

Historical Pragmatics and dialogue: Early Modern English Negatives and beyond

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Abstract

Affirmatives and negatives raise interesting issues for both grammar and pragmatics. This paper focusses on the Early Modern English negatives *no* and *nay*, and their role in question-response system. Using data from Shakespeare's plays and corpus methods, we note the demise of *nay*, and the specific uses and pragmatic meanings of *no* and *nay*. We conclude by discussing our key findings in a broader theoretical and cross-linguistic perspective.

Keywords: negatives, affirmatives, question-responses, pragmatic-semantic change, Early Modern English

1. Introduction

This paper sets out to cast light on the two key Early Modern English negatives, *no* and *nay*, especially, but not exclusively, in their role as response tokens to yes/no questions. It is broadly located in the field of historical pragmatics, a field that saw its landmark publication in the shape of Jucker (1995) and has rapidly expanded since. More specifically, it belongs to the studies that have considered historical dialogue (e.g. Jucker et al. 1999; Culpeper and Kytö 2010). It also overlaps with grammar. In fact, scholarly comments on Early Modern *no* and *nay*, albeit very brief, seem to be confined to grammar books (e.g. Blake 2002). This paper is a natural next step to follow work on affirmatives (Culpeper 2018). *No* and *nay* at first glance seem to be the antithesis of *yes* and *yea*, and they do indeed, as we will note, have some characteristics in common, notably the way in which they pattern after particular kinds of questions.

We begin this paper with some background. First, we set the scene by briefly describing some pertinent aspects of Early Modern English affirmatives, which parallel negatives in some respects, and then go on to etch in the development of *no* and *nay* before the Early Modern period, and also comment on the little that is known about them in Early Modern English. Then we describe our approach and the data we selected – Shakespeare's plays, principally those of the First Folio (1623). The next part of the paper is taken up with our corpus-based analyses. We will investigate the occurrence of *no* and *nay* after positive and negative questions, the meanings they express as suggested by their collocational patterns, and finally a possible shift in the meaning of *nay*. In our following reflections section, we conclude by engaging in some theoretical discussion and draw comparisons with today's question-response system in English and that of other languages.

2. Background

2.1 Affirmatives

The pragmatics of present-day responses to yes/no questions allows for ambiguity. Let us rehearse the reconstructed real-life example given in Culpeper (2018):

- [1] Emily: Didn't you take my costume out of the washing machine?
 Jonathan: Yes.

Emily: What?

As the up-take “what?” of the third turn makes clear, Jonathan’s response “yes” is unhelpfully ambiguous between a negative response and a positive response. A pragmatic account is required to illuminate this interpretative ambiguity. A slightly developed version of the account given in Culpeper (2018) is as follows:

Interpretation 1 (negative response): **Yes**, what you say is true, **I didn't** take your costume out of the washing machine [Confirms the negative proposition in the question. Note that the meaning ‘copies’ what was said in the question with appropriate deictic adjustment (‘didn’t you’ >> ‘I didn’t’).]

Interpretation 2 (positive response): **Yes**, what you suppose is true, **I did** take your costume out of the washing machine [Confirms the positive proposition generated as an implicature in context.]

Old English did not have this problem because it had two central affirmative forms, *gyse* and *gea*, one of which was used to give a positive response to a negative utterance (i.e. use *gyse* for “Didn’t you ...? Gyse, I did ...”), and the other of which was used to give positive response to a positive utterance (i.e. use *gea* for “Did you ...? Gea, I did ...”) (cf. Wallage and van der Wurff 2013: 191). Culpeper (2018) refers to this pattern of responses as the Germanic pattern. When did the Germanic pattern breakdown? Contrary to comments in Crystal and Crystal (2002: 373), Culpeper (2018) found no evidence of a complete breakdown around 1600. Whilst by this time, *yes* was clearly no longer restricted to following negative questions, *yea* never changed its role as an affirmative after a positive question even after that date. *Yea* declined, and *yes* expanded its role as an affirmative response after a positive question. Around the middle of the seventeenth-century the Germanic pattern finally disappeared. Vennemann (2009) has suggested that this breakdown might be due to contact with Celtic languages in Britain. Today’s Celtic languages, such as Welsh, often avoid affirmative markers like these and instead use such strategies such as modal answers (e.g. “Didn’t you take my costume out of the washing machine?” / “I did indeed”).

