

# Blocking effects in the expression of negation

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## Abstract

Dutch (like German) avoids adjacency of negation and indefinite pronouns, e.g. *\*niet iets*, *\*niet ergens*, *\*niet ooit* ("not anything", "not anywhere", "not ever," respectively). On the basis of corpus data, various factors which help improve such sequences are identified (such as discourse factors like echoing, as well as syntactic factors like the particular syntactic position of negation, the indefinite and the presence of postmodifiers) and an account of the remaining ungrammatical cases is provided in terms of *blocking* by n-words. It is argued that n-words such as *niets*, *nergens*, *nooit*, being lexicalized units, are preferred over complex syntactic structures. At the same time, an account is given for the lack of blocking effects in English in terms of the different type of negation (with negation incorporated in the auxiliary) and word order in that language.

## 1. Introduction.<sup>1</sup>

The idea that one way of expressing a given meaning may block another way of expressing it is hardly new. It has been around at least since Hermann Paul's *Über die Aufgaben der Wortbildungslehre* (Paul 1896). The morphological literature is full of references to this idea, and of proposals to embed the notion into a larger theory of language. In present-day syntax, the idea of blocking is less popular, presumably because blocking did not fit in with the general trend of the 1970's and 1980's away from paradigmatic relations to syntagmatic relations. Theories as different as Government-Binding Grammar, HPSG, LFG or categorial grammar all agree on the need to view the unwellformedness of a sentence or phrase just in terms of its own internal structure, and the constraints which the grammar imposes on that structure. The fact that something might be illformed, or considered ill-formed, because there is an alternative way of expressing its meaning was disallowed from theoretical consideration, because that would imply a transderivational constraint, something which teachers of introductory syntax would routinely mention with a shudder as a terrible outgrowth of the permissiveness of the 1960's, with its free-flowing Generative Semantics paradigm. Now, in the 1990's, blocking is back, together with a new interest in paradigmatic aspects of linguistic structure. We see this in Minimalism (Chomsky 1995), where alter-native derivations are compared for economy, but more spectacularly in Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky 1993), which can be seen as a particular theory of blocking.

In this paper, I will take an eclectic position as regards the position of blocking in the grammar. I assume that the grammar is used by the computational system which allows us to formulate and understand utterances to produce a set of candidates for expressing a given meaning. These candidates are subject to a number of output constraints which may be ab-

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the conference on the syntax, semantics and pragmatics of negation, held at the University of Salford, October 30 - November 1, 1998, and at the University of Tübingen, November 27 1998. I want to thank the audiences at both events for stimulating discussion.

solute or statistical in nature. These output constraints may have a functional motivation, but functional forces are not directly appealed to. For example, there is a clear functional motivation for the kind of blocking where listed items such as irregular forms block regular word-formation or syntactic structures. The functional motivation here is that for language production, picking something wholesale from the lexicon might be more economical than computing it online. However, this effect is strongest when the listed item is easy to find. If we have to search among infrequently-used vocabulary items, the advantage of looking-up might be minimal, possibly even negative. This corresponds to the fact that this kind of blocking is clearly sensitive to frequency (Rainer 1988). And the very fact that there is blocking seems to be something that will have to be learned. Children, for example, often exhibit blocked forms such as regular past tenses of strong verbs, even after they have learned the irregular past tense forms. Only later do children learn to suppress the regular forms, and under conditions of stress the blocked forms sometimes re-emerge. Moreover, there are cases where irregular and regular forms live in peaceful coexistence. This suggests that blocking is *not* an automatic phenomenon, which kicks in under the influence of universal functional forces, but is part and parcel of the knowledge of language which has to be learned explicitly as part of the acquisition process.

The output conditions imposed on candidate-sentences can be viewed as part of the grammar or as part of language use. In psycholinguistic terms, they could be viewed as part of the utterance formulator. However, since they closely interact with grammatical structure and their theoretical vocabulary will share many elements with the system that produces output candidates, it makes sense to view them as part of the grammar.

In this paper, I will consider blocking effects in the grammar of negation. We will see that there are several types of effects in this area. In particular, I want to distinguish between blocking by listed items and Elsewhere-type blocking.<sup>2</sup> In the latter case, we have competition between forms with a narrowly circumscribed distribution and forms which can be used in all other cases. The first type of blocking is exhibited by negative quantifiers, so-called *n*-words, which may block syntactic combinations of negation + indefinite pronouns, while the second type of blocking is exhibited by a number of polarity items.<sup>3</sup> I should mention that I am by no means the first linguist to propose blocking effects in the area of negation. Horn (1989) makes frequent appeals to blocking.

