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DIVERGENCE AND APPARENT CONVERGENCE IN THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF YET AND STILL

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A look at the entries in the OED for yet and still suggests that yet functioned very differently in earlier stages of English than it does now, and yet overlapped with still in several of its uses. The purpose of this paper is to show that, while the syntactic range of yet has changed considerably, there has been little change in its meaning, and furthermore that while still took over part of the range earlier available to yet, there is little, if any, evidence of true convergence. Indeed, the original meanings of yet and still account for all the temporal and even the concessive uses of these particles: the core meaning of yet is "continuation up to an imminent boundary/change," while that of still (which originated in the adverb "quietly, without interruption") is "continuation without boundary."

Modern English

In Modern English (NE), as is well known, temporal yet functions as a negative-polarity item and is thus restricted to "downward-entailing" contexts (cf. Ladusaw 1980), where it can be regarded as a suppletive form of already (cf. Traugott and Waterhouse 1969):

- (1) a. He is already here.    b. He isn't here yet.

In such contexts still contrasts clearly with yet:

- (1) c. He is still here.    d. He still isn't here.

Temporal yet, however, may also occur in a few affirmative environments, especially in modal, comparative, and superlative contexts. Here the distinction between yet and still is less obvious and may even be neutralized. A contrast is, however, clearly to be observed in examples like:

- (2) a. It is early yet (...let's go to a movie).  
      b. It is still early.
- (3) a. You may yet buy the horse. [possibility]  
      b. You may still buy the horse. [possibility/permission]
- (4) a. I have yet to see a generous Scotsman. [non-referential]  
      b. I still have to see a generous Scotsman. [referential]
- (5) a. (Your son is not shaping up too badly) ... we'll make a pitcher of him yet.  
      b. We'll still make a pitcher of him.
- (6) a. This is the best essay yet.  
      b. This is still the best essay.

Yet in (3)a. excludes a permission reading for may. Indefinite

object phrases in sentences like (4)a., but not (4)b., can only be non-referential. (6)a., in contrast to (6)b., indicates that the speaker expects other essays to be better. Some of these differences between yet and still are discussed in Hirtle (1977). He proposes that yet is associated "with an impression of being BEFORE, still with an impression of being WITHIN or DURING" (1977:30; cf. also Quirk et al. 1972:498).

In moving toward a more precise description of the meaning differences between yet and still, consider (2)a., which is a relic of an earlier use (to be discussed below), but which is still widely used in some dialects, especially British English<sup>1</sup>. Let  $\phi$  stand for the proposition without yet and  $i$  for the interval (around the moment of utterance) during which  $\phi$  is asserted to be true. Yet in (2)a. presupposes that there is an interval immediately preceding  $i$  such that  $\phi$  was the case during  $j$ :

(7) a.  $\lambda p [\exists j (\forall p)]$  (instantiation prior to some reference point)

and that there is an interval  $k$  immediately following  $i$  such that  $\phi$  will not be the case (or is expected not to be the case) during  $k$ :

(7) b.  $\lambda p [\exists k (\forall p)]$  (imminent change)

This analysis corresponds exactly to that normally given for noch in German or nog in Dutch (cf. Doherty 1973; König 1977; Abraham 1980). The difference between yet and still in (2) is that yet encodes the presuppositions in both (7)a. and (7)b., whereas still only encodes the presupposition of previous instantiation ((7)a.).

The analysis just given is not, however, directly applicable to constructions in which the predication is in a future or modal context and refers to an event rather than a state or process (cf. (3)a.-(5)a.). For example (3)a. and (4)a. imply the possibility and necessity of a continuation through the event specified in the sentence. In this they contrast with (3)b. and (4)b., which imply the persistence or continuation of a possibility or obligation. The dependence of the interpretation of German noch and English yet on the aktionsart of the predication was noted by Abraham (1980) and Hoepelman and Rohrer (1981) in connection with sentences like:

(8) a. Wir suchen das Geld noch "We are still looking for the money."

b. Wir finden das Geld noch "We'll find the money yet/ eventually."