2.2 Negatives: *no* and *nay*

Many of the negative forms that are familiar today existed in Early Modern English – *no*, *not*, *none*, *never*, *nothing*, *neither* and so on. One negative form that is now obsolete is *ne* ‘not’, though even in Shakespeare’s time it was rare.¹ Another possibly unfamiliar form used in Early Modern English is *nay*. *Nay* is in fact still used today and with some frequency, but is largely restricted to northern English dialects. Of course, whether these negative forms expressed different meanings and performed different functions back then is another matter. Of particular note is the fact that Early Modern English *no* was regularly a determiner (e.g. *I am no villain; love no man; this is no place*). Such cases are excluded from this study.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), Old English *no* and its variant *na* are cognate with Old Frisian, and formed from Germanic *ne* + *o* (meaning ‘not ever’). In contrast to *no*, *nay* has a Scandinavian background, a fact that is unsurprising given its prevalence in northern English dialects (the Old Norse and Old Danish speaking Vikings invaded and settled in the northern and eastern areas of England). It is cognate with Old Icelandic *nei*, Old Swedish *næi* and Old Danish *nej*, and formed from *ne* + *ei* (*ay*) (also

meaning ‘not ever’). It is easy to see how a general sense of negation develops from the meaning ‘not ever’: ‘not ever’ entails ‘no’.

Today, *no* can be as ambiguous a response to a negative question as *yes*. By way of illustration, let us re-work example [1]:

- [4] Emily: Didn’t you take my costume out of the washing machine?
 Jonathan: No.
 Emily: What?

As with *yes*, this is also ambiguous, the two interpretations being:

Interpretation 1 (positive response): **No**, what you say [(I) didn’t] is not true, **I did** take your costume out of the washing machine [Disconfirms the negative proposition in the question.]

Interpretation 2 (negative response): **No**, what you suppose [I did] is not true, **I didn’t** take your costume out of the washing machine [Disconfirms the positive proposition generated as an implicature in context.]

In Early Modern English, the use of *no* and *nay* seems to be sensitive to whether a preceding question is positive or negative. Blake (2002: 161) comments: “Often *nay* answers positive questions or statements and *no* negative ones”. Blake’s “often” raises the question of how often. We will investigate whether we have any evidence that this pattern of use was beginning to break up in the period of our data. Aside from present-day scholars, there are comments made by Early Modern writers, for example:

No answereth the questyon framede by the affyrmatyue [...] yf a man sholde aske [...] is an heretyke mete to translate holy scrypture into englyshe [...] he muste answere nay and not no. But and yf the questyon be asked [...] Is not an heretyque mete to translate holy scripture into englysh. To this questyon [...] he muste answere no & not nay. (Sir Thomas Moore, 1532, *Confutation of Tyndales Answere*, iii. p. clxxxii, quoted in the OED)

Of course, the role of *no* and *nay* after yes-no questions is not the only consideration in the discussion of those words, as they appear in other contexts with other meanings and functions. Our exploration will have a fairly broad focus.

3. Data

For obvious reasons, we need historical dialogic data for our study. The study of Early Modern affirmatives used the *Corpus of English Dialogues, 1560-1760*. Here, we will use Shakespeare’s plays. One reason for this is that we have access to texts prepared as part of the Encyclopedia of Shakespeare’s Language project, a £1 million project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), UK (<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/shakespeare/lang>). Bringing the corpus approach into the heart of Shakespearean studies, this project aims to deliver fresh insights into Shakespeare’s use of language at multiple levels – words, phrases, semantic themes, character profiles and more. The key data are the 36 plays of the First Folio (1623), plus *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. One particular advantage of this data is that it has been coded for social status, which will enable us to examine systematically social patterns of use. The tool we used for all our analyses was CQPweb.

