Negative polarity and the Quantifier Cycle: Comparative diachronic perspectives from European languages

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1 Introduction

It is well known that changes in indefinite systems often lead to an item becoming restricted to more 'negative' contexts, whether this is through the introduction of a restriction on its distribution to weak NPI contexts (interrogatives, conditional, comparatives, negatives etc.) or an outright restriction on an item's use to exclusively negative environments. However, examples have also been cited of items developing in the reverse direction, developing more 'affirmative' distributions over time (Jäger 2008, ms. 2007). While on the face of it, these changes have the flavour of a "random walk" through the space of parameters or lexical options, they are clearly not unconstrained, and an adequate account of language change will be able to account for what we observe or do not observe. In this paper, I will examine pathways of development in indefinites in the light of work on child language acquisition, asking both how our knowledge of acquisition stages can inform research in historical linguistics and vice versa. In doing so, I aim to contribute to the task of "distinguishing possible from impossible changes, which I take to be a central task of any theory of historical change" (Lightfoot 1977: 192), on a principled basis grounded in language acquisition.

This raises some general questions that I aim to address in this paper:

- (i) Is the quantifier cycle unidirectional? Do we ever find negative distributions and meanings being lost?
- (ii) How can shift from NPI to negative quantifier (via an n-word stage) be modelled? How can simultaneous affirmative and negative meanings in the same contexts be dealt with?
- (iii) What sort of theory of acquisition would account for the changes that we find?

2 Background: Bidirectionality in the development of indefinites

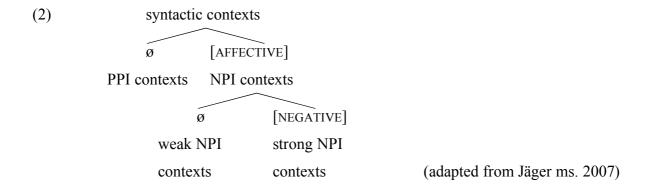
Jäger (ms. 2007) proposes a feature system to distinguish three type of indefinites using two features [AFFECTIVE] and [NEGATIVE]. She assumes lexical underspecification theory; hence, only marked features are stored in the lexicon. This means that English distinguishes the following three sets of indefinites:

(1) normal indefinites / PPI indefinites [] somebody

NPI-indefinites [AFFECTIVE] anybody

n-indefinites [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE] nobody

Schematically, we can think of this feature system as providing for the following options in specifying the available distributions for indefinites:



These features impose distributional restrictions: [AFFECTIVE] must be licensed semantically by a downward-entailing or non-veridical environment; while [NEGATIVE] is licensed by local Agree with a c-commanding [NEGATIVE] element.

Superimposed on this is an Elsewhere Condition, itself parameterized, that rules out items in contexts where they are in principle licensed because some other more specific element is also licensed in this context. As Biberauer & Roberts (forthcoming) note, this effectively introduces a form of Optimality Syntax into the account, with different languages able to rank the Elsewhere Condition more or less highly. Inevitably, the shift towards Optimality Syntax also introduces the need to compare derivations, as a derivation can be ruled out by reference to a more specific, more highly valued derivation. The Elsewhere Condition is needed, amongst other things, for PPI-indefinites, which are featurally identical to ordinary items, having no specific features at all. Hence the ungrammaticality of (3), where, in principle, *someone*, having no need for licensing at all, is permitted, is due to the availability of (4), which includes a more specific licensing configuration, with an [affective] feature licensed in a negative environment.

- (3) *There wasn't someone in the room.
- (4) There wasn't anyone in the room.

Jäger applies this feature system in the historical domain to the history of German, and to create a typology of possible historical changes. For German, she notes the following developments that amount to shifts in feature specification:

- (i) *dehein* 'any' > *kein* 'no', originally an NPI-indefinite, which occurred in [AFFECTIVE] contexts, but could not express negation on its own, occurred increasingly in negative contexts and could express negation on its own, becoming an n-indefinite: [AFFECTIVE] > [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE];
- (ii) the PPI-indefinite ete(s)waz 'something' > etwas 'something, anything' extends its distribution to weak NPI contexts, and so covers all non-negative contexts, whether affective or non-affective: this is $[\] > [\]$, but with weakening of the Elsewhere Condition to allow it to occur in weak NPI environments;
- (iii) *ioman* 'anyone' (*jemand*) extends its use in the opposite direction: it was originally only found in NPI contexts, but was extended to non-affective contexts becoming a normal indefinite, replacing ete(s)wer 'someone', and disappearing from negative contexts: [AFFECTIVE] > [] with the Elsewhere Condition strengthening to prevent its use in negative environments;
- (iv) *io mer* 'any, any more' was an NPI-indefinite but becomes 'normal' *immer* 'always'; *ete(s)wa* 'somewhere' also left the system, coming to mean 'approximately': [AFFECTIVE] > [].

While this successfully characterizes the changes, there are some problems inherent in the use of the Elsewhere Condition: for instance, it is not a set value for the entire language, but both weakens, as in (ii), and strengthens, as in (iii), in the same language but with respect to particular items, cf. also other criticisms made by Biberauer & Roberts (forthcoming). It would also be desirable to link the proposed changes to an account of first language acquisition to explain how these features can be innovated and how they can be lost against a background of generally successful acquisition.

In the more general domain (and evident also in the German data), she proposes a "random walk" system, with all possibilities instantiated:

- (i) [] > [AFFECTIVE]
- (ii) [AFFECTIVE] > [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE]
- (iii) [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE] > [AFFECTIVE]

(iv) [AFFECTIVE] > []

'positive'	'normal' or PPI indefinite				†
	NPI indefinite	•		^	
'negative'	n- indefinite		•		

Table 1. Possible diachronic developments in indefinite systems (Jager ms.).

This specifically involves the possibility that the features [AFFECTIVE] and [NEGATIVE] may fail to be acquired. She cites the following examples, which I divide into two types: loss of [AFFECTIVE] and loss of [NEGATIVE]:

(5) Loss of [AFFECTIVE]

NPI > normal indefinite with German *ioman* > *jemand* (see above)

American English anymore

[NB also generally English *anyhow* and *anyway* NPIs > discourse markers]

- (6) Loss of [NEGATIVE]
- (i) Welsh *neb*, Old Irish *nech* 'someone, anyone' < lengthened grade of the negation particle plus an interrogative indefinite *ne-k**o-, with these items losing their negative value;
- (ii) Slavonic *ně*-series items (e.g. Russian *nekto*, Bulgarian *njakoj* etc. 'someone'): the same development.

In the Celtic case, Jäger seems to envisage Common Celtic [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE] > [AFFECTIVE] > Old Irish [AFFECTIVE] > Middle Irish [], while Middle Welsh retains the inherited [AFFECTIVE] pattern before returning to the inherited state [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE], developments which really do look like random paths. In the Slavonic case, the development postulated is presumably, for most languages at least, [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE] > [] ('Bagel'-distribution).

As other examples of 'backwards' developments, one might add the following:

(7) Old French negative words like *nul* (< Latin *nullus*) and *nesun* (< *nes* + *un* < Latin *ne-ipsum* + *unus*) lost their negativity and were used in non-assertive negative polarity contexts (Catalani 2001: 113–14)

For much of the rest of this paper, I will consider the historical and acquisitional evidence for these changes. We will examine the conditions under which these features can be innovated or lost. In particular I will argue that the conditions under which acquisition failure of the [NEGATIVE] feature must be quite limited.