Abraham and Hoepelman and Rohrer concluded that the meaning of noch in (8)b. is more or less the opposite of that in (8)a., i.e., (8)b. is true iff the relevant sentence without noch is true at  $k$  but false at  $i$  with  $i < k$ . According to this analysis, the same contrast would oppose the meaning of yet in (2)a. to that in (3)a.-(5)a. It is not a convincing strategy to assign more or less opposite meanings (i.e., homonymity) to two uses of the same phonological form, especially when these uses are in complementary distribution. The dilemma can be solved if we consider that "continuation" can be relevant not

only to processes or states but also to events. Processes and states are homogeneous. A part of a certain process or state is a further instance of the process or state in question. Events, by contrast, are not homogeneous. Furthermore, they are bounded. If the concept "continuation up to an imminent boundary" is applied to events, what we get is not a process or state going on over several intervals but a change of state within a larger, superordinate event. Note that the gloss given in the OED for the use of yet in future and modal contexts includes the specification "ultimately, before all is over" and "while there is still time." What we have here is the continuation of an ongoing process through a new event, where both the process and the event in question are part of a larger unit. (3)a. asserts the possibility that a process (of negotiation) may culminate in a new event (the purchase), where the whole superordinate event is a transaction. The superordinate event in (5)a. is the coaching given to a person, and in (8)b. it is the search for the money.

We therefore propose, as a first approximation, the following revised semantic analysis for all uses of yet discussed so far<sup>2</sup>:

(9) Given a sentence ' $\phi$  yet', if  $\phi$  denotes an eventuality  $ev_1$  such that  $\|\phi\|(ev_1) = 1$  at an interval  $i$ , this sentence has the following presuppositions:

- a.  $(\exists ev_2) (ev_2 \alpha ev_1) \ \& \ (\exists ev') [(ev_1 < ev') \ \& \ (ev_2 < ev')]$   
 b.  $\sim (\exists ev_3) [(ev_1 \alpha ev_3) \ \& \ (ev_3 < ev')]$

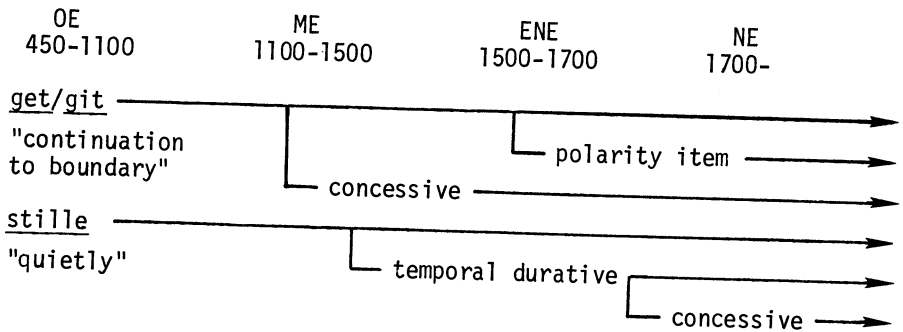
Note that the presuppositions given in (7) for yet in combination with state or process descriptions are a special case of the more general description just given. If  $ev'$  denotes a state or process, every part of  $ev'$  and therefore also  $ev_1$  and  $ev_2$  must also be instances of the state or process in question. If  $ev_1$  denotes an event, the second presupposition specifies that this event occurred at the periphery of a more comprehensive event ( $ev'$ ).

Still shares with yet the first presupposition ((9)a.) for the particular case that  $ev'$  denotes a state or process. The relevant presupposition is therefore described adequately by (7)a.<sup>3</sup>

#### Historical Development

Let us now turn to earlier periods of English to see how the situation just described has evolved in the history of the language.

In Old English (OE) yet was a temporal adverb; it acquired the concessive meaning of "nevertheless" in Middle English (ME) and became associated with negative polarity in the early part of the modern period. Still(e), however, was used in OE only as an adjective or adverb with the meaning "still, quietly." The adverb developed a purely temporal sense in the ME period, and a concessive use in Early Modern English (ENE). The facts can be represented schematically as follows:



In OE yet (spelled get, git, giet, gyt, etc.) signalled that a state or process was considered to continue up to some point in time, when a change occurred or was expected to occur. This is particularly clear when a before-clause follows, as in:

- (10) ic gyt þa wæs wuniende in minum mynstre, ær ic  
 I yet then was living in my minster, before I  
 þas biscopscire underfengce  
 the diocese received. (Werferþ's Dial. of Greg.  
 273:16)

Negatives may precede yet as in (11)a. or may follow it as in (11)b.:

- (11) a. ic ne mæg nu giet geandwyrðan ær þon ðæstið wyrð  
 I not may now yet answer before that time comes

"I cannot as yet answer, before the right time comes."