4. Analysis of Early modern English negatives

4.1 Use of *No* and *Nay* after questions

100 randomized instances of *no* and a further 100 randomized instances of *nay* from Shakespeare's plays. Rhetorical questions (and questions answered immediately by the speaker who asked it) are excluded. Table 1 displays our results.

Table 1. *No* and *nay* after questions in Shakespeare's plays

	<i>No</i>	<i>Nay</i>
Following any (genuine) question	35	4
Following a negative question	8	0

What we see in Table 1 appears to be consistent with the Germanic pattern: only *no* occurs after a negative question. However, what is also clear from Table 1 is that *nay* hardly occurs after questions of any kind – a mere 4 instances out of 100. Thus, *nay* is barely participating in the Germanic pattern at all. This was not mentioned by Blake (2002) (and that lack of mention cannot be accounted for by supposing that we are focusing on Shakespeare and Blake is not – he, as is clear in his book, very much had Shakespeare in mind). But it is not the case that *nay* is generally rare in plays: there are 898 instances of *no* and 602 of *nay* in the Shakespeare data.² What the results in Table 1 mean then is that by Shakespeare's time, or perhaps more accurately the time of the First Folio (1623), *nay* was hardly functioning as a response token at all. In the following section, we will examine the functions of both *no* and *nay*. In section 5, we will comment on the broader distribution of *no* and *nay* across multiple genres in Early modern English.

4.2 Collocates of *No* and *Nay*

We analyzed the collocates of *no* and *nay* to tease out the meanings and functions of *no* and *nay* in an empirical fashion. Collocates co-occurring with a 5-word span to the left and the right of the node were retrieved using the Mutual Information association statistic with the minimum frequency set at 15. Table 2 displays our results.

Table 2. The top ten collocates of *no* and *nay* in Shakespeare's plays in a 5-word span (rank-ordered according to Mutual Information, with a minimum frequency of 15)

<i>No</i>	<i>Nay</i>
no	then
or	let
?	not
say	.
sir	if
Lord	me

'll	?
not	be
good	you
:	will
.	he
my	I

Let us first describe the collocational patterns of *no*. One feature of the tool CQPweb is that it does not ignore punctuation but treats it as a collocational token. Strikingly, we see ? : and . collocating with *no*. These are symptoms of tendency of *no* to occur after questions as a response token, to be turn-initial, and to be parenthetical. Example [5] is an illustrative example (collocates examples are emboldened):

- [5] Boyet. Do you hear my mad wenches?
Mar. No.

No appears as a collocate of itself; in fact, it is the strongest collocate. This seems mainly to be a consequence of the repetition of *no* to intensify a denial of what the previous speaker said, as in example [6]:

- [6] Hal. Yea, and you knew me, [...]
Falstaff. No, **no, no**: not so [...] (HIV,2.4)

The collocate *not* is mainly a symptom of two particular patterns. One is the use of *no* to agree with the previous speaker's negative assertion, as in example [7]:

- [7] Fang. If I can close with him, I care **not** for his thrust.
Quickly. No, nor I neither: I'll be at your elbow. (HIV2, 2.1)

The other pattern is to confirm the negative implication of the previous speaker's negative question, as in example [8]:

- [8] Henry. And tell me then, have you **not** broke your Oaths?
Sink. No, for we are subjects [...] (HVI3,3.1)

The other salient group in the collocates of *no* involves *Sir*, *Lord* and *good*. These are typically used as 'polite' forms of address to accompany refusals of or disagreements with what the previous speaker said. Example [9] provides an illustration:

- [9] Northumberland. Why is he not with the Queen?
Henry Percy. No, my **good Lord**, he hath forsook the Court [...] (RII, 2.3)

Turning to *nay*, amongst the collocates the full-stop indicates a tendency for *nay* to be turn-initial, as in example [10]:

- [10] Julia. You (Minion) are too saucy.
 Lucetta. Nay, now you are too flat [...] (TGV, 1.2)

The collocate *?* suggests a slight tendency to act as a response token. However, many questions are not actually genuine questions. In particular, *nay* is used to amplify a negative assertion by constructing it as an answer to a question confirming or clarifying what the previous speaker has said or implied. In these contexts, the sense amounts to ‘indeed not’. Example [11] provides an illustration:

- [11] Valentine. Without me? They can not.
 Speed. Without you? Nay, that’s certain [...] (TGV, 2.1)

The collocates *then* and *if* point to a pattern whereby a conclusion is drawn from a negative premise – in effect, meaning ‘if not then’, as illustrated by example [12]:

- [12] Petruchio. I am sure sweet Kate, this kindness merits thanks.
 What, not a word? Nay **then**, thou lovst it not [...] (TS, 4.3)

They are also used to reject or qualify what has just been asserted and draw a conclusion from it, as happens in examples [13] and [14]:

- [13] Katherine. I know it is the moon.
 Petruchio. Nay **then** you lie: it is the blessed Sun. (TS, 4.5)

- [14] Hotspur. Good Uncle tell your tale, for I have done.
 Worcester. Nay, **if** you have not, to it again (1H4, 1.3)

Finally, it should be noted that quite a few of the collocates are pronouns: *he*, *me*, *you* and *I*. Examples [15] to [18] illustrate each pronoun:

- [15] L. Anne. Why then **he** is alive.
 Gloucester. Nay, **he** is dead, and slain by Edward’s hands. (R3, 1.2)

- [16] Richard. Uncle give **me** your hand: nay, dry your eyes (R2, 3.3)

- [17] Rosaline. Play music then: nay **you** must do it soon (LLL, 5.2)

- [18] Dick. The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers.
 Cade. Nay, that **I** mean to do. (2H6, 4.2)

We will return briefly to this particular set of examples in the following section. What we can note now is that *nay* is being used to reinforce emotive, expressive and interpersonal meanings.

4.3 *No* and *nay*: A distinctive feature of *nay*?

The collocation patterns for *no* resoundingly support its role as a response token. Not only does it tend to be turned-initial and parenthetical, quite often following questions, but it denies, confirms something negative, refuses or disagrees with what the previous speaker has

said. This pattern is not entirely absent from *nay*, but it is certainly not as strong. Examples [11], [12], [16], [17] and [18] are not typical response tokens. For one thing, all but [18] are in medial position. But more than this they all tend towards the expression of meanings that *no* does not express. In this respect, our final set of examples above, [15] to [18], but especially [18], bear further scrutiny.

We selected examples [15] to [18] to illustrate a shift in the meaning of *nay* that cannot be seen in *no*. We repeat and re-number those examples below, but each time have added a gloss to *nay* that attempts to tease out its meaning in context.

- [19] L. Anne. Why then he is alive.
 Gloucester. **Nay (=no)**, he is dead, and slain by Edward's hands. (R3, 1.2)
- [21] Richard. Uncle give me your hand: **nay (=moreover)**, dry your eyes (R2, 3.3)
- [22] Rosaline. Play music then: **nay (=moreover)** you must do it soon (LLL, 5.2)
- [23] Dick. The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.
 Cade. **Nay (=yes, indeed)**, that I mean to do. (2H6, 4.2)