3 The acquisition and emergence of negative polarity: the abduction and emergence of the [AFFECTIVE] feature

3.1 Specialization for negative polarity

Today's negative polarity items did not always have a restricted distribution. They have typically conventionalized as negative polarity items at some point in their historical development. This process is a gradual development, and individual items may show a greater or lesser degree of specialization for NPI contexts. Hoeksema (1994) shows that there are semi-NPIs, items that show a skew towards being used in (weak) NPI contexts, but are not totally restricted, at least at the current time. This is illustrated in Table 2 for four verbs of indifference (note that, in Table 2, *bother* refers to the verb only in the sense 'annoy'). Table 2 shows that, while *mind* is straightforwardly an NPI, banned from affirmative environments, *care* and *matter* are semi-NPIs. They show a skewed distribution, being less frequent in affirmative environments than an ordinary synonymous verb such as *bother*, but are nevertheless not completely ruled out in such environments. Crucially here, the restrictions are semantically unmotivated, in the sense that broadly synonymous verbs have radically different distributions.

Environment	care	matter	mind	bother
	n=792	n=406	n=341	n=377
negative (%)	53	57	72	35
other neg (%)	12	7	20	7
interrogative (%)	15	13	7	11
affirmative (%)	20	20	1	48

Table 2. Distribution of four verbs of indifference in Present-day English (Hoeksema 1994).

Some modal verbs, namely English (auxiliary) *need*, Dutch *hoeven*, German *brauchen* and Mandarin Chinese *yòng* have shown increasing specialization in (weak)-NPI contexts in the course of their history (Hoeksema 1994). This skewing need not be derived simply from the item's meaning: while certain semantic fields show a (real-world) predisposition to being or becoming NPIs, items with very similar meanings can show significantly different distributions. As Hoeksema notes:

For largely pragmatic reasons, some verbs tend to occur in nonaffirmative contexts more than other verbs. This may set the stage for further specialization, but the main point here is, that there is no necessity for this at all. (Hoeksema 1994)

Examples of this specialization abound. Middle English, *wiht* (Modern English *a whit*), a minimizer, is found in both fully positive and negative contexts, but in Early Modern English becomes restricted to negative environments:

(8) She was falle aslepe a lite wight.

'She had fallen asleep a little bit.'

(Reeve's Tale 363) (OED wight) (c1386)

Here *wight* may have development its NPI-restricted after it was reanalysed as an adverb, hence the development is noun > adverb > NPI adverb.

Similarly, we find conventionalization of French *du tout* (Detges 2003): in Old French *du tout* was not specialized for negative contexts:

(9) Jherusalem prendront *du tout* a leur commant (*Chev. au cygne*, cit. Godefroy, Tot).'They will take Jerusalem completely under their command.' (Detges 2003)

Such uses die out in the classical French period, as *du tout* acquires an increasingly fixed relation to the negator *pas*, associated with the fixing of word order *pas du tout*.

The same development seems to be observed with German *überhaupt* 'at all'. In Middle High German *über houbet*, literally 'over head' meant 'taken together, in sum', originally a term in cattle trading, where it specifically meant 'without re-counting the heads of the individual animals' (Duden). The modern meaning was established only in the eighteenth century, and, with it, a restricted to weak NPI contexts.

Some such developments have been documented in detail, although more studies are needed to allow solidly based comparative work. Hoeksema (2007) shows that Dutch *enig* 'some, any' has narrowed its distribution over the last 400 years, largely disappearing from affirmative and conditionals, as shown in Table 3. He characterizes this as a disappearance from nonveridical environments and a specialization for purely downward entailing environments (*enig* was already restricted to nonveridical environments at the start of the development).

Context	before 1600	1600– 1700	1700– 1800	1800– 1900	1900– 1950	1950- 2000	2000- 2007
	n=109	N=224	n=375	n=656	N=451	n=524	n=248
negation	17	29	34	33	33	38	37
comparative	12	5	6	10	16	20	19
neg. pred.	5	3	6	6	8	5	7
'without'	16	13	14	14	19	19	22
conditional	20	16	9	6	5	3	3
affirmative	13	17	13	15	8	3	2

Table 3. The historical distribution of Dutch *enig* (%) (adapted from Hoeksema 2007).

Notice that the split here would justify the splitting of the [AFFECTIVE] feature so as to make a distinction between a feature [DOWNWARD-ENTAILING] and a feature [NONVERIDICAL].

3.2 Acquisition of NPI distributions

Van der Wal (1996) and Koster & Van der Wal (1995) examine the acquisition of the NPI distribution of the Dutch NPIs *hoeven* 'need' (in child language also 'want') and *meer* 'any