(Alfred's Bo. 12:4)

- b. Fordon in þa tiid þa get ne wæron monig  
 Because in that time then yet not were many  
 mynster getimbred in Ongolþeode (Bede's Eccl. Hist.  
 churches built in England 176:14)

In both cases yet has wide scope. In Ælfric's Grammar, yet is considered to be equivalent to Latin adhuc "up to now, as yet, still" in connection with predications denoting states or processes (Zupitza 1966:237). Yet could, however, also be used in combination with predications denoting events, as in:

- (12) Hlaford sancte nicolae help us and geteode us þæt  
 Lord St. Nicholas help us and instruct us so-that  
 we þe gett geseon moton and þine halige fett cysсен.  
 we you yet see may and your holy feet may-kiss.  
 (St. Nicholas, CCC 303, l. 929)

Here, as in (3)a.-(5)a., yet does not imply the continuation of a state or process, but the continued unfolding of events, in this case within St. Nicholas' larger scheme of miracles. This use can

be found only in future (including imperative) and modal contexts. In contexts such as these in Ælfric's *Grammar* yet is used to gloss not adhuc but rather a Latin future or future perfect, cf. amo-ic lufige; amabo-ic lufige gyt to dægode to merjen "I will-love to-day yet or tomorrow"; amato tu-lufa ðu gyt; cum amavero-bonne ic lufige gyt (Zupitza 1966:130-33).

So far we have assumed that yet always functions as a sentence adverb in OE and thus has the whole sentence as its domain. To round off this brief sketch we should also mention the use of yet as a focus or scalar particle. Just like also, even, or only in NE, yet could also focus on a constituent, typically a VP or object, as in:

- (13) Ac ic wolde giet acsian sumre spræce ðe  
 But I wanted yet to-ask about-some discussion which  
 me ymbe tweoþ  
 to-me about doubts

"But I also wanted to ask about some of the discussion about which I had doubt." (Alfred's Bo. 144:10)

Just as in (12) yet presupposes a preceding event which, together with the event of asking is part of a more comprehensive event; here, however, all events are predicated of the same subject.

In the ME of Chaucer's time, yet continued to have all its OE uses, as in:

- (14) a. Therefore my theme is yet, and evere was (Chaucer Pard. 425)  
 b. Thou shalt have yet, or hit be eve,  
 Of every word of thys sentence  
 A preve by experience (Chaucer HF 876)  
 "Before it is evening you shall yet have empirical proof for every word of this pronouncement."

Yet was, however, highly restricted in past contexts, usually occurring in negative environments. Furthermore, a concessive sense had developed.

A major difference in the ME period is that stille and later all ready "all prepared" were grammaticalized as temporals. At Chaucer's time stille usually still means "quietly, without disturbance" as in:

- (15) For in the bussh he sitteth now ful stille (Chaucer K.T. 1527)

If one sits, stands, abides, or holds still, the state obtains without change or interruption. The temporal relation can be an additional implication in such sentences as:

- (16) Lat it still on the roser sitt,  
 And growe til it amended be (Chaucer R.R. 3124)

"Let it (the rose) remain still (without being picked)

on the rose-bush and grow until it is finer."

Temporality came to be permanently associated with stille in contexts where the idea of uninterruptedness is minimized, i.e., in non-stative contexts:

- (17) Thus they fought stille togyders more than halfe a day  
(Malory 382:17)

Later, in ENE uninterruptedness was bleached to pure durativity, especially in future contexts:

- (18) While I remain above the ground, you shall  
Hear from me still (Shakespeare, Cor. IV.i.51)