In example [19], *nay* rejects the previous speaker's proposition, whether that previous speaker's proposition is construed as a declarative question or an assertion. It is straightforwardly, then, a negative response token. Example [21] is not the same. Here, the sense seems to be 'moreover'. One could describe this in terms of Gricean terms (e.g. 1975). The utterance 'uncle give me your hand' does not provide enough information for the current purposes of the talk, and is thus rejected by *nay* and repaired by the addition of information, 'dry your eyes'. We would suggest that *nay* has acquired, to some degree, a conventional implicature, signalling that the information that precedes it is insufficient but will be made sufficient by the information that follows. One might compare this with the classic example of an item carrying a conventional implicature, the word *but*, which implies that what follows contradicts an expectation flowing from what has preceded. Example [22] works in exactly the same way. Finally, example [23] differs from all the above examples. Although in turn-initial position and parenthetical, its sense is not that of a negative response token. Instead, that sense seems to be more like an affirmative. Again, a Gricean treatment is one way of explaining this. If what the previous speaker says is so obvious that it does not need to be said – it breaks the maxim of quantity – then *nay* could be construed as rejecting its expression and implying 'it goes without saying', i.e. 'yes, indeed'.

5. Broader discussion and conclusions

Let us first examine the whole question-response system, recapping some of the comments made in section 2, including those of Blake (2002: 160-162) on Shakespeare's language. Following Pope's (1972) pioneering study of questions and answers, we can describe the distribution of *nay*, *no*, *yea* and *yes* in terms of the polarity of the response on the one hand and (dis)agreement with the question on the other. The system is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The question-response system of *yea*, *yes*, *no* and *nay*

	Agreement	Disagreement
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Positive polarity	<i>yea</i> 'I agree: it is the case' (the question has positive polarity)	<i>yes</i> 'I disagree: it is the case' (the question has negative polarity)
Negative polarity	<i>no</i> 'I agree: it is not the case' (the question has negative polarity)	<i>nay</i> 'I disagree: it is not the case' (the question has positive polarity)

However, as pointed out in Sections 2.1 and 4.1, Table 3 does not seem to capture the facts of Early Modern English very well. By this time, the original question-response system had undergone some significant changes. *Yea* was still used, for positive polarity agreement (PA) only, but *yes* had already established itself as marking not only positive polarity disagreement (PD) but also PA. *Nay* was hardly an option anymore and *no*, the only possibility to express negative polarity agreement (NA), had already extended into negative polarity disagreement (ND). These developments have eventually given us the Present-day English polarity-based system in Table 4.

Table 4. The question-response system of *yes* and *no*

	Agreement	Disagreement
Positive polarity	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
Negative polarity	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>

Note that Table 4 does not take into account the use of *yes* and *no* to respond to the potential implicatures of questions (see also Goodhue and Wagner 2018 on the variation of *yes* with *no* for PD and of *no* with *yes* for NA).

From a cross-linguistic point of view, the disappearance of the four-way distribution in Table 3 is not so remarkable. The literature on answers to polar questions in the world's languages is fairly limited and lacks a certain empirical precision (e.g. Pope 1972: 172-208, König and Siemund 2007: 320-322, Holmberg 2016, Moser 2018). Yet, it is clear that systems with four different response strategies are very rare. Chaha, an Afro-Asiatic language spoken in Ethiopia, has such a curiosity, according to Pope (1972: 195). It relies on the forms *nk*, *e* and *ba* for PA, NA and DN respectively and repeats the negative polarity question's verb in the positive to convey DP (cf. Holmberg 2016: 62-79 on this so-called verb-echo strategy). Most languages appear to prefer a more economical two-way system, though (cf. Roelofsen and Farkas 2015: 386-387 on the issue of economy). In a polarity-based one like in Table 4, the two forms mark the polarity of the response. *Yes*, for instance, means that the response has positive polarity. After a positive polarity question, it is then interpreted as expressing agreement and, after a negative polarity one, disagreement. In an agreement-based system like in Table 5, the two forms indicate whether the speaker agrees with the polarity of the question or not. *Lie* 'wrong', for example, signifies disagreement. Following a negative polarity question, it is understood as involving a positive polarity response and, following a positive polarity question, a negative polarity response.