more'. The patterns can be illustrated with the case of *hoeven*, in adult language a strong NPI limited to direct or implied negation. In the earliest child language (up to around age 2 years), *hoeven* is found exclusively with immediately adjacent *niet* 'not', and hence seems to be treated as an unanalysable single unit:

```
(10) 'K hoef nie(t) s(l)ape(n).

I need not sleep

'I don't want to sleep.' (2;0.14) (Van der Wal 1996: §2.7.1)
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After this time, creative use of *hoeven* emerges. Children use *hoeven* without *niet*, but give it a negative meaning 'don't want':

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(11) Ik hoef wijkoek.

I need honeycake

'I don't want any honeycake.' (2;04.28) (Van der Wal 1996: §3.3)
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This suggests that children posit an inherently negative meaning for hoeven. Van der Wal, for instance, notes that "if the distribution of NPIs is so narrowly defined that negation becomes inherent in their meaning, then a separate negation marker may become redundant and therefore need not be expressed." (Van der Wal 1996: §3.3)

Another type of error is also found in children after age 2, however. Here, children overgeneralize the use of *hoeven* to contexts where it is not found in adult speech. These include contexts which contain a licenser (e.g. a modal particle) that seems similar to the licensing contexts allowed in adult speech, and also emphatic affirmative contexts:

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(12) nee, dat is 't hele harde. ik hoef van jou zachte 'n no that is the very hard I need from you soft one 'No, that's the hard one. I need the soft one from you.'

(2;11.20) (Van der Wal 1996: §4.4.1)
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(13) hoef jij ook?

need you also

'Do you need to too?'

(2;11.20) (Van der Wal 1996: §4.4.3)
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Van der Wal concludes that "three year old children appear to already know that *hoeven* is a special verb, with a distribution restricted to certain licensing environments" (Van der Wal 1996: §3.14). This last pattern of generalization is interesting from a historical perspective for two reasons. First, it provides some evidence that [AFFECTIVE] is the correct characterization of one of the features involve in NPI licensing. The affective feature, originally posited to account for the distribution of *do*-insertion in English (Klima 1964), also picks out emphatic assertion as an [AFFECTIVE] context. The fact that children overgeneralize *hoeven* to precisely these contexts lends credence to the postulation of the feature. Secondly, emerging markers of negation often carry special pragmatic values of precisely the types that children seem to be associating with *hoeven* here: either pure emphatic negation (Kiparsky & Condoravdi 2006) or emphatic cancellation of a presupposition (Schwegler 1988, Zanuttini 1997).

We can therefore conclude:

- from the very earliest utterances, children are aware of the special relationship between *hoeven* and negation, although not the precise nature of this relationship: a [NEGATIVE] feature is posited early and securely
- children entertain positing an inherently negative meaning for *hoeven* before retreating to an NPI hypothesis as the nature of the relationship with negation
- children easily posit an [AFFECTIVE] feature for *hoeven*, and then fine-tune the distribution

We should expect some link between these patterns and what we find in historical developments.

4 'Forwards' historical developments

Forwards historical developments involve the innovation of the feature [AFFECTIVE] in an item previously unmarked, or the innovation of the feature [NEGATIVE] in an item previously marked only [AFFECTIVE]. The second of these is clearly predicted by the acquisitional studies above: children are willing to posit inherently negative meaning in negative polarity items, and are ready to restrict such items to negative contexts as a stage in acquisition. Arrested acquisition at such stages would lead to the innovation of the [NEGATIVE] feature. We have also seen that children are readily prepared to posit the affective distribution. While we have no evidence of narrowing to this distribution in acquisition, it does not seem unlikely, given children's readiness to posit this distribution in general, for an item to innovate this feature. I

shall illustrate these developments from the history of Celtic, but they are readily found in other languages too.

4.1 Welsh indefinites

In the course of their history Welsh indefinites show a move towards increasingly negative meaning. On the one hand, emphatic forms lose their emphatic quality and form, and new forms develop to renew the old items. On the other hand, forms previously found in all weak negative polarity contexts become inherently negative and restricted to negative contexts. Taken as a whole, within the historically attested period, we see a shift all the way along the quantifier cycle from generic items with no negative features, via [AFFECTIVE] to [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE].

Middle Welsh has two series of indefinite pronouns, a fully grammaticalized series found in negative polarity contexts, (14) (henceforth the *neb*-series), and a semi-grammaticalized series based on generic nouns found predominantly in affirmative contexts, (15) (henceforth the generic-noun series). Some minor items or items that grammaticalize during the course of Middle Welsh are omitted from these lists.

(14) *neb*-series [AFFECTIVE]

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person neb 'anyone'
thing dim 'anything'
quantity dim + noun / un + noun 'any'
quality neb + noun 'any'
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(15) generic-noun series []

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person dyn 'a person, anyone' (= dyn 'person')
thing peth 'a thing, anything' (= peth 'thing')
quantity peth o (mass noun) / rei o (count noun) 'some'
quality ryw 'some' (< ryw 'kind, type')
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Items for 'any (amount of)', 'any (kind of)', 'anyone' and 'anything' are distinguished. The items expressing 'any (amount of)' distinguish mass from count nouns consistently. The *neb*-series shows no synchronic morphological motivation: each member is monomorphemic and there is no particular series marker. Such lack of transparency is uncommon crosslinguistically (Haspelmath 1997: 21–4). The items in the generic-noun series, with the

exception of *rei o*, are all homophonous with ordinary indefinite noun phrases ('a person', 'a thing' etc.), hence this is a poorly defined series. Other ontological categories (place, cause, reason, manner) are expressed using generic nouns such as *lle* 'place' or *mod* 'manner' in both negative polarity and affirmative contexts.

The general developments are as follows: the *neb*-series in (16) develops inherently negative meaning; the generic-noun series is reformed and given transparent morphological motivation by the creation of new items based on *ryw* 'some', giving rise to the Present-day Welsh *rhyw*-series in (17); and a new series based on the innovation *unrhyw* (< *un* 'one, any' + *rhyw* 'kind') in (18) has more recently been created. While initially the non-assertive NPI-functions of the *neb*-series were taken over by the *rhyw*-series, more recently the *unrhyw*-series has become specialized for this use. The three main Present-day Welsh series of indefinites are thus as listed in (16) (the *neb*-series), (17) (the *rhyw*-series), and (18) (the *unrhyw*-series). The time adverbs *byth* and *erioed* have special distributions that do not conform to the general patterns (Borsley & Jones 2005: 109–12) and, in a sense, therefore lie outside of these series.

(16) *neb*-series [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE]

person *neb* 'no one'

thing dim byd 'nothing'

quantity dim (mass or count) / 'run (< yr un 'the one') (count nouns) 'no, none'

place nunlle / unman / lle'm byd (dialectally variable) 'nowhere'

time byth (generic or future-oriented) / erioed (past-oriented)

(17) *rhyw*-series []

person rhywun 'someone'

thing *rhywbeth* 'something'

quantity peth o / rhai (o) / rhywfaint o 'some'

quality *rhyw* 'some (kind of)'

place *rhywle* 'somewhere'

time *rhywbryd* 'sometime'

manner rhywsut / rhywfodd 'somehow'

(18) *unrhyw*-series [AFFECTIVE]

person unrhyw un 'anyone'

thing *unrhyw beth* 'anything'

quality unrhyw 'any'

