

*lef hi dan naet komma ne welle*  
Jespersen's Cycle in Old Frisian

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I'd like to thank the following persons for introducing me to Old Frisian:

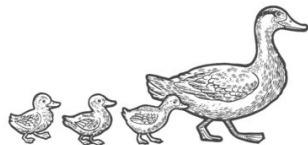
- **Alex Kerkhof** (Fryske Akademy Leeuwarden)
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- ① A profile of (Old) Frisian  
Diachrony and diatopy  
Sources for Old Frisian Studies
- ② The *Corpus Oudfries*
- ③ Turning old into new - negation change in Old Frisian  
Jespersen's Cycle  
Development in the Germanic language family  
Phonology as „motor“ of Jespersen's Cycle
- ④ Results: Jespersen's Cycle in the corpus



„Frisian“ today refers to the group of Frisian languages:

- **North Frisian** (*Friisk*): approx. 15,000 speakers in the district of North Friesland and on Helgoland (seriously endangered)
- **East Frisian** (*Fräisk*): the only surviving variety is Sater Frisian (*Seeltersk*) in the district of Cloppenburg; approx. 2,000 speakers
- **West Frisian** (*Frysk*): approx. 450,000 speakers (of which 75 % as L1) in the province of Fryslân (NL); stable use including the development of a standard variety

☢ Nowadays, the different varieties are **no longer mutually intelligible** (Swarte & Hilton 2013)!

# Diachrony and diatopy of Frisian

## History of Frisian

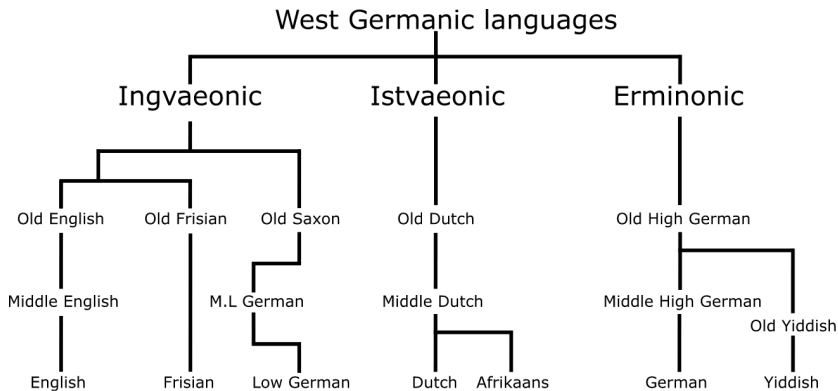


Figure: (A) classification of the West Germanic languages

- Two (attested) dialects of Old Frisian (1100-1550): **East** and **West Frisian** (separated by the Lauwers)
  - Differences esp. in phonology as well as lexic (Munske 1973)!
- Controversial since Sjölin (1966): **East & West** vs. **classical & post-classical Old Frisian** (cut: 1400!)
  - Often not attested at the same time – diachrony conceals diatopy!
- ❗ **No serious comparison** of both major dialects possible!
  - Finer subdivision (i) not possible and (ii) not useful!

# Diachrony and diatopy of Frisian

## Sources for Old Frisian Studies

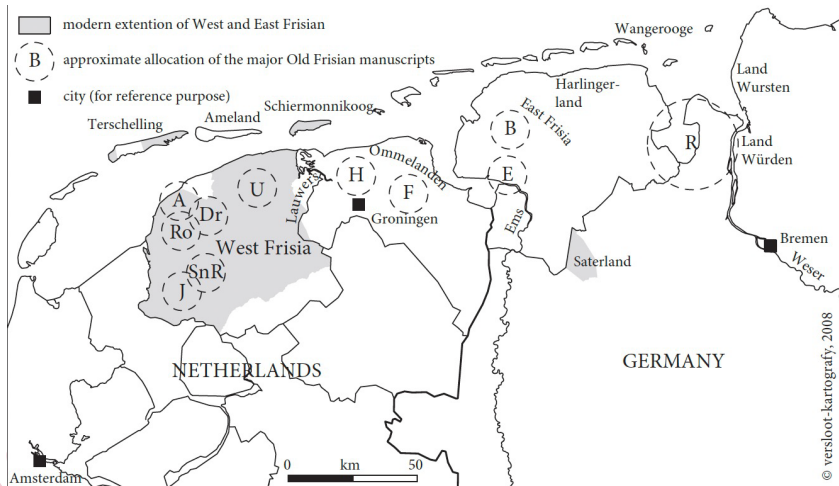


Figure: Attested Old Frisian Manuscripts (Bremmer 2009: 16)

