

A note on the history of *either*

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1. Introduction

The word *either* is of great interest for research on polarity phenomena. It has a number of different uses which synchronically seem to be independent of each other, although they are related diachronically. In some, but not all, of its uses, *either* is a negative polarity item (NPI), and as such it has been a minor topic of discussion going back to the early days of polarity research in generative grammar (e.g. Klima 1964, Horn 1972). An important question is how the different uses of *either* developed historically, and what role polarity-sensitivity played in this development. This issue is part of the more general theoretical problem how particular lexical items can become (or cease to be) polarity items, and how changes in polarity-sensitivity can be accounted for.¹

The central topic of this paper is the emergence of the use of *either* as a sentence-final focus particle, which is illustrated in (1):

- (1) We're not going to LA,
and we're not going to New York, either. (FP *either*)

To distinguish this type of *either* from other types, I will refer to it as FP *either*. FP *either* occurs in negative contexts (mainly, but not exclusively, in the scope of negation and other “*n*-words”), alternating with *too* which occurs in positive ones:

- (2) We're going to LA, and we're going to New York, too.

In present-day English two other types of *either* can be distinguished, which are illustrated in (3) and (4):

- (3) We're either going to LA or to New York. (Disj *either*)
(4) a. We're not going to either city. (Det *either*)
b. We're not going to either.

In (3) *either* is used to mark a disjunction. I will call this type Disj *either*. *Either* can also be used as a determiner, as illustrated in (4a), or independently as a “pronoun” as in (4b). Since the latter can be analyzed as a determiner followed by an empty noun, or as a determiner without any noun altogether, I will regard (4a) and (b) as subcases of the same type, which I call Det *either*.

The three types of *either* differ from each other in polarity behavior.

¹ For earlier historical corpus studies which document diachronic changes in the distribution of polarity items, see for instance Hoeksema 1998 and Hoeksema and Rullmann 2001.

Whereas Disj *either* is not polarity sensitive, both Det *either* and FP *either* are NPIs, although they have very different sets of licensers. Det *either* seems to behave just like *any*: it occurs both in downward entailing environments—including not just the scope of negation but also other NPI licensers such as conditional clauses (see (5a,b))—as well as in Free Choice contexts like (5c):

- (5) a. We're not going to either city.
 b. If you go to either city, you will be arrested.
 c. You can go to either city.

In addition to this, Det *either* has a usage in which it means “both”, for instance in expressions like *on either side*, meaning “on both sides”.

FP *either* is a very different kind of NPI than Det *either*, with a much more restricted set of licensers. It occurs almost exclusively with negation (*not*) and other *n*-words, although a number of other types of licensers are found as well, as will be discussed in more detail in section 2.

Looking at the diachronic development, according to the *OED* the original sense of *either* in Old English was “each of the two”, i.e. the sense that to this day survives in expressions such as *on either side*. With this meaning it occurred both as a determiner or pronoun and as the initial marker of a conjunction. In the 14th century, *either* developed a new sense in which it represents an existential rather than a universal quantifier: “one or the other of two”, giving rise to essentially the modern Disj *either* and Det *either* types. (From the information given in the *OED* it is not clear at what point in the development Det *either* became an NPI.)

The aspect of the development of *either* that will be the focus of this paper is the fact that FP *either* appeared much later than the other two types. The first *OED* citation which is unambiguously of this type is the example from 1828 given in (6), although I have found some earlier cases in my own material (see section 4 below):

- (6) Thy sex cannot help that either (Scott, 1828)

Given this late emergence of FP *either*, how did it develop out of Det *either* and Disj *either*? Interestingly, the *OED* groups examples of FP *either* such as (6) or (7a) together under one heading with a different kind of example, given in (7b):

- (7) a. If you do not go, I will not go either.
 b. If John had said so, or William either, I could believe it.

