

Negation and (lack of) DO-support in a case of pseudo-archaic English

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to describe and account for a case of **register variation** in English, in a **corpus** consisting of one book of fantasy literature, *The Silmarillion*, written by J.R.R. Tolkien and edited by Christopher Tolkien. Specifically, the study targets the parametric variation that exists language-internally with respect to the **raising of main verbs** in English **negative sentences**.

By providing a **quantitative and qualitative description** of negation with and without DO-support in Tolkien's English, I would like to sketch a representation of this particular '**peripheral grammar**' and explain the extent of its deviation from the 'core grammar'.

1. Pseudo-archaic English – general characteristics

The language of the chosen corpus can be considered an **idiolect**, as it employs a series of linguistic strategies which used to be part of **earlier stages of English**.

The book abounds in rare, **archaic and/or poetic words**: *raiment, thrall, thralldom, the plural brethren, to halt, to hearken, to essay, nigh, ere, afar, apace*. As far as **inflectional morphology** is concerned, in a number of contexts, Tolkien's pseudo-archaic language retains two **verbal endings**, **-st** for second person singular (*hast, dost, knowest, saist, namest etc.*) and **-th** for third person singular (*hath, attempteth, rejoiceth, seeth etc.*). For **be**, we can find the forms *art* and *wert*. Personal **pronouns**, too, have a **richer morphology**, as the number distinction (*thou – ye*) for the second person is in some cases conserved.

A **syntactic peculiarity** of Tolkien's language is that it preserves some **traces of differential auxiliary selection** for the perfect aspect (*BE* instead of *HAVE*, just like in Old English). In the domain of **nominal expressions**, we can find a handful of scattered **post-nominal adjectives** (*tears unnumbered, sorrow unfathomed, life unending etc.*) which suggest that the noun could raise to a higher functional projection within the DP.

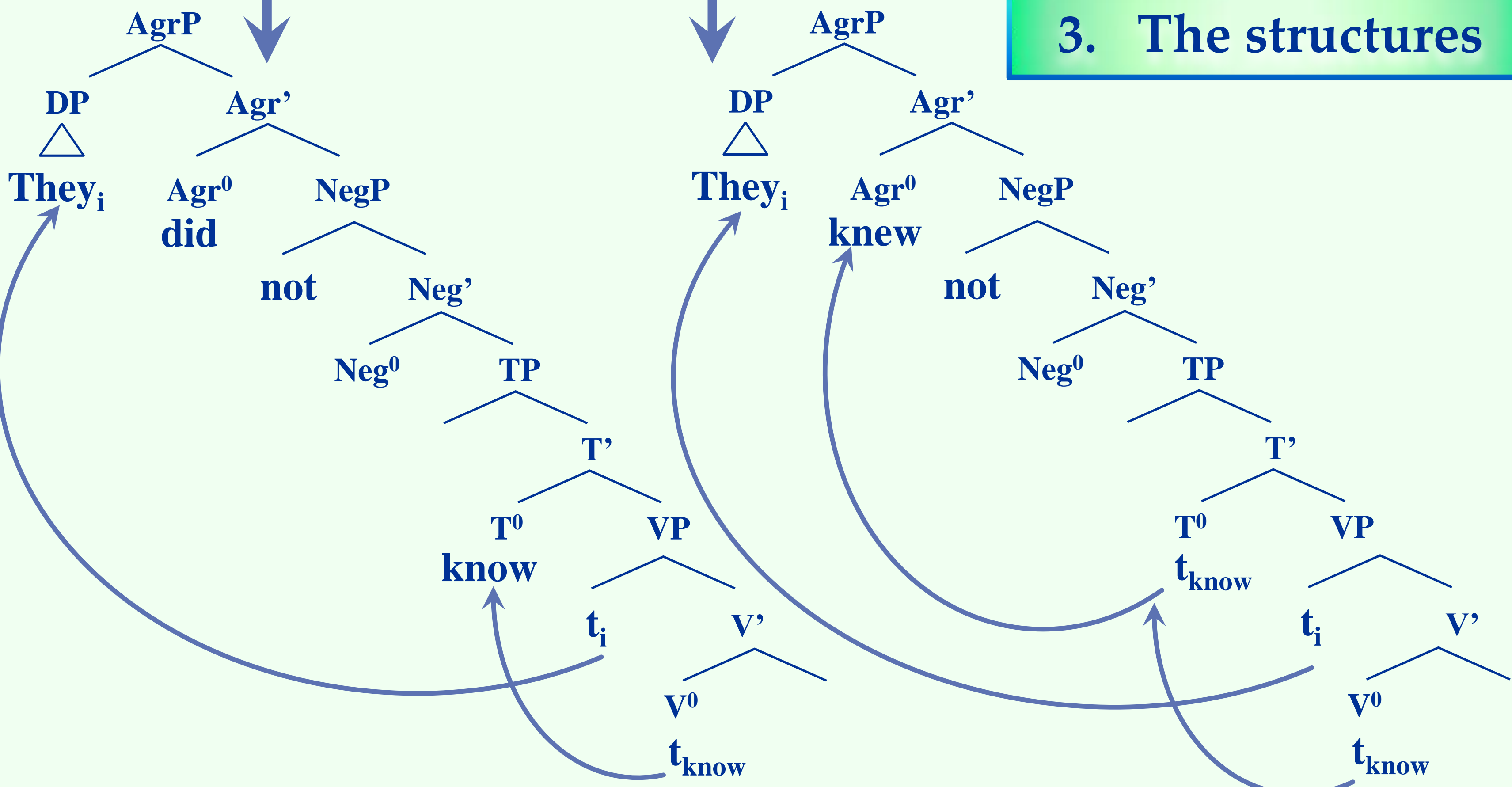
2. Negation in *The Silmarillion* - a quantitative overview