- Corpus: **16 large manuscripts** (approx. 1,000,000 tokens).<sup>2</sup>
- Attested from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards
- The main problem with the texts: **the dating!**
  - Practically every major text is attested **several times**.
  - Individual texts of the large manuscripts are **much older**, therefore dating of the manuscript is not (too) helpful.
  - 🚫 Some of the texts deviate from the (dated) manuscript by up to 200 years (cf. Bremmer 2009: 9–12)!

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<sup>2</sup>In addition, there are 1,000 charters which differ significantly in terms of language and should therefore be treated separately.



## Corpus Oudfries / Old Frisian Corpus

*Corpus compiled and annotated by*

*Rita van de Poel, Leiden University*

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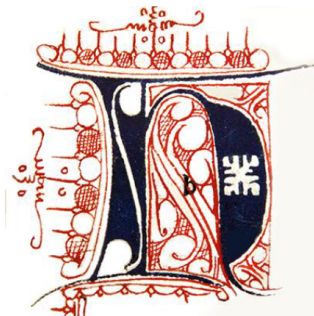


Figure: Logo of the *Corpus Oudfries*

- The *Corpus Oudfries* has been publicly available since 2019 and was compiled by Rita van de Poel (Universiteit Leiden).
- With a total of **235,462 tokens** (25 % of all token), it is relatively small, but still large enough for reliable claims.
- POS-tagged and lemmatised → Focus on lexic & semantics, therefore **few to no morphosyntactic tags!**
- Search queries by **CQL** (*Corpus Query Language*) → less powerful than e. g. ANNIS (Krause & Zeldes 2016)!

- ⚡ Especially for negation structures, the *Corpus Oudfries* has a **great disadvantage: clitic elements were not annotated!**
- Cases of OFri. *ne*, where *ne* cliticises onto the verb, **can't be found.**
  - *ne* merges very often with modal verbs and *wesa* 'to be'!
- ☢ **My approach:** Search for OFri. *ne* or *nāwet* (each glossed as ADV) and **verification by hand**
- Overall, the *Corpus Oudfries* only has **rudimentary search queries!**

## Negation change within Jespersen's Cycle



Figure: The Eggja stone (7<sup>th</sup> century)

(1) *ni=s solu sot uk ni sakse stain skorin*  
NEG=is sun hit and NEG knife stone cut

- (Germanic) **starting point:** the **original negation particle** *ni* (< idg. *\*ne*).

## Negation change within Jespersen's Cycle

- (2) a. *and nammermar ne mot hi anda godis huse wesa*  
and nevermore NEG may he in god's house be  
*mith ore kerstene lioden.*  
with other christian people

First Rüstring Manuscript (R1), XVII.6 (*On Killing a Relative*)

- b. *lef hi dan naet komma ne welle*  
if he then NEG come NEG wants

Jus Municipale Frisonum (J); III.57.6 (*Elder Skeltariucht*)

- c. *Jsrachel, dines Godes nama scheltu naet*  
Israel yours god's name shall=you NEG  
*wrswerra*  
abuse through oath

Jus Municipale Frisonum (J); II.8d (*Haet is riucht?*)



- This development is generally attributed to the so-called **Jespersen's Cycle**.
- This is named after its founder, the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen (Jespersen 1917).
  - The basic idea can already be found in Grimm (1890 [1831]: 690; cited in Lander 2018: 20) and Meillet (1912)!
  - Term *Jespersen's Cycle* going back to Dahl (1979).
- **Homogeneous development** throughout West Germanic!
  - ❗ **But:** Drastic differences in implementation over time!