Both (7a) and (b) are classified as “modern” by the *OED*, which after all is a 19th century dictionary. Whereas examples like (7a) are still found in present-day English, (7b) sounds unacceptable to the modern ear. However, the *or...either* construction is not completely absent from present-day English, and may occur in sentences such as (8):

- (8) We're not going to LA, or to New York either. (FP-Disj *either*)

I will call the type of *either* exemplified in (7b) and (8) FP-Disj *either*, because it seems to have something in common with both FP *either* and Disj *either*. It involves both a sentence-final *either* (just like FP *either*) and the disjunction *or* (just like Disj *either*). For a more precise definition of FP-Disj *either*, see section 3.2 of this paper. Although the *OED* treats FP-Disj *either* and FP *either* as belonging to one and the same type, I will argue that at least for the 19th century they should be regarded as separate constructions.

FP-Disj *either* considerably predates FP *either*, as can be seen from the fact that the earliest *OED* citation of the former is the following example from Shakespeare:²

- (9) Wilt thou set thy foot o' my neck?
Or o' mine either? (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 1601)

This suggests that the existence of FP-Disj must have played an important role in the development of FP *either*. To get a better understanding of FP *either* and FP-Disj *either*, and indeed to motivate my classification of the two as separate types, it is essential to look at historical corpus data, in order to see in what environments the two types occurred. In this paper, I consider the distribution of FP *either* and FP-Disj *either* in literary works of the 19th century, when FP-Disj *either* seems to have had its heyday, and to a lesser extent the 18th century. The historical data reported on in this paper were all collected from the website <http://www.concordance.com/>, which makes available concordance searches of many “great books”. But before taking a look at pre-twentieth-century statistics, let us briefly consider the distribution of FP *either* in present-day English.

2. Licensers of FP *either* in present-day English

By far the most common licensers of FP *either* are negation and other *n*-words, as illustrated by (10a,b):

- (10) a. They didn't invite Bill, either.
b. No one will invite Bill, either.

From the literature (Klima 1964, Green 1973, Bolinger 1977, McCawley 1988) it is known, though, that FP *either* can have other licensers as well, such as *few* (see (11)) and *little* (12), negative adverbs such as *hardly* or *rarely* (13), negative predicates like *unlikely* or *doubt* (14), and even questions (15-17):

² Jespersen (1917) already pointed out that FP-Disj *either* is older than FP *either*, arguing that therefore the former can not have originated as a generalization of the latter.

- (11) Few people will invite Bill, either.
- (12) Other generative semanticists appeared to have little use for it either.
(Randy Allan Harris, *The Linguistic Wars*, p. 224)
- (13) Publishers will usually reject suggestions, and writers will scarcely/
hardly/seldom/rarely accept them, either. (Klima 1964)
- (14) a. It's unlikely that John will come either. (Green 1973)
b. Fred doubted that Ethel would show up either.
c. John doesn't have a house, and if he can't keep up the payments, he'll
cease to have a car either.
- (15) Do you want that one either? (Bolinger 1977)
- (16) While we cannot afford to have anymore underground raves, how can we
afford to have the above ground ones either? (Globe and Mail, 07/31/00)
- (17) I have no idea and I question whether she does either.
(www.goposi.com/rants.htm)³

As pointed out by Horn (1978, 2001), FP *either* can also occur in sentences in which there is no explicit negation or other downward entailing function, but in which its presence seems to be triggered by an expression which carries a certain negative pragmatic inference or implicature; these are cases of what Horn calls “Flaubert triggers” since negation is “everywhere present yet nowhere visible”:

- (18) Small thanks you get for THAT, either. (Horn 1978, 2001)
- (19) I'm anything but happy with THAT analysis, either.

Although examples of FP *either* licensed by something other than an *n*-word certainly do occur, they are quite rare statistically. In a collection of almost 400 occurrences of FP *either* gathered from the website of CBC News less than 2% was triggered by anything other than negation or some other *n*-word (see Table 1). The non-*n*-word-licensors found were *little* (2 occurrences), *doubt* (2), *few* (1), *unlikely* (1), and *surprised if* (1), which all belong to the types of licensors of FP *either* which were identified in the theoretical literature.