2. In Dutch, there appears to be a ban against sequences of *niet*, the word for “not”, followed by an indefinite pronoun. This is evident, not just from introspection, but even from the merest glance at corpus data. As my corpus, I have used the World Wide Web, without any doubt the largest collection of texts available to anyone at present, a corpus which can be accessed through various programs called search engines. On October 12, 1998, the search engine Altavista listed the following frequencies for occurrences on the World Wide Web of combinations with the indefinite pronoun *ooit*, an adverb meaning ‘ever’ or ‘once’:

(1)	<i>ooit</i>	‘ever’	34227
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<sup>2</sup> I should note here that it is possible to unify the two types of blocking, as is the case e.g. in the work of Kiparsky (1982), where listed items are equated with rules producing just one item. I am not convinced that this unification is correct, but will leave the matter unresolved here. See Van Marle (1985) for further discussion of the various types of blocking.

<sup>3</sup> I will not discuss blocking of morphological negation, e.g. blocking of *un*-adjectives by lexical antonyms (cf. Zimmer 1964).

nooit	`never'	89554
niet ooit	`not ever'	59

Even without any prior knowledge of Dutch, one would infer from these numbers that there is an severe asymmetry between the morphological form *nooit* and the periphrastic, or analytic, expression *niet ooit*. I assume that the asymmetry is the result of *blocking*. It is the type of blocking where morphological forms preclude syntactic expression (see Poser 1992 for a number of cases). And indeed in many contexts the sequence *niet ooit* is not just infrequent, but simply ungrammatical:

- (2) a. \*In Holland regent het niet ooit.  
 In Holland rains it not ever  
 "It never rains in Holland"
- b. \*Niet ooit kwam Berend Botje terug  
 not ever came Berend Botje back  
 "Never did B.B. return"
- c. \*Waarom bel je niet ooit?  
 Why call you not ever?  
 "Why do you never call?"

The few cases where *niet ooit* is acceptable involve a limited number of special contexts:

- (3) a. there is an intervening clause boundary  
 b. *niet ooit* is part of a question, and *niet* is expletive/spurious  
 c. *niet* is metalinguistic/echoic  
 d. *niet ooit* is itself inside a larger negative context

These four cases are illustrated by examples (4a-d) respectively:

- (4) a. Ik geloof niet ooit zo gelachen te hebben.  
 I believe not ever so laughed to have  
 "I don't believe I ever laughed as much"
- b. Ben jij niet ooit Miss Holland geweest?  
 Were you not ever Miss Holland been  
 "Weren't you Miss Holland once?"
- c. Ik heb NIET ooit gelogen.  
 I have NOT ever lied  
 "I have NOT ever lied"
- d. Er is niemand die niet ooit gelogen heeft.  
 There is nobody who not ever lied has  
 "There's nobody who hasn't ever lied"

The first three cases are easy to account for. They cannot be compared to sentences with morphological negation, because they have a different meaning. It is intuitively clear that (4a) and (4b) do not mean the same thing as (5a) and (5b), and so presumably the computational system that provides the alternatives, which I take to be some function mapping a meaning onto a set of alternatives, would not consider (4a) and (5a), or (4b) and (5b) to be forms in competition:

- (5) a. Ik geloof nooit zo gelachen te hebben.  
I believe never so laughed to have  
“I believe I never laughed as much”  
b. Ben jij nooit Miss Holland geweest?  
Were you never Miss Holland been  
“Have you never been Miss Holland?”

The differences in meaning are also present in the English examples, so there is no need to dwell on them.

In the case of echoic or metalinguistic negation, the demands of echoing overrule any blocking effects. An affirmative statement with an occurrence of *ooit* is explicitly denied, and this purpose is best served by repeating the sentence verbatim, adding just an emphatic occurrence of *niet*. The lack of blocking is due to what one might call a transderivational parallelism requirement.

Rather a different story appears to be needed for example (4d). It belongs to a set of cases originally identified by C.L. Baker as evidence that positive polarity items, which normally shun the scope of negation, are licit in double negation contexts. The idea is that the two negations cancel out, and so do not stand in the way of positive polarity items. Baker's examples typically involve negation in a higher clause and negation in a lower clause, with a positive polarity item downstairs. The examples in (6) are all from Baker (1970). The positive polarity items are italicized:

- (6) a. There isn't anyone in this camp who *wouldn't rather* be in Montpellier.  
b. I find it impossible to believe that someone else *couldn't do a far better* job than our present governor.  
c. You can't convince me that someone isn't *still* holed up in this cave.  
d. George has never come across anyone who *couldn't do pretty well* on that exam.