# Negation change within Jespersen's Cycle

Development in the Germanic language family

- **Stage I:** (Phonological) Weakening of the original negative marker (< PGmc \**ni* < IE \**ne*):
  - OHG/OFri. *ni* → MHG/OFri. *ne/en*.
- **Stage II:** Reinforcement of the negative element with a second marker MHG *niht*/OFri. *nāwet* (< PGmc \**ni io uuiht*)
  - OHG/OFri. *ni* → MHG/OFri. *ne ... niht/ne ... nāwet*
  - so-called **bipartite negation!**
  - ≠ negative concord („double negation“)
- **Stage III:** Complete replacement of the old negative element:
  - MHG *ich enweiz niht* → NHG *ich weiß nicht*
  - OFri. *ik newēt naet* → OFri. *ik wēt naet* / WFri. *ik wit net*

# Negation change within Jespersen's Cycle

Development in the Germanic language family

- **High German:** early completion in Upper (1300), delayed in (Western) Central German (15.–16. century) (Hrbek & Schallert 2024; Hertel 2022; Pickl 2017; Jäger 2008)
- **Low German:** Completion between the 15<sup>th</sup> (Hanseatic cities) and 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century (Westphalian) (Breitbarth 2014) → Levelling!
- **Dutch:** *niet* as dominating pattern only from the 17<sup>th</sup> (North) resp. 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Flemish) → *en ... niet* as a relict even nowadays (Barbiers et al. 2009; Vosters & Vandebussche 2012; Zeijlstra 2002).



# Negation change within Jespersen's Cycle

Development in the Germanic language family

- **Frisian** is – from a diachronic perspective – the least studied Germanic language.
  - Many aspects (with the exception of the classical Neogrammarian aspects) are still unclear – esp. concerning negation!
  - There is **exactly one survey** (Bor 1990) which is neither theoretically nor diachronically designed
- Main result: Old Frisian exhibits all three stages of Jespersen's Cycle.
- „the double negative *ne.....nawet* is the preferred mode of expressing negation in an Old Frisian clause“ (Bor 1990: 38).

# Turning old into new - negation change in Old Frisian

Phonology as „motor“ of Jespersen's Cycle

- **Two essential questions:**

- ① **What caused** the negation change in (West) Germanic?
- ② **Why** is the development (despite all the obvious similarities) so **heterogeneous in terms of time**?



Adaptation of Hertel's (2022) theory of phonology as „motor“ of negation change:

- **Initial stress** (Initialakzent) caused shift of stress onto the root syllable → **reduction** of unstressed syllables to Schwa
- **Deletion of /ə/**: OHG *sunu, miluh* → NHG *Sohn, Milch*
- Fixation of **Trochee** (xx) as preferred stress pattern



Preverbal *ne* as „victim“ of phonological-prosodic change (interface between syntax and phonology)!

# Turning old into new - negation change in Old Frisian

Phonology as „motor“ of Jespersen's Cycle

Apart from diatopy/diachrony, I include the following aspects (among others) in my investigation:

- **Verb order:** V1 vs. V2 vs. V-later & V/E → Prosody (Trochee!) (cf. Behaghel 1918)!
- **Prefixation**<sup>3</sup>: (unstressed) Prefixes like *be-* or *ge-* increase the number of (unstressed) syllables and worsen the syllabic structure (e. g. MHG *heißen* vs. *geheißen*).
- **Graphematics:** Spelling of *ni/ne/en* and *nāwet*

❗ Link to phonology/prosody!

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<sup>3</sup>In Old Frisian, prefixes inherited from PGmc *\*gi-/\*ga-* have been deleted or reduced to *e-*: *ridden* resp. *eridden* 'ridden'.

- ⊗ Insufficient annotations in the *Corpus Oudfries*:
  - **Clitic instances of *ni*** were not annotated (just the host can be found)
  - **Contractions** with *hebba* 'to have', *wesa* 'to have' and *willa* 'to want' represent independent lemmas (e. g. *nebba* 'to not have')(?)
- ⊗ **Ambiguity/Polyvalence** of OFri. *ne* and *nāwet*:
  - ***ne*** can occur in negative conjunctions ('neither .. nor') and as **exceptive marker**: OFri. *hit ni se*<sup>4</sup> 'unless ...', cf. nl. *tenzij* (< *het en zij*) (cf. Breitbarth 2014; Witzenhausen 2019)
  - ***nāwet*** ('not') homophonic to the n-indefinite OFri. *nāwet* ('nothing')

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<sup>4</sup>I am currently studying this ambiguity from a functional and graphematical perspective and will present the results at the annual GGSG conference in Düsseldorf (Germany) at the end of September.