Table 1: Licensors of FP *either* on CBC News website (N = 398)

<i>Not</i>	81	%
<i>No</i>	10	%
Other <i>n</i> -words	7	%
Other	1.7	%

3. FP-Disj *either* in the nineteenth century

Now that we have a picture of the distribution of FP *either* in present-day English, let's turn to older sources. When I first started gathering historical corpus data on

³ Thanks to Jack Hoeksema for providing me with this example.

the distribution of FP *either*, it initially appeared that the percentage of occurrences of FP *either* licensed by something other than an *n*-word was much larger in the 19th century than it is today. However, on closer inspection it quickly turned out that many of the relevant examples in fact belong to the somewhat different type of *either* which I called FP-Disj *either* above. Example (8) which exemplifies this type is repeated here as (20):

(20) We're not going to LA, or to New York *either* (FP-Disj *either*)

That FP-Disj *either* should indeed be regarded as a type separate from FP *either* (at least in the 19th century) is not immediately obvious. In order to demonstrate that FP-Disj did constitute a type of its own, we first need to set up criteria that define this type and that in any given instance allow us to distinguish it from FP *either*, and secondly we have to show on the basis of empirical data that examples of FP-Disj *either* behave differently than those of FP *either*, for instance in that they have a different distribution in terms of licensing environments. I will do these two things in the following two subsections.

3.1 Properties of FP-Disj *either*

To discuss the defining properties of FP-Disj *either*, it is useful to first give some theoretical background and introduce some terminology. *Too* and *either* are focus particles which introduce a presupposition that must be satisfied by the preceding discourse context. For instance, *I like spaghetti too* (with focus on *spaghetti*) presupposes that there is something other than *spaghetti* that I like, and the corresponding negative sentence *I don't like spaghetti either* presupposes that there is something other than *spaghetti* that I don't like. This presupposition must be satisfied in the preceding discourse context in order for the sentence with *either* to be felicitous. (See Heim 1992 for a much more in-depth discussion of this issue.) Thus, in (21b) the presupposition that there is something other than *spaghetti* that I don't like is satisfied by the immediately preceding clause *I don't like pizza*, and similarly by *I hate pizza* in (21c). Following McCawley (1988), I will call the sentence or phrase to which *too* or *either* is attached the host, and the sentence which satisfies the presupposition of *too* or *either* the antecedent sentence. In the examples in (21), the antecedent sentence is underlined, while the host is in **bold**:

- (21) a. I like pizza, and **I like spaghetti** too.
 b. I don't like pizza, and **I don't like spaghetti** either.
 c. I hate pizza, and **I don't like spaghetti** either.
 d. I don't like pizza, or **spaghetti** either.

The first defining property of FP-Disj *either* is that its host must be the second member of a disjunction. Note that replacing the disjunctive *or* with a conjunctive *and* would make the sentence ungrammatical:

(22) *We're not going to LA, and to New York, either.

Secondly, the first member of the disjunction must be the antecedent clause of FP-Disj *either*. The third property is that the negative polarity licenser of *either* (such as negation) must have scope over both members of the disjunction. That negation has scope over both disjuncts in (20), for instance, can be seen from the fact that by De Morgan's Law it is equivalent to "We're not going to LA and we're not going to New York either".

I take these three characteristics as defining properties of FP-Disj *either*, individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions distinguishing it from FP *either*. These properties were used as the defining criteria for the text counts on which the statistics reported below are based. In addition to these, FP-Disj *either* was found to have a number of additional characteristics which may help us to gain a better understanding the construction. As in (20) and (21d), the host of FP-Disj *either* is usually—but not necessarily—a phrase rather than a full clause. Moreover, the host usually seems to have the status of some sort of afterthought or parenthetical. There is a variety of evidence for this. Syntactically, the *or*-phrase in an FP-Disj *either* construction often is extraposed. Intonationally, the *or*-phrase is often set off from the rest of the sentence by a pause, as indicated in the punctuation by means of a comma or dash. The *or*-phrase may even be uttered by a different speaker than the antecedent sentence. All these characteristics are indicative of the status of FP-Disj *either* as an afterthought or parenthetical.⁴