Table 5. The question-response system of Japanese (cf. Moser 2018: 8)

	Agreement	Disagreement

Positive polarity	<i>hai</i> ‘right’	<i>lie</i> ‘wrong’
Negative polarity	<i>hai</i> ‘right’	<i>lie</i> ‘wrong’

There is, in other words, no real need for four different strategies. Language can do the same job with just two forms, which obviously accounts for the cross-linguistic scarcity of the question-response system in Table 3. In the same vein, we can regard the ongoing change in Early Modern English as a reasonable evolution toward the more natural and economical system in Table 4.

An intriguing aspect of the developments in English is where its two current polarity-based response tokens *yes* and *no* come from. Why did the forms originally used to answer negative polarity questions survive and spread to positive polarity questions, as in [24]? As the latter type of question occurs more often than the former, we can assume that *yea* and *nay* were more frequent than *yes* and *no*. To our knowledge and surprise, there exists little to no research into the diachrony of question-response systems in any language. So it is unclear whether the changes in [24] are common or not.

[24] *yes* = DP → DP & AP
no = NA → NA & ND

Still, any future study of changes in question-response systems may want to consider the role of Roelofsen and Farkas’s (2015: 388) markedness hierarchy in [25]. In their view, the four slots in the system differ in their degrees of markedness in the world’s languages. NA and PD are more marked than PA and ND because they violate some natural connection between the “positive” values of agreement and positive polarity response and the “negative” ones of disagreement and negative polarity response. In addition, PD is more marked than NA and so is ND compared to PA. The reason is that disagreeing is a more conspicuous communicative act than agreeing.

[25] PA < ND < NA < PD

Roelofsen and Farkas (2015: 386-388) also argue that there is a strong pressure for more marked slots to have a specific formal expression. This so-called realization need would explain why many a language with an essentially polarity-based system, like French and Dutch, have a special form for PD, as Table 6 shows.³

Table 6. The question-response system of Dutch

	Agreement	Disagreement
Positive polarity	<i>ja</i> ‘yes’	<i>jawel</i> ‘yes’
Negative polarity	<i>nee</i> ‘no’	<i>nee</i> ‘no’

What could the concepts of markedness and realization need tell us about English? The developments in [24] both go from a more to a less marked slot in the hierarchy in [25] and led to a situation where PA and ND no longer had their own particular response tokens. This “expulsion” of *yea* and *nay* may not have been especially problematic, though: the pressure for PA or ND to have a specific formal expression is weak. Imagine, by contrast, that English

had evolved a polarity-based system with *yea* and *nay*. Such a change would have involved the expulsion of two response tokens, *yes* and *no*, that were fulfilling the strong realization need of PD and NA. This development would thus have gone *directly* against the pressures within question-response systems identified by Roelofsen and Farkas (2015).⁴ Note, however, this hypothesis requires verification and that more cross-linguistic research on the diachrony of question-response systems is therefore needed.

With respect to *no* and *nay* specifically, there may have been additional sociolinguistic reasons for the decline of *nay*. Culpeper (2018) reports that there is no evidence for suggesting that *yea* was a more regional dialectal item than *yes*. In contrast, as noted in section 2.2, we know that *nay* has an Old Norse / Old Danish background, rather than Anglo-Saxon, and today is almost exclusively found in Northern English dialects. We checked the distributions of *no* and *nay* across both gender and social status in Shakespeare, but no significant differences emerged. However, we also checked their distributions across genres in *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) for the period 1560 to 1640, and a difference emerged. In EEBO, there are 701,809 instances of *no* in 5,405 texts, and 31,609 instances of *nay* in 3,159 texts. Those differences suggest that *nay* is more restricted. Furthermore, *no* is fairly evenly distributed across genres: it occurs most densely in plays (3,405 instances per million words (pmw)), followed by poetry (3,093 pmw) and then texts on Protestantism (2,828 pmw), and so on. In stark contrast, *nay* occurs most densely in plays (639 pmw), but then much less densely in fiction (146 pmw), and even less densely in the other genres. Thus *nay* occurs most densely in the very genre, plays, that several scholars have argued to be most colloquial (e.g. Culpeper and Kytö 2000). It is also the genre, one might argue, that is most likely to contain regional speech. In sum, in a period of increasing sensitivity to “standardizing” variants and their prestige (e.g. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003), it seems quite predictable that *nay* will decline in general use.