- Diachronic development of negation change:
  - At the beginning of the written tradition (12<sup>th</sup> century) **dominates still alone *ne*** (stage I).
  - From the 13<sup>th</sup> century: ***ne ... nāwet*** (stage II) takes over **the absolute majority** and keeps it!
  - Only in the west: *nâwet* (phase III) from 1450 as **preferred variant**.
- ❖ Old Frisian thus shows **clear signs of an ongoing *Jespersen's Cycle!***

# Results: Jespersen's Cycle in the corpus

Diachrony & diatopy

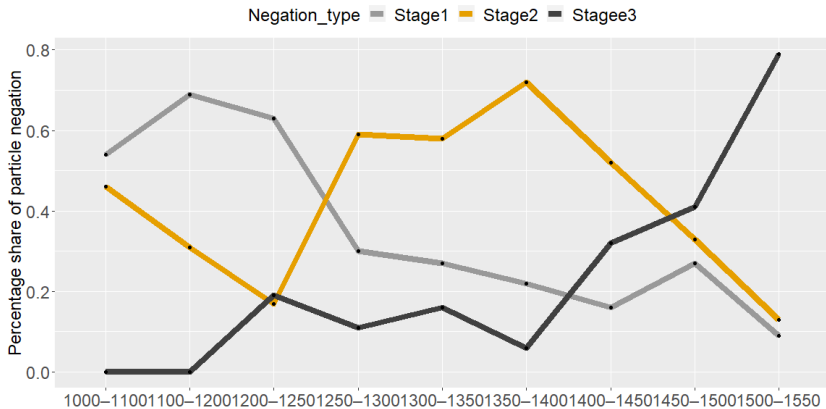


Figure: Diachronic development: Share of negation markers in OFri.

# Results: Jespersen's Cycle in the corpus

## Position of the finite verb

- V1<sup>5</sup> with single *ne* is hardly attested; with *ne ... nāwet* solely up to the year 1300.
  - ❗ The preverbal particle *ne* disappears (as in MHG; cf. Hrbek & Schallert 2024) with V1 pretty fast!
    - Here: **particularly high frequency of single *nāwet*!**
- V2 seems to preserve *ne* (and *ne ... nāwet*) the longest – even though this contradicts Behaghel (1918).
- V-later/VE takes a position inbetween: long occurrence of *ne ... nāwet*, but also high frequency for *nāwet* early on („Mittelstellung“)!
  - ❗ Results match with those of Bor (1990: 39)!

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<sup>5</sup>V1 is generally **very rare**; only between 1250–1300 does it occur **remarkably often** (*Brokmerbref* & *The Ten Commandments*) → due to text type?

# Results: Jespersen's Cycle in the corpus

Position of the finite verb

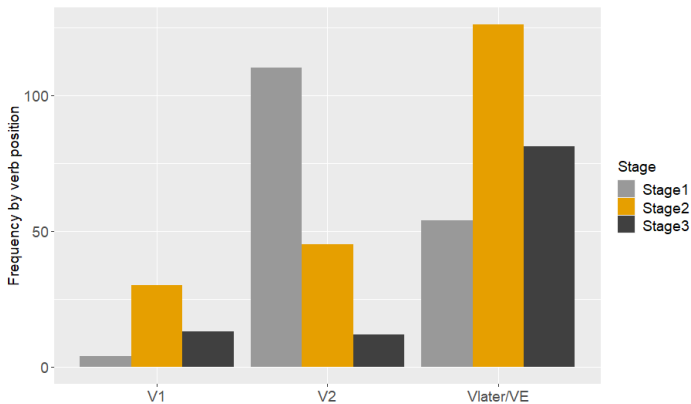


Figure: Frequency of negation structures by position of the finite verb



- Prefix verbs (e. g. OFri. *biriuchta* 'to judge') are **extremely rare!**
- From a prosodic point of view, they are dispreferred with OFri. *ne* – which is **reflected in my data!**
  - Approx. **every 50<sup>th</sup> verb** that co-occurs with OFri. *ne* or *ne ... nāwet* contains an (unstressed) prefix á la *bi-* or *gi-*.
  - In contrast: **Every fifth verb** that was negated with single *nāwet* contains an unstressed prefix → statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.01$ )!



Prosody as **clear influencing factor** on Jespersen's Cycle!