TOTAL	Sentential negation			Constituent Negation
	in the functional domain (IP layer)	in the lexical domain (negative quantifiers)	Left Periphery (CP negation)	
1426	714	542	88	82
	1344			

TOTAL IP negations	714
RAISING VERBS (auxiliaries and modals)	416
MAIN (lexical) VERBS	298

Used strategy	Total = 298	Percentage
DO-support	123	41.28 %
Raising of the lexical verb	175	58.73 %

3. The structures



4. Account & Conclusions

The data can only be explained from a **diachronic perspective**. By retracing the steps of the rise of DO-support in Standard English, one can see that Tolkien's language suffers a **reverse process** as an effect of the fact that main verbs can still undergo raising.

According to a theory of **Grammar Competition** (Kroch 1989, 1994), linguistic change consists in the **resetting of a Parameter**: at a certain moment in time, speakers of a language may have **two alternative grammars**, which differ with respect to one Parameter. But a process of selection takes place, one of the two variants is gradually eliminated, and the Parameter receives a **new value**.

Thus, I would like to propose that Tolkien's *Silmarillion* language has been **artificially brought back** to the stage in which English had two alternative grammars, with different values for the raising Parameters (like in **the 15th century**). There is, therefore, some minor **code-switching** happening whenever the author selects one of the two strategies. In this way, the language of the corpus is **peripheral grammar** in itself, but, in addition to this, it includes **two separate sub-grammars** that give rise to the two constructions. The fact that the data includes comparable numbers of instances of the two strategies and that no apparent pattern can be discerned is another argument in favor of this **unbalanced state** of the **two alternative systems**.

As to **the reasons** for which this apparent **reversal of language change** has been made, we should take a **sociolinguistic approach**. It is a generally-accepted fact (Butters 2001: 201) that speakers speak according to a set of expectations (related to genre, social class *etc.*). This idea can be applied to books as well: **books are written as the readers expect them to be written** – or, at least this is true in the case of *The Silmarillion*. The author and the editor knew that fans **expected an 'old' book**. Its special status as the 'background' for Tolkien's other works, the fact that the plot is set in the earliest eras of his fantasy universe and the author's **esthetic preference** for a seemingly 'older, higher' language have led to the creation of a **register which adopts some structures of earlier stages** of the language, *i.e.*, a **pseudo-archaic peripheral grammar**.

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