Assuming that *ooit* is a positive polarity item, as was indeed proposed by Van der Wouden (1997), we could explain (4d) as a result of Baker's double negation effect. In fact, we would not have to make any appeal to blocking at all. Cases where *niet + ooit* are ruled out would follow directly from *ooit*'s status as a positive polarity item. The fact that we get *nooit* instead is then grammatically of no interest because it is not connected to the illformedness of *niet ooit*. It is merely convenient for those who would like to express what they may not express by means of *niet ooit*.

The problem with this kind of argumentation is that it fails to be illuminating. We now delegate the illformedness of *niet ooit* to the well-attested, but ill-understood phenomenon of positive polarity. *Why* something is a positive polarity item is left unexplained.

A way out of this dilemma is offered in Horn (1989), where it is noted that Baker's examples are acceptable precisely when they have an *echoic* or metalinguistic flavor. The examples in (6) are natural in situations where the affirmative part of the embedded clause is under discussion or expected in the conversational context.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise they are not accep-

<sup>4</sup> Compare for example the acceptable sentence (4d) with the unacceptable (i):

- (i) \*Niemand loog niet ooit.  
Nobody lied not ever/once

Baker's article does not explain why sentences such as (i) are much worse than their structurally

table. Hence one might assume that parallelism requirements of the kind needed for echoic negation, requirements which overrule any blocking effects by n-words, may also serve to counteract blocking in Baker's double negation contexts. If the suggestion in footnote 2 is correct, the contexts of Baker's double negation are even more restricted to just conventionalized litotes constructions.

3. The case of *niet ooit* does not stand alone. Other indefinite pronouns present a similar picture, with added complications. The Altavista search engine yields the following numbers:

(7) iets	"something/anything"	169591
niets	"nothing"	62448
niet iets	"not anything"	1387

Again we see a strong preference for the n-word over negation + indefinite. But this preference is less absolute. On inspection, this turns out to be due to one main effect: when *iets* is followed by a modifier, such as a relative clause, an adjective or a prepositional phrase, the periphrastic construction is not blocked by the n-word. In (8) some examples from the World Wide Web are presented:

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more complex counterparts such as (4d). The two sentences have the same truth-conditional meaning, but a relevant difference may be that *there is nobody who doesn't* is a conventional litotes construction, whereas *nobody .. not* isn't. Similarly:

- (ii) Niemand maakt me wijs dat hier niet ooit een kasteel heeft gestaan.  
 Nobody makes me wise that hier not ever a castle has stood  
 "Nobody will make me believe that there wasn't a castle here once."

is fine, but a similar statement like (iii) is not:

- (iii) ??Ik geloof niet dat hier niet ooit een kasteel heeft gestaan.  
 I believe not that here not ever a castle has stood  
 "I don't believe that there wasn't a castle here once."

Once more, it is different to find a semantic or syntactic explanation for the difference in acceptability. Again, it would seem that a notion such as "conventional litotes-construction" might be invoked to explain the difference between the two examples. Note in this connection that an old asymmetry between positive and negative polarity items might be eliminated if we take the notion of litotes more seriously. It is a well-known fact that positive polarity items may be acceptable in double negation contexts, while negative polarity items are also acceptable in the context of double negation. The latter is odd, if double negation contexts are to count as "positive" and if positive and negative polarity items are to have complementary distributions. Note, however, that the asymmetry breaks down in cases of litotes: here, there is no possibility of negative polarity items, and hence every reason to speak of truly positive contexts:

- (iv) \*It is not unlikely that she will ever return.  
 (v) It is unlikely/not likely that she will ever return.  
 (vi) \*He was not surprised that she would ever do such a thing.  
 (vii) He was surprised/did not expect that she would ever do such a thing.

- (8) a. Geestelijke groei is niet iets wat uit Amerika komt.  
 Spiritual growth is not something what out America comes  
 "Spiritual growth is not something that comes from America"
- b. Eeuwigheid is niet iets onveranderlijks.  
 Eternity is not something immutable  
 "Eternity is not something immutable"
- c. Dat is niet iets van de laatste tijd.  
 That is not something of the last time  
 "That is not something recent"

More than 80% of the 144 occurrences I checked on the World Wide Web turned out to be of this type. The remainder fell into the by now familiar groups of expletive negation in questions, contrastive or echoic negation, double negation of the echoic type and a few cases where *niet* and *iets* were separated by a clause boundary. To give just one example, the following case of contrastive negation was found on the Web:

- (9) Wie iets onderzoekt wil niet iets hebben, maar wil iets weten.  
 Who something investigates wants not something have, but wants something know.  
 "Whoever investigates something does not want to have something, but wants to know something."

