an Bächen, flutenden Strömen von Honig
 not may he himself refresh at creeks, flowing rivers of honey
 und Milch.
 and milk

⁴The examples in (13) to (16) are from Paganini (2009), example (17) is from Krüger (2001). The glosses and translations are mine.

(Job chapter 20)

- (16) Aber die Nichtswürdigen, wie geflohene (d.h. verabscheute) Dornen
but the worthless-ones, like detested horns
sind sie alle, denn nicht werden sie mit der Hand gefasst.
are they all, for not are they by the hand taken
(2. Samuel chapter 23 v. 6-13; Luther translation)

- (17) Viele wirst Du lenken, wenn die Vernunft Dich lenkt: von ihr wirst
many will you guide, if the reason you guides: from her will
du lernen, was und wie du es anpacken musst: nicht wirst du den
you learn what and how you it tackle must: not shall you the
Dingen anheimfallen.
things fall-prey-to

(Krüger 2001: Seneca Epistles 37,4)

Turning now to the syntactic position and semantic role of NEG₁, observe first, that it's interpretation is, essentially, extraclausal. This is easily seen from the ample translations provided above for the examples in (1)-(3). This observation is further strengthened by the fact that the NEG₁ element is itself often paraphrased by some short sentence such as 'don't tell me' or 'it just cannot be true' in example (1). The special status of NEG₁ is also evidenced by the fact that the negative marker induces a clear meaning contrast with the clause internal negation. Consider the following triple of examples:

- (18) a. Nicht kommst Du morgen wieder zu spät.
not come you tomorrow again too late
'Don't tell me you are going to be late again tomorrow!'
b. Du wirst morgen nicht wieder zu spät kommen.
you will tomorrow not again too late come
'You will not be late again tomorrow!'
c. Du wirst doch nicht etwa morgen wieder zu spät
you will surely not perhaps tomorrow again too late
kommen?
come
'Surely you will not be late again tomorrow – don't you dare!'

(18a) is the typical case of NEG₁: the speaker expresses great dismay if the hearer were to repeat being late tomorrow. It is a thinly veiled threat of blame or even punishment. (18b) is a bland statement: you will not be late tomorrow. Of course

it could, given the right pragmatic circumstances be used as dismay or threat, but it can just as easily mean something like it will not be snowing tomorrow, so the train will be on time and there is no reason why you should be late. (18c), however, shows that standard discourse particles (or modal particles as they are sometimes also called) such as *doch* and *etwa* can achieve an effect quite similar to the one caused by NEG1.

In Bayer & Struckmeier (2017), one of the properties of discourse particles they stress is that they are similar to 'high adverbs' (see in particular Cinque 1999). There are indeed good reasons for equating NEG1 with high adverbs, however I will not venture into the morass of the complex structure of the left periphery. See Rizzi (1997) for influential proposals and Haegeman & Lohndal (2017) for some critical discussion.

In view of the fact that you cannot be higher than the leftmost element in a sentence, it is, therefore, important to ask if there are any other potential cases of leftmost adverbs, under which I would subsume adjectives that are neither attributive nor predicative in relation to some element within the sentence. Martin Prinzhorn (p.c.) has pointed out to me a term paper by a student of his, David Diem, who has observed that a relevant construction can be found in Swiss German with certain adjectives, in particular *schön* ('nice'), *guet* ('good') and *schad* ('shame, pity, too bad'). Here are some examples that Diem found in the Swiss SMS Corpus (Stark et al. 2009-2015).

- (19) Schön gits di min schatz!
 nice exist you my treasure
 'Nice that you exist, my dear!'
- (20) Guet bisch früe ufs fäscht choo!
 good are-you early to-the party come
 'A good thing you came early to the party!'
- (21) Schad häsch du morn nöd frei,...
 pity have you tomorrow not free
 'A pity you are not free (sc. from work) tomorrow...'

One possible hypothesis might be that the adjective is really a predicate adjective in a structure like 'it is A', in Swiss German 's *isch* A', with the 'it is' part elided (or silent). Indeed such predicative adjective constructions can be construed with either V2 or with complementizer and VFinal. The VFinal variant of (21), for example, would be (22).

(22) Schad dass du morn nöd frei häsch,...

Recall that we observed above that the NEG₁ is often best paraphrased by a sentential expression as was mentioned between the examples (17) and (18) above. Future research will have to show whether left-peripheral discourse particles are limited to these instances of reduced mini-clauses.

To conclude, here is a particularly nice example of a Swiss German adjectival adverb in first position.

(23) Schön isch-s hüt schön!
nice is-it today nice
'It's nice that it's nice today!' (= It is a pleasant fact that the weather is nice today)

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