A final observation about FP-Disj *either* that can be made on the basis of my data is that in the literary works investigated it very often appears in the representation of spoken dialogue. In some cases, but by no means all, it is uttered by fictional characters whose language is presented by the author as being nonstandard or belonging to a regional dialect. This suggests that at least in the 19th century FP-Disj *either* was perceived as belonging more to spoken than to written language.⁵

3.2 Licensers of FP-Disj *either*

The licensers of FP-Disj *either* that were found in the 19th century literary works investigated are extremely diverse. In addition to many cases where the licenser is negation or another *n*-word, there were cases of FP-Disj *either* triggered by negative adverbs and predicates (see (23)), both polar (24) and *wh* questions (25), *if*-clauses (26), concessive clauses (27), *before*-clauses (28), comparatives (29),

⁴ At the conference Larry Horn pointed out that the afterthought function of FP-Disj *either* contrasts with the premeditated character of Disj *either*, which explains the fact that it is impossible to combine the two: **I don't like either tea or coffee either*.

⁵ It should be noted though that FP-Disj *either* does not appear to have been restricted to one particular dialect or region (note for instance that the authors cited include British writers as well as Americans). In grammars or dictionaries that include examples of this construction I haven't come across any statements noting it as being dialectal or prescriptively incorrect.

equatives (30), superlatives (31), *enough* (32), *too* (33), *only* or *the only* (34), and *for anything/all (that)* (35). Some representative examples are given here:

- (23) Composers can very seldom sing their own music or anybody else's either.
(Dickens)
- (24) Did you ever know English law, or equity either, plain and to the purpose?
(Dickens)
- (25) What could I do, or you either? (Susan Fenimore Cooper)
- (26) but if you find better sack than that in the Sheres, or in the Canaries either,
I would I may never touch either pot or penny more. (Scott)
- (27) Mrs Tulliver had a sighing sense that her husband would do as he liked,
whatever sister Glegg said, or sister Pullet either. (Eliot)
- (28) But it WAS a VERY long time before Joe looked five years older, or
Dolly either, or the locksmith either, or his wife either. (Dickens)
- (29) You might have been better off than Sambo, or Quimbo either (Stowe)
- (30) There are people quite as bad as Sir Griffin—or Mrs. Carbuncle either.
(Trollope)
- (31) I'm the last man to give in to the cry about new doctors, or new parsons
either. (Eliot)
- (32) - It's hard enough to find honest men anywhere, I suppose.
- Or honest women either. (Trollope)
- (33) but he was too feather-headed to know it, or care anything about it, either.
(Twain)
- (34) He owed his eventual escape to the only talisman which can ever save a
young man, or an old one either. (Susan Fenimore Cooper)
- (35) He's a madman, in his wounded pride, and may do that, for anything we
can say, or he either.

Of course, all of these licensors are known to be licensors of NPIs. *Any* or *ever*, for instance, could occur in any of these environments as well. I conclude that in 19th century English, FP-Disj *either* had the same distribution as NPIs such as *ever*; assuming Ladusaw's theory of NPI licensing, it was licensed in the scope of any downward entailing function.