place unrhyw le 'anywhere'

time unrhyw bryd / byth / erioed 'ever'

manner unrhyw sut 'any way'

Middle Welsh expresses 'anyone, no one' using the inherited pronoun *neb* in all weak negative polarity contexts: in negative clauses in (19) and (20), in interrogatives in (21), in conditionals in (22), and in comparatives in (23).

(19) A **neb** ny dieghis odyna namyn ef a 'e wreic. and anyone NEG escape.PAST.3s from there except he and GEN.3MS wife 'And no one escaped from there except him and his wife.'

(*Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* 36.21–2) (Middle Welsh)

(20) ny welynt **neb.**NEG see.IMPF.3P anyone

'...they saw no one.' (*Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* 52.7) (Middle Welsh)

- (21) ...a weleisti **neb** o 'r llys yn dyuot y'm hol i?

 Q see.PAST.3s anyone from the court PROG come.INF after.me
 - "...have you seen anyone from the court coming after me?" (Peredur 14.6–7) (Middle Welsh)
- (22) ...pei kymerwn i **neb** y 'm kanlyn, mi a 'th gymerwn if take.COND.1PI anyone to GEN.1S follow.INF I PRT ACC.2S take.COND.1S ditheu.

you

"...if I took anyone to accompany me, I would take you."

(Ystoryaeu Seint Greal 731) (Middle Welsh)

(23) ...canys mvy y carei ef Eudaf no **neb**...
for more PRT love.IMPF.3S he Euddaf than anyone
'...for he loved Euddaf more than anyone.'

(*Brut Dingestow* 71.24 = 99.12–13) (Middle Welsh)

Occasionally, the generic nouns *dyn* 'person', either alone or as *un dyn* 'any person', and *gwr* 'man' are used in this function too, although they are more usual in affirmative contexts:

(24) Ny lafasswys **dyn** vynet y 'r forest ys blwydyn.

NEG dare.PAST.3S person go.INF to the forest since year

'No one has dared to go to the forest for a year.' (*Peredur* 68.15–16) (Middle Welsh)

Neb has come to be inherently negative. When it occurs in interrogative and conditional clauses, it is now interpreted as negative. In such clauses, an affirmative meaning is now conveyed either by *rhywun* or the recently innovated item *unrhyw un* 'any one' (< unrhyw 'any' + un 'one').

Middle Welsh expresses 'any, no' using a range of quantifiers. It is expressed by *dim* (< *dim* 'thing') if the head noun is a mass noun:

(25) A guedy nat oed **dim bvyt** gan y saesson...

and after NEG.COMP be.IMPF.3S any food with the English

'And once the English didn't have any food (left)...'

(Brut Dingestow 228.12) (Middle Welsh)

If the head noun is a count noun, *un* 'one' is the most frequent option:

(26)diamheu yw gennym na welsam eiroet uilwraeth yn **un** and doubtless is with.1P NEG.COMP see.PAST.1P ever valour in any wreic kymeint ac ynot ti. woman so.much as in.2s you "...and we have no doubt that we have never seen as much valour in any woman as in you.' (*Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* 20.26–8) (Middle Welsh)

We find also *neb* 'any' (< *neb* 'anyone'):

(27) Ny byd kylus **neb brawdwr** yr rodi a datganu brawt

NEG be.FUT.3Sfaulty any judge for give.INF and announce.INF judgement

o awdurdawt yscriuennedic...

from authority written

'No judge is at fault for giving and announcing a judgement on the basis of written authority...'

(Llyfr Blegywryd 102.5–6) (Middle Welsh)

Neb tends to be used with animate count nouns, as in (27), but it is not entirely restricted in this way, and less frequent cases with inanimate count nouns or inanimate mass nouns do occur:

(28) mal na chaffvn y ganthunt vynteu weithyon **neb amdiffin**. so NEG.COMP get.COND.1s from.3P them now any defence '...so that we could not get any defence from them now.'

(Brut Dingestow 125.6–7) (Middle Welsh)

Where 'any' means 'any member of a contextually salient group', yr un 'the one' is used:

(29)kedymdeithas y rydunt yll pedwar, Ac yn hynny tyuu in that grow.PAST.3s companionship between.3P all four and mynnei heb hyt yr un uot y gilid na na until NEG.COMP want.IMPF.3s the any be.INF without 3MS RECIP neither dyd na nos. day nor night

'And thereby companionship grew between all four of them, such that none wanted to be without the others day or night.'

(*Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi* 51.9–11) (Middle Welsh)

These distinctions became blurred with time, and the three items *dim*, *neb* and *un* were evidently more or less equivalent by the sixteenth century, with *dim* ultimately winning and now acting as the usual quantifier for 'any, no'.

While Middle Welsh un has died out as a means of expressing 'any', the related form yr un has survived, in speech normally in the reduced form 'run. This represents an extension of its use, since in Middle Welsh it is found only to refer to any member of a previously definite group. That is, while in Middle Welsh the definite article yr contributes a definite interpretation (requiring a previously defined, hence definite, group), this requirement has

been lost in Modern Welsh and there is no longer any semantic connection with the definite article. Examples where no connection with a previously defined group is evident appear already in late Middle Welsh:

(30)hi, myui a Ac ony ellwch chwi ... y dwyn 'e I and unless can.PRES.2P GEN.3FS take.INF it PRT GEN.3FS you dygaf, kan nyt oes im vr vn. take.PRES.1S since NEG be.PRES.3S to.me the one 'And if you can't take it, I will take it, since I haven't got one (any) (shield).' (Ystoryaeu Seint Greal 538–9) (Middle Welsh)

Here, a magic shield has been discussed, but the speaker is saying that he has no shield of any kind, not simply that he does not have the shield just discussed. Phonetic reduction to 'run, with loss of the initial schwa of the indefinite article, had occurred by the seventeenth century at the latest. It is now essentially synonymous with dim 'no', and has undergone the same shift to being inherently negative. However, it retains the requirement that the following noun should be singular.

All of the items discussed in the previous section undergo a shift towards being inherently negative. We saw above, items (19) to (23), that *neb* occurred in a range of non-assertive negative polarity environments in addition to negative clauses in Middle Welsh. The same is true of all the other items mentioned in this section. In Middle Welsh, their negative interpretation depends on their co-occurrence with a marker of sentential negation such as ni(t) or na(t). Two changes affect the status of these items. First, they come to express negative meanings in the absence of a marker of sentential negation. Secondly, they lose the ability to appear in non-assertive environments with non-negative meanings.

Even in Middle Welsh, *neb*-series items may have negative interpretations where the scope of negation is limited to the item itself, and where the overall proposition is not negative. Thus, in (31), there is narrow scope negation over *dim* 'nothing' alone.

(31) Ac y velly e dielws ryuyc y Freinc hyt ar **dim**.

and thus PRT avenge.PAST.3s arrogance the French as.far.as nothing

'And thus he avenged the arrogance of the French down to nothing.'

(Historia Gruffud vab Kenan 23.2) (Middle Welsh)

Negative interpretations of *neb*-series items in sentence fragments (typically answers to questions) are found at least as early as the seventeenth century:

(32) Scot: Pa ryw newydd, noble Crwmel?

Scot what kind news noble Cromwell

Crwmel: **Dim** ond darfod cwrs y rhyfel.

Cromwell nothing but finish.INF course the war

'Scot: What news, noble Cromwell?

Cromwell: Nothing except (only) that the course of the war has ended.'

(Rhyfel cartrefol 811) (after 1660)

In the nineteenth century, negative interpretations appear in certain non-elliptical syntactic environments. Initially, irrealis conditional clauses, as in (33), and absolute clauses, as in (34), seem most favourable to negative interpretations.

(33) tase **dim** arath i 'ch atal chi be.COND.3s nothing other to 2P stop.INF you 'if there was nothing else to stop you'

(Gwilym Hiraethog, *Llythyrau 'Rhen Ffarmwr* 62.15–16) (1870)

(34) ...yr oedd y pin ysgrifennu wedi mynd ar goll
PRT be.IMPF.3s the pen write.INF PERF go.INF on lose
...a dim sgrap o bapur gwyn yn y tŷ.
and no scrap of paper white inthe house

'the writing pen had become lost ... and not a scrap of white paper in the house.'

(Gwilym Hiraethog, *Helyntion bywyd hen deiliwr* 52.1–3) (1877)

Absolute clauses containing *neb*-series items were once interpreted non-negatively, as witnessed by the following example from the 1588 Bible translation (retained in the 1620 Bible) where *dim cîg noeth byw*, with quantifier *dim*, is interpreted as 'any live raw flesh' rather than 'no live raw flesh':

