

## Historical Development of Indefinite (*io*)*wiht/iht* from Polarity Aspects

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The indefinite *iht* (< *io**wiht* < *wiht*) has become extinct in most dialects of Modern German and exists, as shown in example (iv), in the forms *it* or *et* as a sentential negation particle only in some Bavarian dialects (Schmeller 1872: 30 or 176), southeastern Swabian (Grimm 1890: 714), and northeastern Swiss dialects (cf. Jäger 2008: 119, 2010: 801–802). Yet in older stages of German, it was still an integral part of the indefinite system as a polarity-sensitive indefinite referring to entities. The historical development of *iht* and its uses have been discussed in the literature (cf. Jäger 2008, 2010; Paul 2007). However, *iht* has not been the main subject of investigation in these works. Hence, I conducted a corpus study to expand the scope of the texts in which *wiht*, *io**wiht*, and *iht* occurred in order to address the following questions: 1) To what extent these elements were used as a Negative Polarity Item (NPI). 2) In exactly which NPI contexts they appeared diachronically. The Data from Old High German texts as well as Middle High German texts of southern and southwestern dialects have shown that (*io*)*wiht/iht* always functioned as an NPI of the weak type (cf. i), except for a few cases in which it was a noun. In addition, the data suggest that (*io*)*wiht/iht* was associated with negation throughout its historical development and that expressions in which it served to strengthen the negation (cf. ii) may have formed a “Bridging Context” in the sense of Larrivée & Kallel (2020), which led to *iht* later appearing in similar NPI contexts as the only negation-marker in the expression (cf. iii).

**Keywords:** Historical linguistics, Negative Polarity, Polarity Change, Indefinite Pronoun, Old High German, Middle High German.

### Old High German – use of *eouuihd* as NPI in negative contexts

- i.   so   bifangolode   sindun   simbles,   dhazs   sie   ni   eigun   eouuihd,   huuazs  
    then   cornered   are   always   so-that   they   NEG   have   anything.ACC   what  
  
    sie   dhar   uuidhar   setzan.  
    they   there   against   set

‘Then they are always cornered, so they have nothing to oppose.’

(Isidor 5, 5)

### Old High German – use of *wiht* as a negation-strengthenener

- ii.   Si   wíht   thoh   sin   nirknáta  
    she.NOM   at-all   though   he.GEN   NEG.recognized

‘However, she didn't recognize him at all.’

(Otfrid 5, 7)

### Middle High German – use of *iht* as a negation-marker NPI contexts

- iii.   vñ   wanit   def   niht   daz   ir   iht   bedurfit.  
    and   believe   it.GEN   NEG   that   you.NOM   nothing.ACC   need

‘And don't believe (this) that you need nothing.’

(Speculum ecclesiae 62va, 18)

### Contemporary Swabian German – Use of it as standard sentential negation-marker

- iv.   Des   ka   it   sei.  
    that   can   NEG   be

‘That’s not possible.’

(Grimm 1890: 714, cited in Jäger 2010)

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