# Results: Jespersen's Cycle in the corpus

Prefixation

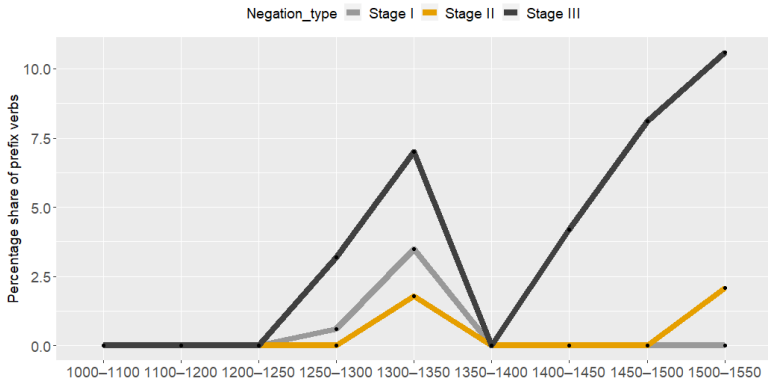


Figure: Share of prefix verbs by stage (total)

# Results: Jespersen's Cycle in the corpus

## Spelling of the negative particles

- Spelling **allows no certain conclusion about phonology**, but often **hint** for variation or change.
- *ne* has only **four variants**, while *nāwet* has **14 spellings!**
  - <ne>, <ni>, <ney>, <en> → <ne> as main variant from the beginning!
- Spelling of *nāwet* shows **no clear picture – individual preferences of the writers** resp. **free variation(?)**
  - Increasing spelling with <th> points to MLG influence!
  - Furthermore: intervocalic <w> disappears over time → erosion with progressing grammaticalization!

# Results: Jespersen's Cycle in the corpus

## Spelling of the negative particles

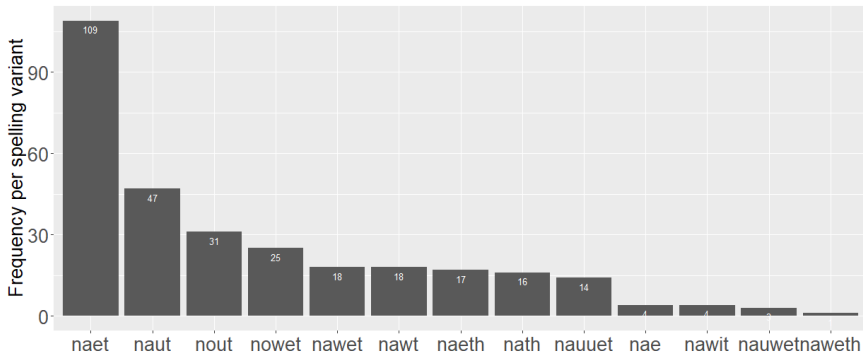


Figure: Graphematic variation of OFri. *nāwet*

- Old Frisian continues to be „a gem within the Old Germanic languages“ – there is still much to be found!
- With the help of the *Corpus Oudfries*, an up-to-date study of Old Frisian is possible – albeit with **cuts!**
  - Poor annotations and Co. require **good grammatical knowledge**, philological know-how and esp. **endurance!**
  - However, great results can be achieved with a good knowledge of corpus linguistics and the respective phenomenon!

- Old Frisian **shows clear evidence for a *Jespersen's Cycle***; diatopic statements are **only speculative!**
- Results regarding verb position correspond to our expectations e. g. for MHG (Hrbek & Schallert 2024).
- Prefix verbs represent a context in which OFri. *ne* **gets lost rather quickly.**
- Graphematics: *ne* extremely **stable** (<ne>), *nāwet* shows **free variation.**





***Thonke!*** (OFri. for 'Thanks!')









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	East Old Frisian			West Old Frisian		
	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III	Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
1000–1100	14	12	0	∅	∅	∅
1100–1200	11	5	0	∅	∅	∅
1200–1250	16	4	1	43	12	17
1250–1300	19	43	11	28	49	7
1300–1350	7	27	7	8	6	2
1350–1400	4	13	1	∅	∅	∅
1400–1450	4	13	8	∅	∅	∅
1450–1500	9	10	4	1	2	11
1500–1550	0	2	1	4	4	36
<b>Total:</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>

Tabelle: Frequency of negation markers in East &amp; West Old Frisian

- Overall, **East Old Frisian seems much more conservative, West Old Frisian more progressive.**
  - This would match the old Neogrammarian and Sjölin's (1966) opinion: East OFri. = older – West OFri. = younger!
- However, Old West Frisian is attested much later and only at times when *Jespersen's Cycle* had already moved on to the next phase!
- ❗ Overall, a much more harmonious picture of a consecutive negation change in Jespersen's style emerges!