(35) Ac edryched yr offeiriad, yna, os chŵydd gwynn [a fydd] yn y croen, and look.IMPERS the priest then if swelling white PRT be.FUT.3sin the skin a hwnnw wedi troi y blewyn yn wynn, a **dim cîg noeth byw** and that PERF turn.INF the hair PRED white and any flesh naked live yn y chŵydd;

in the swelling

'And let the priest look, then, if [there will be] a white swelling in the skin, and it has turned the hair white and there is any naked live flesh in the swelling...'

(Tyndale Bible: 'and let the preast se him. Yf the rysinge apeare white in the skynne ad haue also made the heer white, ad there be rawe flesh in the sore also')

(Leviticus 13.10) (1588)

There are also nineteenth-century examples of inherently negative indefinites in tenseless complement clauses.

Conversely, *neb*-series items have disappeared (or have come to be interpreted as negative) in interrogatives and in conditionals, the two major non-assertive environments where they were once possible. In the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, *neb*-series items were possible in these contexts, although they were already being replaced by *rhyw*-series items (see below). The *neb*-series items *dim* 'any' and '*run* 'any' (cf. (16) above) are shown in interrogative and conditional contexts in (36) and (37) respectively.

- (36) a. A oes **dim rhew** ac eira yn Awstralia?

 Q be.PRES.3s any frost and snow in Australia

 'Is there any frost and snow in Australia?' (Awstralia a'r cloddfeydd aur) (1852)
 - b. ous gynoch chi run ci arallbe.PRES.3S with.2P you the.one dog other'Have you got any other dog?'

(Gwilym Hiraethog, *Llythyrau 'Rhen Ffarmwr* 30.6) (1850)

(37) a. tae **dim synwyr** yn dy goryn di
be.COND.3s any sense in 2s skull you
'if you had any sense in your skull'

(Gwilym Hiraethog, *Llythyrau 'Rhen Ffarmwr* 45.11) (1851)

b. mi 'rydw' i wedi cael troad os cafodd yr un dyn
 PRT be.PRES.1s I PERF get.INF conversion if get.PAST.3s the one man erioed dro
 ever conversion

'I've had a conversion if any man ever had a conversion.'

(Gwilym Hiraethog, Helyntion bywyd hen deiliwr 84) (1877)

Middle Welsh had already grammaticalized *ryw* 'kind, type' as an adnominal quantifier 'some (kind of)'. When followed by a generic noun it often fulfilled the same function as the generic-noun series. Collocations such as *ryw beth* 'some thing' and *rhyw le* 'some place' conventionalized and came to be used in place of generic nouns functioning as indefinites. There is also a semantic shift from 'such a thing' or 'something such that it has the property...' etc. to the indefinite meaning that these items have today. Specific indefinite readings seem to emerge in late Middle Welsh, with non-specific readings slightly later. An example where *ryw beth* seems to function as a specific indefinite pronoun 'something' in late Middle Welsh is given in (38).

(38) 'Nac ef, y rof a Duw,' heb yr iarll, 'ef a vu **ryw beth**no between.1s and God said the earl it PRT be.PERF.3s some thing
yn ymdidan a thi.'

PROG converse.INF with you

"No, between me and God," said the earl, "there was something talking to you."

(Kedymdeithyas Amlyn ac Amic 536–7) (Middle Welsh)

In these cases, the *rhyw*-items seem to be competing with generic nouns, ultimately replacing them to form a morphologically uniform series of indefinites.

From the point of view of negation, however, the most significant shift comes rather later, when the *rhyw*-series pronouns start being used freely in non-assertive contexts. In the nineteenth century (at the latest), we find the *rhyw*-series being used in conditionals and interrogatives where there is no presupposition of the existence of a referent for the pronoun:

(39) a oes gennych chwi **rywbeth** arall a recomendwch i mi?

Q be.PRES.3S with.3P you something else REL recommend.PRES.2P to me
'Have you anything / something else that you recommend to me?'

(David Owen, Wil Brydydd y Coed 4) (1863–5)

(40) a. os bydd **rhywbeth** ynddo. if be.FUT.3s something in.3Ms '...if there is anything / something in it.'

(David Owen, Wil Brydydd y Coed 7) (1863–5)

b. os oes **ryw ystyr** iddo if be.PRES.3s some meaning to.3MS 'if it has some / any meaning'

(Gwilym Hiraethog, *Helyntion bywyd hen deiliwr* 62.14) (1877)

This amounts to encroachment on the previous territory of the *neb*-series: in both (39) and (40), we might have expected to find *dim* 'anything' at an earlier date. It is thus symptomatic of the ongoing narrowing of the *neb*-series to negative contexts at this period, a process which reached its full expression in the twentieth century. The disappearance of *neb*-series items in interrogatives and conditionals probably dates to the last hundred years, and its course may have varied from item to item. Fynes-Clinton gives no non-negative uses for quantifier *dim* 'no, any' in his comprehensive 1913 description of the Bangor dialect, while he does give non-negative uses for *neb* 'anyone, no one' (Fynes-Clinton 1913: i.88–9).

In the nineteenth century, the neb-series lost ground in non-assertive negative polarity contexts to the rhyw-series. Later, in the twentieth century, when the neb-series was ousted completely from interrogatives and conditionals, a different series, namely the unrhyw-series, also played a significant role. This series is a relatively recent innovation. The roots of modern unrhyw are found in the sixteenth century, when it first appears with the meaning 'any kind of, any' (that is, based on un 'one, any' + rhyw 'kind'):

(41) llymach nac vnrryw gleddau-daufinioc sharper than any sword two-edged 'sharper than any (kind of) two-edged sword'

(*Testament Newydd* 330b, Hebrews 4.12) (1567)

The pronouns *unrhyw beth* 'anything' and *unrhyw un* 'anyone' are of more recent provenance, however, being first attested in 1711 and 1852 respectively according to the University of Wales Dictionary. *Unrhyw*-series items are quite rare until the second half of the nineteenth century. However, they have become common in the late twentieth century, where they appear extensively in negative, interrogative, conditional and comparative clauses, as well as being used as free-choice items. Transfer from English seems to be apparent here, as *unrhyw*-series items have come to be identified as translation equivalents of English *any*-series items, and have adopted a syntactic distribution to match (Willis 2008).

This thus instantiates the standard 'forward' type of development, found widely elsewhere, for instance, with French n-words such as *personne* 'anyone, no one' and *rien* 'anything, nothing'. One substantive difference between Welsh and French is that the reanalysis of *personne*, *rien* etc. from nouns to indefinite pronouns in French is widely regarded as having been triggered by the innovation of the indefinite article (Déprez 2000). The innovation of *dim* 'thing' > 'anything' in Welsh cannot be assimilated to the same account, however, because Welsh has never had an indefinite article. Apart from this, the developments are very similar. In terms of Jäger's model, the *neb*-series, like *personne*, becomes restricted to negative environments, and therefore changes feature specification from [AFFECTIVE] to [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE].

However, two aspects of the development do not fit easily within this analysis: first, the emergence of independently negative interpretations predate the disappearance of these items by several centuries. This is the classical n-word problem: these items allow both negative interpretation in the absence of another negator, and non-negative interpretations in certain environments for an extended period. It is unclear how the items are to be characterized during this period: if they are [AFFECTIVE], then we need some account of what changed to allow the independently negative interpretations to arise. One solution is to say that the Elsewhere Condition became less strong: a sequence of Op¬ ... [AFFECTIVE] was previously ruled out by the Elsewhere Condition, but subsequently this condition weakened. This seems unsatisfactory, since it is unclear what the more specific option was that ruled out Op¬ ... [AFFECTIVE]. An alternative would to posit two items during the transitional period (Herburger 2001), one with the feature specification [AFFECTIVE] and one with the feature specification [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE].

A second issue involves the staged loss of *neb*-items from non-assertive environments. As in various other languages, indefinites that become negative survive in comparatives. This suggests that a more fine-grained set of features is needed, one which allows comparatives to