The postmodified cases are interesting. The vast majority involves sentences in which the indefinite pronoun is used as a predicate nominal, as in the examples in (8). Indefinites used as predicate nominals have a special status in many languages, and may exhibit behavior not witnessed elsewhere. To mention just one case, the opposition between *any* and *some* in English is neutralized in predicates. Normally, *any* occurs after negation when the indefinite has narrow scope, and *some* is used for wide scope indefinites, as in the examples in (10):

- (10) a. You can't please anyone these days.  
 b. You just can't please some people.

Predicates, on the other hand, allow either determiner with narrow scope:

- (11) It is not something/anything extraordinary.

Without any doubt, this has to do with the fact that predicate nominals are semantically rather different creatures than other nominals. According to Partee's type shift theory of predicates, predicate nominals are of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ , the type of predicates, whereas ordinary noun phrases are of type  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$ , the type of generalized quantifiers. It is therefore not entirely surprising that different conditions hold for predicate nominals. In particular, various blocking effects are lifted: *niet iets* is no longer blocked by *niets*, and narrow-scope *some* is no longer blocked by *any*. The precise reasons for the lack of blocking in predicates still deserve to be studied further. However, it is now possible to explain why the majority of *niet iets* sequences in Dutch have a postnominal modifier: all by itself, simple indefinite pronouns like *iets* or *something* are too general to serve as predicates. Sentences like (12) are grammatical, but receive a special interpretation:

- (12) a. Dat is iets.  
 b. That is something.

The literal meaning of these sentences is a tautology: since *that* is a referring expressing, it will refer to something, hence saying of this referent that it is something is not particularly useful. The normal usage of *iets* or *something* as predicates is with postmodifiers, where the meaning is neither tautological nor special:

- (13) a. Dat is iets anders.  
b. That is something else.

I conclude that the strong presence of postmodifiers after *niet iets* largely follows from another, more significant observation, namely that these sequences almost always involve predicational structures. It is not obvious, however, that predication can completely explain the postmodifier effect. Even when there is not predicational structure, the presence of a postmodifier clearly improves the acceptability of *niet iets*:

- (14) a. Hij zei niet iets nieuws.  
He said not anything new  
“He didn’t say anything new”  
b. \*Hij zei niet iets.  
He said not anything

4. The [+human] indefinite pronoun *iemand* and its negated counterparts show the same blocking effects. Our search engine yielded the frequencies in (15):

- |      |                    |              |                          |
|------|--------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| (15) | <i>iemand</i>      | “someone”    | 76199                    |
|      | <i>niemand</i>     | “no-one”     | 136796                   |
|      | <i>niet iemand</i> | “not anyone” | “about 400” <sup>5</sup> |

Upon inspection, the *niet iemand* sequences fall in the same categories as the *niet iets* sequences: copula constructions with postmodifiers, occurrences in negative questions, and cases where negation is contrastive or metalinguistic.

5. The most spectacular case of blocking is no doubt the blocking of *niet + een*, the indefinite article, by the negative determiner *geen*. The raw numbers in this case are

- |      |                 |         |                |
|------|-----------------|---------|----------------|
| (16) | <i>een</i>      | ‘a’     | 8,679,425      |
|      | <i>geen</i>     | ‘no’    | 607,966        |
|      | <i>niet een</i> | ‘not a’ | “about 10,000” |

The high number of *niet + een* cases is entirely due to the frequency of *een* in copula constructions. With the indefinite article, there is no pragmatic need for post-modifiers, and so a larger number of occurrences is expected. Elsewhere, we still see clear blocking effects:

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<sup>5</sup> For combinations of key words, Altavista sometimes gives rounded-off estimates. Since we are interested in ballpark figures, not exact numbers, this should not matter.