Let us now briefly look at *nay* conveying not only ‘moreover’ in [21] and [22] but also ‘yes, indeed’ in [23]. The account given for these developments in Section 4.3, with Gricean implicatures and their conventionalization, is perfectly compatible with established theories of meaning change (e.g. invited inferencing à la Traugott and Dasher 2002: 34-40). Still, the end result of ‘yes, indeed’ is quite remarkable: a marker of ND originally that comes to express some kind of agreement with – as well as elaboration on – a preceding positive polarity clause or, put differently, some sort of PA. Unfortunately, the lack of typological attention to changes in question-response systems makes it impossible for us to assess how (un)common such an evolution is in language. Even for English, a more in-depth study of *nay* seems desirable. The OED (s.v. *nay* adv.₁ and n.) makes no mention and contains no examples of this response token’s PA-like function. This raises the question, for further research, to what extent the use of *nay* in [23] actually semanticized. Its “additive” function in [21] and [22], however, does get discussed in some detail. It is glossed as ‘or rather’, ‘moreover’ and ‘and even’ and characterized as “introduc[ing] a more correct, precise, or emphatic statement than the one first made” (OED s.v. *nay* adv.₁ and n. 4a). As [26] and [27] show, *nay* has this meaning in common with Present-day Dutch *nee*, which suggests that the development of additive semantics is relatively normal. Interestingly, *nay* also shares the meaning with *yea*, as in [28].

[26] What follie, **nay**, what madnesse 'twere to lift A finger vp. (John Ford, 1634, *The Chronicle Historie of Perkin Warbeck: A Strange Truth*, i. sig. B2v, quoted in the OED s.v. *nay* adv.₁ and n. 4a)

- [27] Júst met het maken van een goede, **nee** fantastische eerste indruk, kun je echt het verschil maken. (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/maak-van-je-sollicitant-een-fan-marthe-van-der-kint?trk=prof-post>, accessed 5 December 2018)
‘It is precisely by making a good, no great first impression that you can really make the difference.’
- [28] How wantonly, **yea**, and howe willingly haue wee abused our golden time. (John Lyly, 1578, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wyt*, f. 38v, quoted in the OED s.v. *yea* adv. and n. 3)

According to the OED (s.v. *yea* adv. and n. 3), the distinction between the two words is that *yea* emphasizes the addition’s “identity in substance” to the initial phrase while *nay* stresses its “contrast in degree”. In other words, in [28], abusing willingly is presented as being of the same ilk as abusing with no regard for right or consequences. In [26], madness is put forward as involving a higher level of foolishness than folly. Assuming that more data confirm this difference, we can attribute it to the PA and ND origins of *yea* and *nay* respectively. As a marker of agreement, the former connects things that have essentially an equivalent meaning. As a marker of disagreement, the latter links things that need to contrast with one another in at least some respect.

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¹ In Old English, typically preverbal *ne* was the only element required for the ordinary negation of a clause (e.g. *ic ne secge* ‘I don’t say’). This negator was felt to be in need of reinforcement in Middle English, resulting in the two-part negation *ne ... not* (e.g. *I ne seye not* ‘I don’t say’). By Early Modern English, the weaker first element had disappeared altogether, leaving us with *not* (e.g. *I say not* ‘I don’t say’). This process is often referred to as the Jespersen Cycle and is very common in the world’s languages (cf. Vossen 2016).

² The figure for *no* excludes cases that belong to the relatively fixed pattern “whether or no”.

³ Moser (2018: 34) suggests, however, that this phenomenon is mainly typical of languages spoken in Eurasia and, more specifically, of the Germanic languages.

⁴ Of course, the actual change also resulted in a situation where PD and NA no longer had their own particular response tokens. We would argue, however, that the situation was a more indirect effect of the evolution toward a more economical two-way system.