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Against heterogeneous origins for n't and not

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Zwicky and Pullum (1983) claim that English *n't* is an inflectional affix as opposed to a reduced form of *not* derived via cliticization. However, following through on the implications of this claim actually yields a new way to frame one of the main puzzles it purports to solve – the incompatibility of *n't* and reduced auxiliaries/modals – rather than an explanation for that puzzle.

The clitic/affix distinction is meant to explain the contrasting status of (1) and (2).

- (1) I'd've made my point by now. (*from* 'I would have made my point by now.')
- (2) *I'dn't be so sure of that. (*from* 'I would not be so sure of that.')

According to Z&P, *'ve* comes to be attached to *'d* via cliticization in the syntax in (1); *'ve* and *'d*, reduced forms of *have* and *would*, are simple clitics. In (2), *n't* is barred from similarly attaching to *'d*; *n't* seems not to behave as a simple clitic form of *not*. The ungrammaticality of **I'dn't* is attributed to the proposed affixal status of *n't*. Since concatenation of inflectional affixes takes place in the lexicon, it cannot follow concatenation via syntactic cliticization in word formation.

If *n't* is indeed an inflectional affix, then on the model of the grammar Z&P assumed, negative and non-negative auxiliaries/modals should exist alongside one another in the lexicon. Take *has* and *hasn't* in (3a-b) as examples.

- (3) a. He has seen the light.
- b. He hasn't seen the light.

Note now that while *has* in (3a) can reduce to clitic *'s*, as in (4a), "*has*" in *hasn't* can't, as in (4b).

- (4) a. He's seen the light.
- b. *He'sn't seen the light.

The contrast in (4) is rather mysterious if *has* and *hasn't* are truly counterparts, since both ought to be able to behave as simple clitics. Z&P's treatment of *n't* thus raises the following question: why can't a negative auxiliary/modal cliticize?

This question was obscured in the discussion of (2) because the only derivation considered for **I'dn't* involved illicit affixation of *n't* following cliticization of *would*. The ques-

tion emerges clearly once (5), with the negative modal *wouldn't*, is properly recognized as the source of (2) under an approach in which *n't* is an inflectional affix.

(5) I wouldn't be so sure of that.

Z&P's conclusion that *n't* is an affix has gained wide currency, and has become a source of support for the notion that the semantics of sentential negation can be distributed between heads and affixes in a grammar. However, at least one argument in support of heterogeneous origins for *n't* and *not* is internally inconsistent.

Reference

Zwicky, A.M. and G.K. Pullum (1983) "Cliticization vs. inflection: English n't", *Language* 59:3, 502-513.