- (17) a. \*Jan aarzelde niet een moment. [OK when echoic, or contrastive]  
 Jan hesitated not a moment  
 “Jan did not hesitate for a moment”  
 b. Jan aarzelde geen moment  
 Jan hesitated no moment  
 “Jan did not hesitate for a moment”
- (18) a. \*Niet een lezing was zonder belang.  
 not a lecture was without interest  
 “No lecture was without interest”  
 b. Geen lezing was zonder belang.  
 no lecture was without interest  
 “No lecture was without interest”

The same blocking effects obtain with the zero determiner of bare plurals and mass nouns:

- (19) a. \*Ik heb niet tijd.  
 I have not time  
 b. Ik heb geen tijd  
 I have no time
- (20) a. \*Ik zag niet mensen.  
 I saw not people  
 b. Ik zag geen mensen.  
 I saw no people

6. Having reviewed a number of apparent blocking effects, the question arises how to address these effects. Is it really necessary to treat these cases in terms of some blocking mechanism, or can we approach the matter in some other way? I will now outline an alternative, and suggest some reasons why it is not satisfactory.

There is an popular approach to n-words which treats them as the result of syntactic incorporation. In the generative tradition, this idea is due to Klima (1964), and it fits right in with the currently popular notion of head movement. Suppose we let indefinite pronouns, or rather, the feature bundles corresponding to these pronoun, adjoin to negation. The resulting cluster of features is then spelled out as an n-word. Instead of a theory of blocking, we would then need a theory of why incorporation is sometimes obligatory and sometimes optional.

However, there are several syntactic problems with incorporation. The first problem is that if we treat n-words as the result of incorporation an indefinite into a higher negation element, we would have to assume for English *no*, or Dutch *geen*, that indefinite determiners may leave the determiner phrase in order to incorporate. This movement would violate the Left Branch condition which is otherwise adhered to in Dutch and English by determiners. But suppose that this problem can be solved somehow. In that case there remain some cases where word order stands in the way of a head movement analysis. One interesting case is provided by a set of temporal PPs, listed in (21):

- (21) in weken      “in weeks”  
 in maanden    “in months”  
 in jaren        “in years”  
 in tijden       “in ages”



These PPs are polarity items, but have the peculiar property of being illicit when they are right-adjacent to negation:

- (22) a. \*Het heeft niet in weken geregend.  
It has not in weeks rained  
“It has not rained in weeks”  
b. \*Ik heb haar niet in maanden gezien.  
I have her not in months seen  
“I have not seen her in months”  
c. \*Ik heb niet in tijden zo gelachen.  
I have not in ages so laughed  
“I haven’t laughed as much in ages”

Instead, Dutch has two options not available in English: scrambling or a form with PP-internal negation:

(23) SCRAMBLING

- a. Het heeft in weken niet geregend.  
It has in weeks not rained  
“It has not rained in weeks”  
b. Ik heb haar in maanden niet gezien  
I have her in months not seen  
“I haven’t seen her in months”  
c. Ik heb in tijden niet zogelachen  
I have in ages not so laughed  
“I haven’t laughed like this in ages”

(24) PP-INTERNAL NEGATION

- a. Het heeft in geen weken geregend.  
It has in no weeks rained  
“It has not rained in weeks”  
b. Ik heb haar in geen maanden gezien.  
I have her in no months seen  
“I haven’t seen her in months”  
c. Ik heb in geen tijden zo gelachen.  
I have in no ages so laughed  
“I haven’t laughed like this in ages”

I will ignore scrambling and topicalization here. These processes clearly bleed incorporation. However, the cases of PP-internal negation are interesting, because they contain exactly the same element *geen* which elsewhere competes with negation + zero determiner. If we were to analyse such cases as involving incorporation of the zero determiner into the negation element, both word order and independent constraints on head movement would be violated. Note also that the PPs in question are adjuncts, and hence should be treated as islands. The alternative, lowering of negation onto the zero determiner and spell-out of the result, which is actually what Klima proposed, violates yet other constraints which serve to rule out head lowering. In a constrained theory of syntax, obligatory incorporation is not a

good alternative to blocking as it would require violations of established grammatical constraints. In this connection, it should be noted that the prepositional phrases in (21) are somewhat exceptional in modern Dutch. In most cases, there is no PP internal negation involving *geen*, although some Belgian dialects deviate in this respect from the standard language:

- (25) a. Ik houd niet van koffie.  
I hold not of koffie  
"I do not like coffee"  
b. %Ik hou van geen koffie.  
I hold of no coffee  
"I do not like coffee"

The PPs which allow internal negation with sentential scope form a closed class in Dutch. They are, therefore, idioms, just like their English counterparts. Some cases are listed in (26):

- (26) a. in geen geval  
in no case  
"by no means"  
b. met geen mogelijkheid  
with no possibility  
"in no way"  
c. van geen kanten  
from no sides  
"from no direction = in no way"

