A critical investigation of Jespersen cycle in 13th century Old Norse

Luisa Troncone—luisa.troncone01@universitadipavia.it--University of Pavia

Being negation one of the most common language features, it was predictable to change continuously over time.

Here I investigated the differences between negations in Norse prose and poetry in works from the 13th century, in order to see if, and to what extent, poetry is more conservative than prose when coming to negation forms.

Methodology

The Jespersen cycle, named after the linguist Otto Jespersen, who described it at the beginning of the 20th century, affected not only Germanic languages, such as English or German, but also Latin (Gianollo, 2018) and non-Indo-European languages (Willis et al., 2013).

The cycle Jespersen described through English is the prototypical one:

> Prototypical Jespersen cycle:
>
> (I)   OE *Ic **ne** secge*
>
> (II)   ME *I **ne** seye **not***
>
> (III) EME *I say **not***
>
> (Jespersen, 1923: 9)

but there are also examples of cycles which lack of the second step (Gianollo, 2018: 176-180).

Old Norse had its first Jespersen cycle occurring between VII-IX century and the second one between IX-XI century.

Here I investigated the phases of the second cycle Old Norse underwent occurring in 3 comparable works from the 13th century: the *Grettis' Saga* (from now on GS), the *Poetic Edda* (P) and the *Book of Homilies* (H). We could compare theese works because Old Norse is equivalent to Old Icelandic.

At the same time I also illustrated the negations in the *Poetic Edda* as belonging to both the cycles, though it being written down during the 13th century.

Data

Figure 1: Negations in *Poetic Edda*.

First Cycle				
		Second Cycle		
I	II	III / I'	II'	III'
45	15	213	0	47

Total = 320

Figure 2: Second cycle negations in the three works.

	I'	III'	Total
GS	0	238	238
P	213	47	260
H	3	292	295
Total	216	577	793

Discussion

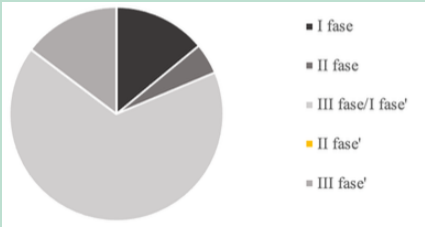Figure 3: Occurrences of the phases of the cycles in *Poetic Edda*

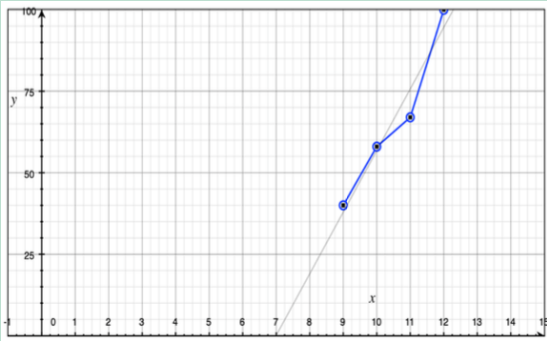Figure 4: Occurrences of the phases in *Poetic Edda* by cycle

What is noticeable is that even in the most recent verses we find (I) phase negations:

> (1) *svefn þú né sefr* (*Grp*, 29)

With the second cycle the negation with *ekki/ikke* is introduced, which then became the negative adverb in Modern Scandinavian languages.

Figure 5: Percentage of *Edda* texts where *ikke/ekki* occurs at least once.

> (2) *Du er ikke alene* (SKAM, s.3 ep. 9)

Through X^2 test and Cramer V it was shown that the differences between the three works were statistically significant (X_1^2, V_1 being for P-GS comparison, X_2^2, V_2 for P-H comparison and X_3^2, V_3 for H-GS comparison).

> X_1^2= 340,7 V_1= 0,827
> X_2^2= 380,5 V_2= 0.828
> X_3^2= 2 434 V_3= 0,068

References

An. (2004). Il Canzoniere Eddico (7 ed.). (P. Scardigli, A cura di, & M. Meli, Trad.) Garzanti.

An. (2015). The Saga of Grettir the Strong. (Ö. Thorsson, A cura di, & B. Scudder, Trad.) Penguin.

Dahl, Ö. (1979). Typology of sentence negation. , 17(1-2), 79-106. https://doi.org/10.1515/ling.1979.17.1-2.79

Gianollo, C. (2018). Indefinites between Latin and Romance. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jakubíček, M., Kilgarriff, A., Kovář, V., Rychlý, P., & Suchomel, V. (2013, July). The TenTen corpus family. In 7th International Corpus Linguistics Conference CL (pp. 125- 127).

Jespersen, O. (1917). Negation in English and other languages. København, A.F. Høst og søn.

McDougall, D. (1993). Homilies (West Norse) in Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia ed. Pulsiano, P. and Wolf, K.

Sigurðsson, G. (2004). The medieval Icelandic saga and oral tradition : a discourse on method. Cambridge, mass: Harvard University Press.

Sims-Williams, H. (2021). Token frequency as a determinant of morphological change. Journal of Linguistics, 1-37. doi:10.1017/S0022226721000438

Swart, H. (2010). Expression and Interpretation of Negation. Springer Dordrecht. Walkden, G., & Morrison, D. (2017). Regional variation in Jespersen's Cycle in Early Middle English. Studia Anglica Posnaniensia, 52(2).

Wallenberg, J. C., Ingason, A.C., Sigurgsson, E. F. & Rögnvaldsson, E. (2011). Icelandic Parsed Historical Corpus (IcePaHC) version 0.9.

Willis, D., Lucas, C., & Breitbarth, A. (2013). Comparing diachronies of negation. Volume I Case Studies, 1–50.