

*Never again***The regrammaticalization of *never* as a marker of sentential negation in English**

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There are a number of contexts in Present-Day English where *never* marks sentential negation rather than negation quantified over time:

- (1) I never stole your wallet this morning.
- (2) a. You're never her mother.  
b. That's never a penalty.
- (3) Never (you) fear.
- (4) Never mind what colour it is. / Never mind.
- (5) I never knew you were Lithuanian.

In 0, unavailable in standard English but widespread in nonstandard varieties of British English, *never* conveys pure, but emphatic, negation in the past. In 0, possible even for many speakers who reject 0, it conveys a pragmatic meaning beyond pure negation: (2a) can be paraphrased as 'There is no process of reasoning by which I can reach the conclusion that you are her mother.' (quantification over reasons rather than time). In such cases, an inference of surprise, as in (2a), or disbelief, as in (2b), may be made. Examples 0 and 0 show what appear to be fossilized expressions where no temporal interpretation is present. Finally the use in 0, although superficially similar to 0, is not sociolinguistically restricted; it also shows a close resemblance to the instances of sentential-negation *never* found in Middle English (ME.), chiefly with verbs of cognition, as in 0.

- (6) And his wiff saide she wost neuer. (*Black Knight of La Tour Landry*, c. 1450, *OED*)

Since *never* derives from a negative element plus a temporal element (*ever*), it is clear that these uses represent a grammaticalization of a negative adverb as a marker of pure negation. This paper investigates how this situation arose using textual evidence from corpora of Middle and Modern English texts. We consider two hypotheses:

## (A) Multiple grammaticalization

- *never* grammaticalizes in ME. as a negation marker used with verbs of cognition
- in this function it becomes obsolete, surviving only in (semi-)fossilized contexts (*never fear* and *never mind*)
- it later regrammaticalizes twice: once to create the 'contrary to logic' negator 0, and once to create emphatic negation 0

## (B) Contraction due to standardization

- *never* grammaticalizes in ME. as a negator, first with verbs of cognition, spreading to other verbs
- with standardization, this use comes to be seen as illogical and is stigmatized
- in standard varieties its use contracts to contexts where it can be pragmatically motivated and to fossilized expressions, leaving the former use only in nonstandard varieties

(B) seems more economical than (A), invoking fewer changes and only a single grammaticalization. However, hypothesis (A), involving triple grammaticalization, seems better supported by textual evidence. We show that the grammaticalizations needed can all easily be derived by plausible misinterpretations of pragmatic inferences (core meaning being reinterpreted as an inference). If multiple grammaticalizations are involved, the history of *never* reinforces an important observation about grammaticalization of negators: new negators typically retain for a while a pragmatic nuance beyond pure negation, either emphatic focus (French *pas*, Welsh *ddim*) or a ‘contrary to expectation’ meaning (Italian *mica*, German *nie im Leben*). English *never* exemplifies both along different paths of its development.