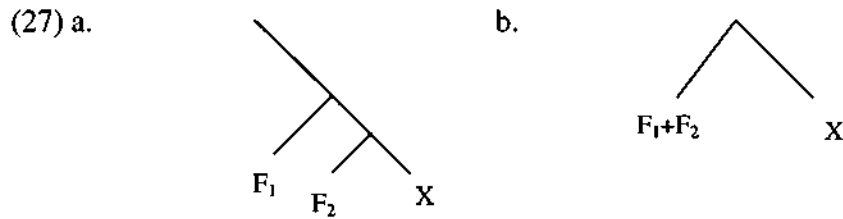
I take it that idioms, just like lexical items, are listed (cf. e.g. Jackendoff 1975, 1997), and as such may block syntactic formations. Hence the idiom *in geen jaren* blocks the regular combination *niet in jaren*. The claim that *in geen jaren* is an idiom is also motivated by the fact that English *in years* does not have an internally negated counterpart *in no years*, even though English has internally negated PPs elsewhere. If the internally-negated construction were entirely regular, we would expect to find more parallelism between the two languages.

7. Let me now contrast the situation sketched above for Dutch with the situation in English. Quite generally, it seems to be the case that English lacks the kind of blocking effects which are so obvious in Dutch. The question is why. Ideally, one would like to derive this difference with Dutch from some basic difference in the grammar of negation.<sup>6</sup> The most strik-

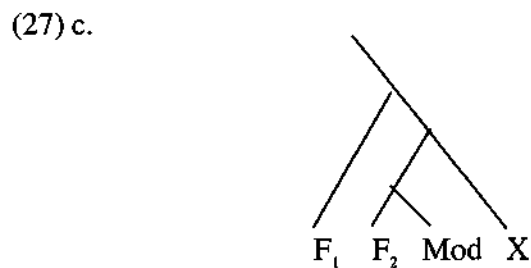
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<sup>6</sup> I do not think that global variation of the kind proposed in Ackema and Neeleman (1998) is relevant for the differences between Dutch and English with regard to the incorporation of negation. In their view, languages may vary according to how high they rank the principle of "Avoid Morphology". According to their paper, English and Dutch are alike in ranking it rather highly. This would explain the absence of productive noun incorporation in the two languages. It is not at all clear that languages have global preferences or dispreferences in the competition of morphological with syntactic options. Rather, it seems to me that a language may prefer syntax over morphology in some domains (e.g. noun-verb combinations) and morphology over syntax elsewhere (e.g. combinations of negation and indefinites or in the formation of the comparative). In Optimality Theoretic terms, this means that the Avoid Morphology constraint would have to be broken up into a family of constraints ("Avoid Noun Incorporation", "Avoid Neg-Incorporation" and so on) if it is to be compatible with a more complete coverage of the relevant facts.

ing difference between the two languages is that negation is part of the auxiliary system in English, but not in Dutch. Another difference between the two languages is basic word order. Negation is frequently adjacent to an indefinite adjunct or complement in Dutch, but in English there is usually an intervening verb. I take both differences to be relevant. Let me be a bit more explicit about blocking. I want to say that a structure as in (27a) is blocked by the structure in (27b), where  $F_1$  corresponds to negation and  $F_2$  to a bundle of indefinite features.



When there is a postmodifier, the structure is not exactly that of (27a), but rather:



Presumably, it is this different syntactic configuration which is responsible for the lack of blocking in the presence of postmodifiers.  $F_1$  and  $F_2$  may not merge if one or the other has material adjoined to it which lacks a counterpart in the merged form  $F_{1+2}$ .

In English, sequences of negation + indefinite pronoun are rare, due to VO word order, but not impossible. For instance, we have

- (28) a. I will not ever see you again.  
b. He was not anywhere to be seen.

I claim that the reason such forms are not blocked, is that they have a parsing where negation is attached to the preceding auxiliary, as the result of cliticization (or negative inflection, if we follow the advice of Zwicky and Pullum 1983). The special form *-n't* can only be explained as the result of prior cliticization of *not*. As a consequence, there is no direct competition between *not ever* and *never*, or between *not anywhere* and *nowhere* in such cases, but rather between *will not ever* and *will never*, or *was not anywhere* and *was nowhere*. In both variants, we have some kind of incorporated negation, either as part of the Aux, or as part of the indefinite. Neither type is favored over the other, and in any case the disfavored analytic structure (27a) is not at stake.