My data also contain a few cases in which FP-Disj *either* appears to be licensed pragmatically by a negative implicature or inference (Flaubert triggers, in Horn's sense):

- (36) For, of course, my going was out of the question – or sending a message
either. (Anne Bronte)
- (37) Woe be to that man, or woman either, that pauses for a moment amongst
you. (Anne Bronte)

Finally, I found some cases in which it was hard to identify what the licensor was:

- (38) If I had slaves (as I hope I never shall have), I'd risk their wanting to run away from me, or you either, John. (Beecher Stowe)
- (39) "I can ride against him any day, said Grindley."
"Yes; or against a brick wall either, if your horse didn't know any better," said George. (Trollope)
- (40) and this she said with a staid and solemn air, quite worthy of Jephthah's daughter or of Iphigenia either (Trollope)

Maybe in (38) and (39) the modal ('*d* and *can*, respectively) could be the trigger, and in (40) it might be the predicate *worthy of*. This might be taken as an indication that the set of licensers for FP-Disj *either* was in fact larger than just the set of downward entailing functions, and maybe included some other types of expressions as well, possibly because they are nonveridical in the sense of Giannakidou (1998). However, the number of such examples is too small to draw any firm conclusions.

Table 2 (see next page) compares the licensers other than *n*-words for FP *either* and FP-Disj *either* in works by a large number of 19th century authors.⁶ We see an almost complementary distribution of these two types of *either*. Whereas FP *either* in the 19th century occurred with the same kind of non-*n*-word licensers that we find in present-day English (negative adverbs and verbs, as well as *as few*, *little*, and *without*), FP-Disj *either* is often triggered by questions, comparatives, equatives and superlatives, *if*-clauses, and expressions such as *for all/anything (that)*, *enough* and *too*, and *before*.⁷

Another important statistical difference between FP *either* and FP-Disj *either* was that the latter occurred much more often with non-*n*-word licensers than the former. I performed counts of *n*-word and non-*n*-word licensers of FP and FP-Disj *either* for a smaller set of 19th century authors (Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Edgar Allan Poe). For Dickens I have a lot more data in my collection than for the other authors, both because there is more Dickens material available on the concordances website I used as my data source, and because he seems to have been one of the more prolific users of FP-Disj *either*. For that reason I have presented the data from Dickens separately in Table 3, and summarized those of the other authors in Table 4. Both tables show essentially the same picture. Only roughly 7% of occurrences of FP *either* have a licenser that is not an *n*-word, as opposed to between a third and a half for FP-Disj *either*.

⁶ The authors included in the data in Table 2 are Louisa May Alcott, Jane Austen, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Anne Bronte, Emily Bronte, Wilkie Collins, Joseph Conrad, James Fenimore Cooper, Susan Fenimore Cooper, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, H. Rider Haggard, O. Henry, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Walter Scott, Anthony Trollope, and Mark Twain. All the works by these authors which were available on the concordances website at the time of the writing of this paper were included. For more detailed information on the composition of the corpus, please contact the author.

⁷ The cases of FP *either* licensed by a question or an *if*-clause actually appear to be cases of pragmatic licensing of the kind discussed by Horn (his "Flaubert triggers").

The data presented in this section show clearly that in the 19th century FP-Disj *either* should be regarded as a distinct type of *either*, separate from FP *either*. The two expressions had very different profiles not only with respect to the proportion of non-*n*-word licensers, but also with respect to the kinds of non-*n*-word licensers that could trigger them.

Table 2: Non-*n*-word licensers of FP and FP-Disj *either* (19th century)

	FP <i>either</i> (N=25)	FP-Disj <i>either</i> (N=46)
<i>scarcely/hardly</i>	8	0
<i>without</i>	7	0
<i>few/little</i>	4	1
negative verb	2 (<i>prevent, doubt</i>)	1 (<i>give up</i>)
question	1	10
comp./superl./equative	0	10
<i>if</i> -clause/concessive	2	5
<i>(the) only</i>	0	3
<i>for all/anything (that)</i>	0	3
<i>enough/too</i>	0	2
<i>before</i>	0	1
other licensers	1	10

Table 3: Licensers of FP and FP-Disj *either* (Dickens)

	FP <i>either</i> (N=198)		FP-Disj <i>either</i> (N=24)	
<i>not</i>	139	(70 %)	8	(33 %)
<i>nor</i>	17	(8.5 %)	0	
other <i>n</i> -words	28	(14 %)	3	(13 %)
<i>scarcely/hardly</i>	7	(3.5 %)	0	
<i>without</i>	2	(1 %)	0	
<i>few/little</i>	1	(0.5 %)	0	
other	4	(2 %)	11	(46 %)