be distinguished from other non-assertive environments, cf. Hoeksema's discussion of *enig* above.

With respect to the development of *rhywun* 'someone', the underspecification account is actually rather attractive: we saw that in the nineteenth century, as *neb* was becoming more negative, its place was taken by the ordinary indefinite *rhywun* 'someone' in interrogatives and conditionals. In the twentieth century, it has lost ground, but remains grammatical, in these contexts, because a new more specific item, *unrhyw un* 'anyone' has been innovated. An account that says that *rhywun* always had neutral [] specification but expanded or contracted its distribution in response to what other, more specific items were available, seems quite attractive.

5 'Backwards' historical developments

We can now turn to consider various proposed 'backwards' historical developments. I shall argue that the two most well-known ones, Celtic *neb* and Slavonic *ně*-series items, are not secure as evidence of the potential for loss of the [NEGATIVE] feature in language acquisition. Other examples involve special cases: assimilation to existing series of items (hence providing children with a basis to abductively hypothesize a representation without a [NEGATIVE] feature) or else language contact (and hence, potentially, not involving child language acquisition at all).

5.1 The development of *neb/nech* in Celtic

5.1.1 *Neb* in Common Brythonic

Brythonic Celtic languages make extensive use of indefinites arising via grammaticalizations based on generic nouns. In most cases, the earliest items based on generic nouns are different enough to suggest that the Brythonic parent language possessed a productive pool of forms, with the daughter languages only later fixing on particular items. For instance, in the case of indefinites for things, Middle Welsh dim 'anything' < dim 'thing', Middle Breton nep tra 'any thing' > netra 'anything' and tra '(any)thing' and Cornish neb peyth and neb tra 'anything, something' are grammaticalizations of the same general type, all derived from generic nouns meaning 'thing', but are based on different lexical items. We can conclude that Brythonic made extensive use of generic nouns for indefinites, but that particular items had not yet conventionalized or else had conventionalized differently in different areas. Some similarity of patterning in grammaticalization in Cornish and Breton suggest this latter option to some extent.

All medieval Brythonic languages share an adnominal quantifier *neb*, *nep* 'any'. Cornish allows it freely across affirmative and negative contexts, while Middle Welsh and Middle Breton show more complex patterning. In addition to using *neb* as a weak negative polarity item, both allow *neb* as the antecedent of a free relative. This is illustrated for Middle Welsh in (42).

(42) A 'r neb a dodes hut ar y wlat, a beris bot and the anyone PRT put.past.3s magic on the land PRT cause.PAST.3s be.INF y gaer yma.

the fortress here

'And whoever bewitched the land caused the fortress to be here.'

(Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi 56.4–5) (Middle Welsh)

Furthermore, neb is also an element within the specific unknown indefinite quantifier nebun 'any' (< neb + un 'one'), which occurs freely in both negative polarity and non-negative-polarity environments. Its use in an affirmative environment is given in (43).

(43) wynvydedic wyry nebun yscolheic ...e a emdangosses the blessed to some virgin **PRT** appear.PAST.3S scholar a dywedut urthav... and say.INF to.3_{MS}

"...the Blessed Virgin appeared to some (a certain) scholar and said to him..."

(Gwyrthyeu e wynvydedic Veir 14.5–6) (Middle Welsh)

Both these uses are archaic today.

These uses of *neb* in Middle Welsh and Middle Breton are surprising, since these languages do not otherwise allow *neb* in affirmative contexts. When set against the fact that Cornish makes use of *neb* generally in affirmative contexts in Cornish, the Welsh and Breton use looks like the fossilized relic of an earlier more productive system. For instance, it looks as though Middle Welsh *nebun* was created as an item at a point when Welsh did allow affirmative uses of *neb*. This suggests that the Cornish pattern, with *neb* freely available in affirmative, non-assertive and negative contexts, is the one that should be reconstructed for the Brythonic parent language.

Middle Welsh and Cornish use *neb* also as an animate indefinite pronoun. Middle Breton, apart from its use as an antecedent to free relatives, does not use it as a pronoun. However, such use is attested in Old Breton, and should therefore be reconstructed for the whole of the Brythonic parent language:

We can conclude that the Brythonic ancestor of *neb* was both a pronoun and a quantifier, and was freely available in all environments. That is, we reconstruct no features restricting its distribution, and posit that Welsh and Breton innovated a restriction to [AFFECTIVE] contexts.

The Old Irish quantifier nach / na (the 'dependent' form of nech / ni 'anyone / anything') is also cognate. This item is evidently pronominal in origin (< Common Celtic *ne-k^wos NEG + 'who') (see section 5.1.2 below), so the use of neb as an adnominal quantifier, in (27) above, is an innovation, based on the abductive reanalysis given in (45) or (46).

(45)
$$[DP \ neb] > [DP \ [Q \ neb] \ [NP \ \emptyset]]$$
 anyone any

(46)
$$[DP [D neb] [NP neb]] > [DP [D neb] [NP \emptyset]]$$

anyone any

In (45), *neb* is hypothesized to contain a null head noun and therefore to be an adnominal quantifier rather than, or perhaps in addition to, being a pronoun. In (46), this is conceptualized in a slightly different way as the loss of N-to-D movement (cf. Roberts & Roussou 2003), freeing up a head position into which a noun can be inserted. The innovation of adnominal uses by pronouns (cf. English *them books*, with pronoun > demonstrative) is not uncommon crosslinguistically, and it seem likely that this is a readily made abductive innovation in child language.

Once this reanalysed structure becomes entrenched, it is manifested by the emergence of examples such as (27). Given that use of *neb* as a quantifier is parallelled by the syntax of

the cognate items in Old Irish and Middle Breton, we could posit that this reanalysis took place early on in the development of the Celtic languages; however, this reanalysis is so common crosslinguistically that independent innovation in Brythonic and Goidelic cannot be ruled out. The original morphological formation of *neb* is based on the animate form of the interrogative pronoun. This is reflected in Middle Welsh by the fact that pronominal *neb* is animate ('anyone' rather than 'anything'), and that the free-relative antecedent *y neb* is also restricted to animate uses ('anyone who, whoever' rather than 'anything that, whatever'). On the other hand, quantifier *neb* is possible with a following inanimate, as in (28) above. Historically, this must therefore represent an extension in the environments in which it occurs. It is made possible by the fact that Brythonic does not continue the neuter forms of the pronoun (found in Old Irish as *ni* 'anything', *na* 'any'). The evidence of Breton and Cornish, where quantifier *nep* is used irrespective of animacy, suggests that either: (i) Welsh *neb* was once used more widely for inanimates, and that its rarity with inanimate nouns is due to competition from the innovative quantifier *dim*; or (more economically) that Middle Welsh is conservative and maintains an original restriction to use with an animate head noun.

Quantifier *dim*, on the other hand, is a Welsh innovation, as it is not found in any other Celtic language. It is based on the same form of reanalysis as posited for *neb*, only based on the indefinite pronoun *dim* 'anything'. That is, *dim* 'anything' is (abductively) hypothesized to contain a null or elided head noun:

(47)
$$[DP \ dim] > [DP \ [Q \ dim] \ [NP \ \emptyset]]$$
 anything any

Once this hypothesis is accepted, a new item, quantifier *dim* is posited and phrases like that in (25) become possible.

5.1.2 Common Celtic and the historical development of Old Irish *nech*, Middle Welsh *nep* In the documented history of Welsh, it is clear that, in very general terms, *neb* becomes more negative. In Middle Welsh, it has non-negative non-assertive uses and appears in contexts entirely unconnected with negation. However, in Present-day Welsh, it is an inherently negative item. This seems like a straightforward unidirectional development. However, problems arise when we turn to internal and comparative reconstruction.