A different story applies to constituent negation. Consider (29):

- (29) a. Never will I see you again.  
b. \*?Not ever will I see you again.  
c. No one could help her.
-

- d. \*Not anyone could help her.

Here we have removed the effect of preceding auxes, and suddenly a blocking effect emerges, similar to what we have in Dutch.

A special case where there is no blocking by n-words is resumptive negation:

- (30) I won't do it, not now, not tomorrow, not ever!

I take it that parallelism requirements specific to this construction allow for the analytic option here. In Dutch, resumptive negation also shows strong parallelism requirements (Van der Wouden 1997), leading to a special type of double negation in sentences corresponding to (30):

- (31) Ik doe het niet, nu niet, morgen niet, nooit niet!  
I do it not, now not, tomorrow not, never not!

A final case to be noted is English *not a*. Normally, *not + a* is blocked by *no*, with the exception of predicates and minimizers. Minimizers are polarity-sensitive indefinites denoting some minimal measure or extent. The two cases are illustrated in (31):

- |         |                                       |             |
|---------|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| (32) a. | Not a bad idea!                       | [predicate] |
| b.      | Not a second ago, she was still here. | [minimizer] |
| c.      | Not a shred of truth in that story.   | [minimizer] |

Minimizers have a special interaction with the grammar of determiners. As noted by Progovac (1993) in connection with Kinande, and by Giannakidou (1996) for Modern Greek, some languages use zero determiners only in combination with minimizing nouns. Dutch has a special indefinite determinerlike element *ene* which is used just for minimizers (Postma 1997):

- (33) a. Ik zie geen ene bal.  
I see no one ball  
"I don't see a thing"  
b. Het maakt geen ene moeder uit.  
it makes no one mother out  
"It doesn't matter one bit"

I take this as evidence that minimizers may form a distinct subclass of nouns, with its own licensing relation with the determiner. It is this special licensing relation which allows *not a* to survive with minimizers, while being blocked elsewhere.

8. Elsewhere type blocking. To conclude this paper, I will briefly consider a type of blocking which can be termed 'elsewhere type', named after Kiparsky's (1973) Elsewhere Condition. Many linguistic regularities are in competition such that in a well-circumscribed set of cases, one regularity rules, in all other cases the other. We see this phenomenon in many areas of linguistics, ranging from pragmatics to phonology. Blocking may also exhibit Elsewhere characteristics. One form may block another in a certain set of environments, whereas the

other form is used elsewhere. The elsewhere form is usually considered the unmarked member of the pair of competitors, and the other the marked form.

Many pairs of negative and positive polarity items can be viewed in this light. Thus the familiar pair of English determiners *some* and *any* appear to be in a blocking relation. *Any* is used in negative environments and *some* elsewhere. As a matter of fact, the situation is a bit more complex. *Any* blocks *some* only when it occurs in the scope of negation. In interrogative, conditional or other contexts, both determiners are licit:

- (34)
- a. I don't have any time.
  - b. \*I don't have some time.
  - c. If you have any time, please visit us.
  - d. If you have some time, please visit us.
  - e. Do you have any time?
  - f. Do you have some time?
  - g. Only Fred has any time.
  - h. Only Fred has some time.
  - i. Few of us have any time.
  - j. Few of us have some time.

As noted above, predicate nominals are a special case since they do not exhibit blocking:

- (35)
- a. That is not anything new.
  - b. That is not something new.

Blocking, then, is not just competition between two forms, such that one form is excluded by the other, but it is often more subtle, applying only in specific syntactic contexts.

Cases which are similar to the *some/any* pair are *already/yet* and *still/anymore*. In contexts of direct negation, the polarity items *yet* and *anymore* block their positive counterparts. In other contexts, either item of a pair might be used (with individual preferences, to be sure):

- (36)
- a. Few of us are done already.
  - b. Few of us are done yet.