Table 4: Licensers of FP and FP-Disj *either*
(Austen, Bronte sisters, Collins, Eliot, Poe)

	FP <i>either</i> (N=86)		FP-Disj <i>either</i> (N=28)	
<i>not</i>	48	(56 %)	12	(43 %)
<i>nor</i>	15	(17.5 %)	0	
other <i>n</i> -words	17	(19.5 %)	6	(21.5 %)
<i>scarcely/hardly</i>	0		0	
<i>without</i>	2	(2.3 %)	0	
<i>few/little</i>	2	(2.3 %)	0	
other	2	(2.3 %)	10	(35.5 %)

4. FP-Disj and FP *either* in the eighteenth century

As was mentioned earlier, there are also historical reasons for regarding FP and FP-Disj *either* as two separate types: the first occurrences of FP-Disj *either* considerably predate the emergence of FP *either*. Recall that the earliest *OED* citation of FP-Disj *either* is the example from Shakespeare given in (9). FP-Disj *either* seems to have been in existence throughout the 18th century (and presumably the 17th century although I have no data on that). Here are some examples:

- (41) but now it was my real desire never to see them, or him either, any more.
 (Defoe)
- (42) believing, he said, that a cheerful and contented mind was the best sort of thanks to heaven that an illiterate peasant could pay, - Or a learned prelate either, said I.
 (Sterne)
- (43) That I neither know nor do pretend to know any thing about 'em or their concerns either.
 (Sterne)

Although the earliest citation of FP *either* in the *OED* is from 1828 (see example (6)), the construction must in fact have been somewhat older, as I found a few older examples dating from the 18th century:

- (44) I would not wrong them either. (Defoe)
- (45) but my never-failing old pilot, the Portuguese, had a pistol in his pocket, which I knew nothing of, nor the Tartar either. (Defoe)
- (46) I protested I could see no reason for it either. (Goldsmith)
- (47) I would not give three sous for any one thing in it, but Jaidas's lantern – nor for that either, only as it grows dark, it might be of use. (Sterne)
- (48) I believe, Mr. Allworthy, you would not have known me either. (Fielding)

In fact, however, FP *either* seems to have been very sporadic in the 18th century. In most cases where speakers nowadays would use FP *either*, 18th century writers instead used *neither*.

5. Negative concord: FP *neither*

In Shakespeare and throughout the 18th century, the use of *neither* instead of FP *either* was very common:

- | | | |
|------|--|---------------|
| (49) | Be not too tame neither | (Shakespeare) |
| (50) | “You don’t know that neither,” says the brother. | (Defoe) |
| (51) | “Nor I neither, madam,” cries Sophia. | (Fielding) |

I will refer to the use of *neither* in such examples as FP *neither*. Because both FP *neither* and its licenser are expressions of negation, these structures can be regarded as instances of the more general phenomenon of negative concord.

Negative concord with *neither* of course did not disappear overnight at the end of the 18th century. Many examples can be found in the works of Dickens, for instance, but since these appear in representations of the speech of fictional characters speaking substandard or dialectal English, I conclude that by that time negative concord with *neither* was no longer part of the standard language:

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| (52) | ‘Ah!’ said Bailey. ‘It IS my gracious, an’t it? Wouldn’t I be gracious neither, not if I wos him!’ | (Dickens) |
|------|--|-----------|

We may assume that prescriptive pressure against negative concord was a significant factor in the replacement of FP *neither* with FP *either* in the standard language (cf. Jespersen 1917). Of course, FP *neither* survives to this day in nonstandard varieties of English.