Brythonic *nep* is cognate with the Old Irish indefinite pronoun *nech* (masculine and feminine), *ni* (neuter). In Old Irish, the 'independent' forms *nech* and *ni* are used as pronouns 'anyone' and 'anything' respectively. Parallel 'dependent' forms exist, *nach* (masculine and feminine) and *na* (neuter). These are used as adnominal quantifiers 'any'. These forms are found in negative polarity contexts, whether negative, as in (48), or other non-assertive environments, as in (49) (universal quantification).

- (48) ním-raib ní

 NEG+1s-be.PRES.3s anything

 'may I not have anything' (ZCP 7: 308 §1) (Dictionary of the Irish Language 1 ní)
- (49) cech duine shirfess ni fort
 every man seek.FUT.REL anything on.2s
 'every man who (whoever) shall ask anything of you'

(Leabhar Breac 462) (Dictionary of the Irish Language 1 ní)

They have non-negative uses rather more extensively than their Middle Welsh cognates. *Nach* etc. is used in affirmative environments to meaning 'some' and 'something':

(50) itá nách cumachta fora cul na n-én-sa be.PRES.3s some power behind the birds-DEM 'there is some power behind these birds'

(Serglige Conculain 7) (Dictionary of the Irish Language 1 nach)

(51) ní do thabairt do neuch something.ACC to give.INF to someone.DAT 'to give something to someone' (glossing *aliquid proferre*)

(Milan glosses 98.a.4) (Dictionary of the Irish Language 1 ni)

Old Irish *nech* may serve as the antecedent to a free relative, although in contrast to Middle Welsh usage in (42), it is not preceded by a definite article in a free relative construction:

(52) comalnad neich forchanat
fulfilling any.NEUT.GEN teach.PRES.3P

'fulfilling of what they teach' (Würzburg glosses 29a.11) (Thurneysen 1946: 309)

The neuter form ni already shows some nominal (as opposed to pronominal) properties, as a noun meaning 'thing', in Old Irish. It combines with the quantifier na to give na-nní or na ní 'anything whatever' and it also combines with cach 'every' to form cach ni 'everything' (Thurneysen 1946: 310). Combinations with the modifying adjective mór 'big, great' to give mór ní 'a great thing, greatly' are also found already in Old Irish (Dictionary of the Irish Language ní₂). This development has continued in the transition to the modern Goidelic languages, where ni has left the pronominal system, acquiring even more nominal characteristics, for instance, a plural form, Scottish Gaelic *nithean* 'things', Irish *nithe*. This is a surprising development, since it represents a counterexample to the generalization that grammaticalization is unidirectional. In the current instance, a pronominal element (an indefinite pronoun) develops into a noun. It is thus an instance of degrammaticalization. In fact, the same degrammaticalization has occurred in Bulgarian, where the pronoun nešto 'anything, something' developed into a common noun 'thing' (Willis 2007). In the Irish case, this unexpected change may be attributed to two factors. First, Irish has a series of generic nouns that function as pronouns in negative polarity contexts; for instance, rud functions both as a negative polarity indefinite pronoun ('anything') and as a generic common noun ('thing') (cf. also duine 'person, anyone'). Effectively, ní was assimilated to this group. Secondly, the morphologically irregular link between the neuter (ni) and masculine/feminine (nech) forms of the pronoun could easily be broken, leading to the two being treated as independent items.

Old Irish *nech* and Middle Welsh *nep* clearly go back to a Common Celtic formation *ne-k^wos. Thurneysen suggests that this was itself a negative pronoun 'no one' and that it lost its negative force, coming to mean 'someone, anyone' (Thurneysen 1946: 311). Lewis & Pedersen, on the other hand, seem to envisage the original item to have been a free-choice pronoun, suggesting that *ne-k^wos was short for *k^wos ne-k^wos 'someone, someone not', which seems to imply an original meaning of 'someone or other, anyone or other' (Lewis & Pedersen 1937: 233). On Thurneysen's view, *ne-k^wos went from negative to non-negative in Common Celtic, before becoming negative again in Welsh. On the first account, as envisaged by Jäger, this would involve a change of the type given in (53). Haspelmath suggests that this is an impossible direction of change (Haspelmath 1997).

(53) NEG V ... NEG-indefinite \geq NEG V ... (non-NEG) indefinite

Haspelmath considers the Celtic case as a possible counterexample to this generalization, and it is in fact the only possible counterexample for which he is not able to suggest an alternative

account. However, there are good reasons for rejecting it as an instance of the development in (53). First of all, on Thurneysen's account, it is not really clear what the basis for the formation is in the first place. On the other hand there are parallels for Lewis and Pedersen's suggestion, for instance the parallel formations of Lithuanian *kas ne kas* 'something, someone' and Hindi / Urdu *koii na koii* 'somebody' (Haspelmath 1997: 232):

- (54) Kas ne kas jau padaryta.

 what.NOM NEG what.NOM already do.PTC

 'Something has already been done.' (Lithuanian) (Dictionary of Modern Lithuanian)
- (55) Kas ne kas, o jau mano brolis tikrai nenuvils.

 who NEG who.NOM but EMPH my brother certainly NEG.let.down
 'If there is anyone who will not let (us) down, that is my brother.'

 (?'Whoever [may let us down], my brother will certainly not let us down.')

(Lithuanian)

If Lewis & Pedersen are correct, then we have an original free-choice indefinite pronoun that generalizes as an ordinary indefinite in Common Celtic, and then narrows towards negative environments in Welsh. The first part of this development is attested in French and (presumably under French influence) in Breton. Breton has ordinary indefinite pronouns of the form $unan\ bennak$ 'someone', $un\ dra\ bennak$ 'something'. Here the element bennak derives historically from py, the unstressed form of a general interrogative pronoun 'who, what', plus a negative element na(g). The original context for its use must have been something like the free relative construction that survives in Cornish:

(56) **panak** vo age deses
whatever be.PRES.SUBJ.3S their disease
'whatever their disease may be'
(BMer. 3104) (Lewis 1946: 46) (Cornish)

Here the negative must once have been interpreted as an instance of expletive negation, cf. French *Je doute, qu'il ne soit là* 'I doubt that he'll be there' (Rowlett 1998: 26–7), or German *Was es nicht alles gibt!* '(look) who was(n't) there'. The relevant shift parallels the slightly earlier development of Old French *quel* ... *que* from free relative 'whatever' along the same pathway to free-choice indefinite marker, attested in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,

illustrated in (57), to the Modern French *quelque*-series (*quelque* 'some', *quelqu'un* 'someone', *quelque chose* 'something' etc.) (Foulet 1919).

(57) Qui femme prend, de **quelque** taille, /Il ne puet faillir a bataille. who wife takes of any size he NEG can lack at battle 'Anyone who takes a wife, of whatever / any size, he cannot be short of battles.'

(Jean le Fèvre, *Les lamentations de Matheolus* 1. ii, v. 3817–18) (c. 1371)

(Foulet 1919: 227)

5.2 Middle Cornish *neffra* 'always'

Middle Cornish has a single series of indefinites with a distribution that is not sensitive to negative polarity; that is, all items are found in negative, non-assertive and affirmative contexts, and are thus characterized as featureless []. The forms themselves are given in (58).

person den (vyth) / nep (onon) 'someone, anyone'
thing nep peyth / nep tra / tra (vyth) 'something, anything'
quantity nep N 'some, any' (also N vyth)
time neffra / bythqueth / byth / vyth / nep preys 'ever, always'
place (in) nep pow / nep le / nep tu 'somewhere, anywhere'

The generic nouns *den* 'a person' and *tra* 'a thing' are used alone as indefinites. The inherited quantifier *nep* 'some, any' may also be used with various generic nouns to create indefinites such as *nep peyth* 'some thing' or *nep preys* 'some time'. This strategy is used to create various place indefinites with the generic nouns *pow* 'country', *le* 'place' and *tu* 'side'.

Examples in (59) and (60) show lack of sensitivity to negative polarity: *nep le* 'somewhere, anywhere' is used indiscriminately in an affirmative context in (59) and in a negative context in (60).

(59) Hy re gafes dyhogel /dor dyseghys **yn nep le.**she PERF get.PAST.3S certainly earth dried.out insome place