In Dutch, there is a polarity sensitive degree adverbial, *ook maar*, studied extensively in Rullmann and Hoeksema (1997). In a large database of occurrences of this adverbial, the following numbers were found:

2775 occurrences of *ook maar*  
 475 triggered by *niet*  
 6 occurrences of *niet ook maar*

The low number of *niet ook maar* sequences cannot be explained from general syntactic factors such as preferred word order. Word order is such that one would expect many cases of *niet* directly adjacent to *ook maar*. However, very few of them occur. In fact, none of the equivalent expressions *ook maar*, *zelfs maar* and *zelfs* (all meaning 'even') likes to occur directly after *niet*. Instead, the adverb *eens* is used, which is normally a temporal adverb, but which has a special meaning 'even' precisely when it is preceded directly by negation:

- (37) a. ?\*Jan heeft niet zelfs/ook maar/zelfs maar gelachen  
 Jan has not even laughed  
 b. Jan heeft niet eens gelachen.  
 Jan has not even laughed

In all other contexts, *eens* cannot be used in this way:

- (38) a. Geen van ons zal daarover ook maar piekeren.  
 None of us will there-about even think  
 b. \*Geen van ons zal daarover eens piekeren.  
 None of us will there-about even think  
 (39) a. Ik geloof niet dat hij daarover ook maar piekert.  
 I believe not that he there-about even thinks  
 b. \*Ik geloof niet dat hij daarover eens piekert.

The same observations apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to German *auch nur* (corresponding to Dutch *ook maar*) and *(ein)mal* (cf. Kürschner 1983):

- (40) a. \*Hans hat nicht auch nur ein Wort gesagt.  
 Hans has not even one word said  
 b. Hans hat nicht mal ein Wort gesagt  
 Hans has not even one word said  
 c. Keiner hat auch nur ein Wort gesagt.  
 Nobody has even one word said  
 d. \*Keiner hat mal ein Wort gesagt. [OK with temporal interpretation for *mal*]  
 Nobody has even one word said

It should be clear that *eens* and *mal* are the special forms, and that *ook maar/auch nur* are elsewhere cases. Note also that the blocking does not seem to hold perfectly in all cases for all speakers. As I noted, there were 6 cases of *niet ook maar* in the Hoeksema/Rullmann database. Three of these are given in (41) below. Some of them strike me personally as unacceptable (e.g. (41a), while others are somewhat better.

- (41) a. Niet iets opmerkelijks, niet verstandig, niet ook maar lollig [...] <sup>7</sup>  
 not something remarkable, not sensible, not even funny  
 b. Het stond voor mij zo vast dat hij per se niet met het slechte plan-Reynders zou komen, dat ik mij daarover niet ook maar een seconde zorg heb gemaakt. <sup>8</sup>  
 "I was so certain that he would not come up with the bad Reynders-strategy, that I did not worry about it even a second."  
 c. wjl dit optreden zelf noodzakelijker wijze moest geschieden in een proza, dat geheel van een anderen stand is, dat in 't minst niet ook maar vergeleken kan worden met den prachtigen, gedragen, muzikalen volzin, die ook in Kloos' latere literaire kronieken altijd is blijven bewegen. <sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Simon Vestdijk, *De ziener*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Rapport Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945, deel 1c, verhoren, Staatsdrukkerij, 's Gravenhage 1949, 35.

"because this had to appear in a prose of an entirely different standing, which can not in the least even be compared to the magnificent, lofty, musical period, so characteristic of even Kloos' latter-day literary chronicles"

In some cases, such as (41c), we might explain this acceptability by the possibility of an alternative parsing: rather than [*niet [ook maar X]*], we might be dealing with [*in het minst niet [ook maar X]*]. Again, we would have a case where the relevant blocking configuration (27a) does not apply. As an argument for this claim, I note that occurrences of *in het minst* to the left of negation are always left-adjacent to negation. Topicalization appears to be ruled out, unlike what we see for NPIs such as *in jaren* "in years":

- (42) a. In jaren heb ik niet zo gelachen.  
In years have I not so laughed  
"I haven't laughed as much in years"  
b. \*In het minst ben ik niet tevreden.  
In the least am I not content  
"I am not in the least content"

Perhaps the reason for this is that *in het minst niet* formed a fixed constituent. I should note, by the way, that in recent years *in het minst niet* has become obsolete and been replaced by *niet in het minst*.

## 9. Conclusions.

In this paper, I have studied the competition of morphological and syntactic expression of negation and indefiniteness. I have argued and presented evidence for the following claims:

- negation + indefinite pronoun sequences are blocked by n-words (syntactic negation is blocked by morphological negation)
- this blocking is highly sensitive to syntactic structure, in particular to the position of the negative element, and the presence of postmodifiers
- pragmatic effects may counteract or overrule blocking
- polarity items which occur in a broad range of contexts may be blocked in direct negation contexts by items which require direct negation as a licenser
- negation provides examples for both blocking of syntactic by morphological forms and for blocking of general by specific elements (Elsewhere type blocking)

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<sup>99</sup> Lodewijk van Deyssel, *Over wankunst*.

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