Looking at the licensers of FP *neither*, we find that these are limited almost exclusively to *n*-words.⁸ Table 5 gives figures for a few authors, which all essentially show the same pattern.⁹

⁸ Interestingly, in Shakespeare and Defoe we find examples of *neither* licensed by *but*, and Shakespeare also has a few examples where there does not appear to be a licenser, or where I was unable to determine what the licenser was. This may indicate that in early modern English there was greater variation in the distribution of sentence-final *neither*, an issue which merits further investigation.

⁹ I have so far collected fewer data on *neither* than on *either*. The counts for Dickens include only about half the works that were included in the earlier tables.

Table 5: Licensers of FP *neither* (Shakespeare, Defoe, Fielding, Dickens)

	Shakesp.	Defoe	Fielding	Dickens
<i>not</i>	23	18	15	27
<i>nor</i>	9	0	2	16
other <i>n</i> -words	7	5	4	3
two <i>n</i> -words	2	0	0	1
<i>but</i>	1	1	0	0
no licenser	2	0	0	0
unclear	2	0	0	0

6. A timeline

Summarizing our findings, we can now construct an approximate timeline for the development of FP and FP-Disj *either* in modern English. For the sake of simplicity, I will divide up the development into three periods, which we may conveniently think of as coinciding with the 18th, 19th, and 20th century respectively. (Needless to say, in reality the development must have been a gradual one, and things are further complicated by the potential existence of differences between dialects and registers.)

In the 18th century (and before that, going back to at least the early 1600s), FP-Disj *either* existed as a separate construction, side by side with FP *neither* which participated in negative concord with *n*-words. In addition to that we find sporadic instances of FP *either*.

By some time in the 19th century, negative concord had become substandard, and FP *neither* was replaced by FP *either*. However, the set of licensers for FP *either* was somewhat larger than that of FP *neither*, including not only *n*-words, but also negative adverbs and predicates and words like *without*. Interestingly, FP *either* and FP-Disj *either* existed side by side, in partially overlapping contexts. Because of the important differences in licensing behavior, it seems best to regard the two types of *either* as independent of each other for this time period.

In the 20th century, we no longer find FP-Disj *either* licensed in questions, conditionals, comparatives, etc. Examples such as those in (24)-(35) are no longer considered well-formed. This does not mean however that FP-Disj *either* has ceased to exist altogether. In modern writers, we still find examples such as the following:

- (53) He'd never paid much attention to me, or to Laura either.
(Margaret Atwood)
- (54) She's powerless to stop him, or to wake him either. (Margaret Atwood)
- (55) But a lack of interest in going – or in staying either – was at the heart of his problem.
(Larry McMurtry)

However, the licensors of FP-Disj *either* now seem to be restricted to exactly the same kinds of expressions that also trigger FP *either*: i.e., negation and other *n*-words, as well as some negative adverbs, predicates, etc. If this is correct, we may say that in the 20th century, FP-Disj *either* has become a subtype of FP *either*, and has ceased to exist as an independent type in its own right.

7. Towards an explanation: Two pathways to FP *either*?

Going back to the question posed at the beginning of this paper, how did FP *either* develop diachronically? The foregoing discussion suggests that this development may in fact have been more complicated than might have been suspected at the beginning of this paper. It turned out that negative concord structures with *neither* played an important role in the development. Rather than a single linear development of FP *either* from Disj *either*, FP *either* seems to have developed along two independent, but converging pathways.

One pathway along which FP *either* could have emerged takes the *neither...nor...* construction as its starting point, which according to the *OED* goes back to the Middle English period. Because of negative concord, the language had sentences of the form *I don't like neither tea nor coffee*.¹⁰ If *neither* is postposed to the end of the clause, the result is *I don't like tea nor coffee neither*. We may assume that this construction was generalized to other *n*-words than *nor*, giving rise to negative concord with FP *neither* which was so common in the 18th century (the earliest *OED* example of this kind is from 1551.) This would include sentences such as *I don't like tea and I don't like coffee neither*. The final step in the development would then have been the replacement of FP *neither* with FP *either*, possibly as a result of prescriptive pressure against negative concord, resulting in sentences like *I don't like tea and I don't like coffee either*.

