

# *Ief hi dan naet komma ne welle* – Jespersen’s Cycle in Old Frisian

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In the history of Frisian, as in all other classical Germanic languages, there have been significant changes in the negation system, particularly concerning sentence negation with a negative particle like wfs. *n(a)et* (1a). From Proto-Germanic, Old Frisian inherited the preverbal (and often clitic) negative particle ofs. *ni / ne* (1b) (< ptg. *\*ni* < ie. *\*ne*). After becoming (phonologically) weakened, it was soon reinforced by a second element, the postverbal particle ofs. *nâwet* (< ptg. *\*ni io uuiht* ‘not a thing’; cf. ital. *niente*) (1c) and ultimately displaced (1d).

- (1) a. *Ik ben **net** bliid.*  
I am NEG happy
- b. *and nammerrmar **ne** mot hi anda godis huse wesa mith ore kerstene lioden.*  
and nevermore NEG may he in=the god’s house be with other christian people  
First Rüsting Manuscript (R1), XVII.6 (*On Killing a Relative*)
- c. *Ief hi dan **naet** komma **ne** welle*  
if he then NEG come NEG wants  
Jus Municipale Frisonum (J); III.57.6 (*Elder Skeltariucht*)
- d. *Jsrahel, dines Godes nama scheltu **naet** wrswerra*  
Israel yours god’s name shall=you NEG abuse through oath  
Jus Municipale Frisonum (J); II.8d (*Haet is riucht? What is law?*)

This classical, three-stage scenario is also found in several Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages such as French or Arabic and is now known as Jespersen’s Cycle (Jespersen 1917). The noteworthy phase is stage II (1c), where both negative elements co-occur without mutually canceling each other (as it would be the case in (most) modern Germanic languages), but rather only together have the capacity to reverse the proposition.

The diachrony of negation has been extensively documented and is considered well (though not conclusively) researched in many (West) Germanic dialects: Jäger (2008), Hertel (2022), and Hrbek & Schallert (forthcoming) for High German, Breitbarth (2014) for Low German, and Ingham (2013) for English, among others. (Old) Frisian, however, can rightly be labeled as the least attended to and studied Old Germanic language, particularly with regard to negation, which, aside from brief mentions in grammars, has only been sporadically analyzed by Bor (1990).

In the context of my ongoing dissertation project, I aim to present the results of a corpus study on Old Frisian using the *Corpus Oudfries*. In addition to tracing the evolution of sentence negation (in diachronic and diatopic dimension), I am also investigating graphematic-phonological aspects (spelling, prefixation) and morphosyntactic factors (verb placement, verb class) that have been discussed in the literature for over a century (see Behaghel 1918) as potential accelerators of Jespersen’s Cycle.

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