'She has certainly found dry land somewhere.' (*Origo mundi* 1143–4) (Cornish)

(60) rag bytqueth my ny welys /benen thy'm a wel plekye
for ever I NEG see.PAST.1s woman to.me REL better please.impf.3s
/wheth yn nep le
yet in any place
'For never have I seen a woman who pleased me more in any place.'

(Origo mundi 2107–9) (Cornish)

Strikingly, this patterning is even extended to the English loanword *neffra* (< Old or Early Middle English *næfra* 'never'), which adopts the distribution of its Cornish equivalent *bythqueth*, and is therefore found in both negative and affirmative contexts. Example (61) shows its unexpected affirmative use to mean 'always'.

(61) ha **neffra** me a 'th vynyk.

and ever I PRT you bless.PRES.3S

'and I shall always bless you.'

(Bewnans Ke 791) (Cornish)

In crossing from English to Cornish then, *neffra* has lost a [NEGATIVE] feature. However, here it is clear that L2 English is responsible: Cornish speakers assumed that *neffra* had the same distribution as the nearest equivalent item, *bythqueth*, which was featureless. For this reason, *neffra* was featureless from the start in Cornish.

5.3 Scottish Gaelic *càil*, *sian* etc. 'anything'

Scottish Gaelic has created a number of new indefinite pronouns from minimizers, completing bleaching the lexical content of these items in the process. For instance, we have *sian / sìon* 'anything' (Uist Gaelic) < OIr. *sian* 'a term applied to various kinds of continuous or prolonged sound' including 'howling or roaring of the wind or sea; lowing (of cattle)', 'humming; whistling, whirring' etc. (cf. English *a squeak*); and *càil* from OIr. *cáil* 'quality, property; characteristic, trait; repute, reputation; measure, amount; way, respect' (eDIL). The only plausible context for reanalysis and the relevant semantic shift in these cases is in a negative environment with these items used as minimizers:

(62) I didn't hear [DP] a squeak] > I didn't hear [DP] anything].

So, initially we have N [] > N [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE]. However, today, they are all used in a range of non-negative, non-assertive contexts:

- (63) Cha d' ith mi càil.

 NEG PRT eat.PAST I anything

 'I ate nothing.' (Wentworth)
- (64) A bheil **càil** ceàrr?

 Q be.PRES anything wrong

 'Is anything the matter?' (Wentworth)
- iad (65)Bha a' impidh air daoine a chunnaic càil cur be.IMPF they PROG put.INF appeal on people REL see.PAST anything bruidhinn ri polais. na speak.INF with the police 'They were appealing to people who saw something/anything to speak to the police.'

Hence we have a subsequent development from N [AFFECTIVE, NEGATIVE] to D [AFFECTIVE]. The 'backwards' move here is from negative indefinite / strong NPI to weak NPI. This has to be explained analogically: other indefinite pronouns in Scottish Gaelic have an [AFFECTIVE] distribution, and this was extended to the new items.

5.4 The Slavonic *nekto/nešto*-series

Jäger considers two possible reconstructions of the Slavonic nekto-series of indefinite pronouns. In the earliest attested Slavonic languages, this series had the distribution of an ordinary indefinite, occurring in affirmative contexts, and being unavailable in negative contexts. According to one hypothesis, which Jäger prefers, these derive from negative indefinites, and this would therefore be an instance of [NEGATIVE] > []. According to the other hypothesis, this would be an instance of free-choice pronoun > ordinary indefinite pronoun, effectively [] > [].

The Common Slavonic reconstructed form of these items involves a long /e/ in the first syllable, for instance *někůto 'someone', clearly written in the earliest Slavonic languages, such as Old East Slavonic and Old Church Slavonic. Thus, while the second element is clearly the interrogative pronoun *kůto 'who', the nature of the first element is not clear, since it is not identical to the negative marker *ne, with a reconstructed short vowel.

The first hypothesis says that the first element is the negative particle in a lengthened grade. The formation therefore goes back to Indo-European. While ablaut gradations are of course a central part of Indo-European inflectional and derivational morphology, it is not clear what function an ablaut gradation of the negative particle could play, or indeed on what basis it could have arisen. Jäger cites the parallel formations in Celtic and Baltic as support for this hypothesis. We have actually already seen both (Welsh *neb*/Irish *nech* and Lithuanian *kas ne kas*). However, all these really show is that new pronouns can be formed from a negative particle plus an interrogative. They do not demonstrate that the resulting pronoun will be restricted to negative environments, and we have seen that there is good evidence to think that the resulting pronoun might actually be a free-choice pronoun or a free relative.

The second hypothesis derives it from a Common Slavonic sequence parallel to Old Church Slavonic *ne vě kůto*... 'I don't know who...'. Since *vě* 'I know' actually exists in the earliest Slavonic languages, this formation would have to date to Common Slavonic itself or perhaps Common Balto-Slavonic rather than any earlier. Jäger rejects this on phonological grounds, arguing that there is no evidence for the element *vě* having been present. The vowel of *vě* survives in the contraction of *ne vě* to *ně*, so in that sense there is evidence for it. However, she is right to imply that this contraction is not phonologically regular. Here it is in good company. Of all of the examples of the emergence of free-choice pronouns from sequences 'I don't know who' etc. cited by Haspelmath, not one is phonologically regular. This seems to be typical of cases where whole clauses undergo grammaticalization, cf. similar English cases such as *whatchamacallit* < *what you may call it*. Against this background, it would actually be surprising if this case were phonologically regular.

In acquisitional terms, the first hypothesis would require acquirers of Common Slavonic to have overlooked all of the evidence for the [NEGATIVE] feature in these items, yet we have seen that this is the one aspect of the distribution of indefinites that children are very good at. On the other hand, the development of free-choice pronouns into ordinary pronouns is very common crosslinguistically. We have seen other examples of it, and it does not seem to pose any acquisitional problems. Given that the only evidence for the development for the loss of the feature [NEGATIVE] comes from two cases of reconstruction, both of which are amenable to alternative analyses, it does not seem that we have good grounds for believing that changes in the development of indefinites really following a "random path", and that the path away from [NEGATIVE] is freely available. When it is available at all, it is under very special circumstances. Of course, the Cornish example is real, being based on attested material, but it shows us rather that such changes are possible in second language acquisition

where speakers may use the grammar of their native language to form hypotheses about lexical items of another language without any regard to evidence from that other language.

6 Conclusion

We have considered examples of the various possible directions of development in indefinite systems, both 'forwards' developments innovating narrower restrictions on the distribution of items, and putative 'backwards' developments, relaxing these restrictions. I have argued that there are reasons to doubt that developments in the distribution of indefinites follow a "random walk" around the space of possible systems. In particular, I have doubted the possibility, during ordinary first language acquisition, of the loss of a restriction to negative environments, that is, the feature [NEGATIVE]. Not only does the evidence from first language acquisition show that this feature is easily, sometimes too easily, acquired by children, we have also seen that, while the three other developments are all amply attested, the evidence for [NEGATIVE] > [] is sparse. Apart from special circumstances involving individual items rather than series of pronouns, it is based almost entirely on reconstructions, never a good foundation on which to base a generalization about diachronic language change. Furthermore, these reconstructions are all open to other interpretation, based on typologically well documented development, and so cannot be regarded as reliable evidence for this type of development.

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