The second pathway along which FP *either* might plausibly have developed starts with the *either...or...* construction, i.e. Disj *either*, for instance *I don't like either tea or coffee*. Postposing of *either* would lead to sentences such as *I don't like tea or coffee either*, i.e. the construction with FP-Disj *either* that has been the central topic of this paper. This construction may in turn have been generalized to non-disjunctive contexts, leading to sentences such as *I don't like tea and I don't like coffee either*.

The above is a somewhat speculative, but I think plausible hypothesis which is consistent with the evidence presented in this paper. Rather than insisting on a single historical origin for FP *either*, it suggests that there may have been two separate routes along which this construction may have developed—one via FP *neither* and the other via FP-Disj *either*—which converged and reinforced each other.

¹⁰ Such examples are indeed cited in the *OED*, for example: *Dauid king of Scottes...spoyled the Countrie, not sparing neyther man woman nor chylde.* (Grafton *Chron II* 42, 1568)

Both hypothesized pathways crucially involve the mechanism of postposing (of *neither* in the first case and of *either* in the second). This kind of postposing is quite plausible, given that in today's language it is still possible for initial coordination markers such as *both*, which is a close cousin of *either* and *neither*, to be postposed:

(56) I like both tea and coffee ==> I like tea and coffee, both.

In a recent, very interesting paper, Hendriks (2001) has argued that Disj *either* is in fact a focus particle, which would account for its flexible position in the sentence (and presumably her analysis would carry over to related items like *neither* in the *neither...nor...* construction and *both* in *both...and...*).¹¹

8. Further questions and prospects for further research

If the scenario suggested above for the emergence of FP-Disj *either* is on the right track, of course several questions remain, and new ones arise. I will briefly mention two of these, which both have to do with the licensing properties of FP-Disj *either* and FP *either*. The first question is: Why did FP-Disj *either* become an NPI, given that its presumed origin, Disj *either* is not polarity sensitive? One possible answer that suggests itself is that the postposing of *either* for some reason was only possible if it resulted in “widening” and “strengthening” in the sense of Kadmon and Landman (1993). As we have seen, the construction with FP-Disj *either* had the function of an afterthought; it may have in fact been restricted to an afterthought that amounted to a strengthening of the sentence. This would explain why—just like *any*—it was restricted to downward entailing contexts.

The second question concerns FP *either*: Why does FP *either* have the very restricted set of licensors that it has (mainly negation and other *n*-words)? Apart from—and in addition to—any synchronic explanation that could be given for this state of affairs, the results of the present investigation suggest a possible diachronic explanation. Since one of the sources for FP *either* is negative concord with *neither*, and by and large only *n*-words participate in negative concord, the restriction on the distribution of FP *either* could be a reflex of its historical origin in negative concord structures. Only a slight generalization to licensors other than *n*-words seems to have taken place, mainly to negative adverbs and predicates.

The data discussed in this paper indicate that the history of FP *either* has been a quite complicated one, involving on the one hand the older FP-Disj *either* which had a much more inclusive set of licensors, and on the other hand FP *neither* which occurred in negative concord with other *n*-words. Statistical data on the distribution of these three items have proved to be very interesting and revealing. At the same time, the picture I have sketched here is still incomplete in

¹¹ An additional piece of the puzzle may be provided by Krifka (1998) who discusses the semantics of postposed focus particles.

many respects. The data are based mostly on literary works from the 19th and to a lesser extent the 18th century. I have gathered virtually no information on older stages of English (with the exception of Shakespeare). More data from other genres and from dialect sources would be very useful too.¹²

Given the data limitations of the present study, the scenario for the development of FP *either* suggested in section 7 is still a very tentative one. Further empirical study could confirm or disconfirm this hypothesis, but I will leave that for another occasion.

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¹² The *Dictionary of American Regional English* notes the use of *or either* in the sense of "or else", for instance in *Everything had been moved out or moved in or either moved off*.