From the beginning of its grammaticalization as a temporal, still had the meaning in (7)a. (previous instantiation of a state or process). In this it overlapped in meaning with yet, and indeed appeared to replace it in most affirmative contexts like (1)c. or (2)b. Like yet, still also came to be used in comparative and superlative contexts, and ultimately developed a concessive sense<sup>4</sup>. However, despite the similarities, and despite some neutralization of differences, for example in comparatives like Fred is taller yet/still than Bob, there was no actual convergence of the two adverbs (contrary to Ladusaw (1977) and what the OED suggests). Still differed from yet in that it was (and continues to be) limited to states and processes (i.e., it never expanded its range from (7)a. to (9)a.) and, crucially, it never came to have the presupposition of imminent change characterized for yet in (9)b. Evidence for the lack of convergence comes from the persistence of minimal pairs such as (3)-(6) (cf. also Hirtle 1977), the use of still as "always" (cf. OED still 3), and the failure of still to replace yet in contexts most clearly suggestive of a boundary, such as (11)a. and (14)b. Furthermore, even in their concessive uses yet and still contrast. Yet emphasizes contrast and is rather like but, while still emphasizes continued cohesiveness, as in:

- (19) He knew Conrad had told him the truth. It was so.  
Yet/\*Still it wasn't so. It wasn't so because it  
couldn't be so (the contrast is introduced as new  
information and contrary to expectation)  
(Ed Lacy, Manhunt 9:4, 1961).

- (20) a. The death of man is unique. Yet it is universal.  
(new, contrasting fact)  
b. The death of man is unique. Still, it is universal.  
(universality has been the topic of discussion)

The reason that still appears to have converged with yet is that still can occur in affirmative contexts like (1)c., contexts that were available to yet until NE, but which are now largely unavailable. We follow Ladusaw (1977) in assuming that the exclusion of yet in these contexts is the result of a radical reinterpretation of the scope of yet in negative contexts<sup>5</sup>. Originally, yet had



- (23) a. I have not yet made known to Mariana  
 A word of this (Shakespeare M.M. IV.i.49)
- b. No more yet of this;  
 For 'tis a chronicle of day by day,  
 Not a relation for breakfast. (Shakespeare. Temp.  
 V.i.162)

Note that in (23)b. wide scope of no is also lexically marked by more, one of the forms that have replaced yet in this function.

The claim that polarity item yet in NE is the result of reanalysis and reinterpretation in negative contexts with state or process predicates leads to the prediction that the spread of yet in the sense of already to other downward-entailing contexts like interrogatives was a later development. The data in Shakespeare are not helpful in determining the relative order of development since both the older and the newer uses already coexist in his works, as exemplified by:

- (24) a. Hath yet the deputy sent my brother's pardon?  
 (~"already") (Shakespeare M.M. IV.iii.118)
- b. What my dear Lady Disdain. Are you yet living?  
 (~"still") (Shakespeare MAdo I.i.119)

According to the OED there are a few cases in earlier ME which exemplify a yet that is interpretable as already in interrogatives, prior to the development of the same interpretation in negatives:

- (25) Hu þincþ þe, artu zut inume,  
 Artu mid riȝte ouercume? (Owl and Nightingale 541)
- "What do you think, are you yet caught, are you fully defeated?"

However, yet in these sparse data can equally well be interpreted as "eventually, after all" (i.e., in the sense yet always had in event predications), therefore these data are not convincing counterexamples to the hypothesis that reinterpretation started in negative contexts. The precise path of entry and spread of reanalysis is beyond the scope of this paper, but clearly needs investigation.

#### Conclusion

In summary, we have shown that the various uses of yet and still cohere both synchronically and diachronically. There is a potential for convergence in so far as neither adverb affects truth conditions, and both share the presupposition of prior instantiation. But full convergence is continually negated by the potential for divergence in so far as yet encodes a presupposition of imminent boundary (a sense clearly reflected in as yet).

The pair we have been discussing is particularly interesting in that the core meanings we have proposed persisted for a considerable period of time (over a thousand years in the case of yet) and, furthermore, these core meanings have to a large extent constrained

subsequent changes, even through several stages of grammaticalization, including the shift to nontemporal, concessive meanings.

Among a number of broader implications of this study, there is space to mention only two here. A major theoretical question in historical semantics is when polysemy begins. Our study of yet and still suggests that polysemy is best treated as beginning only when the constraints of a core meaning cease to be in operation (for example, it is not only unnecessary, but also misleading, to postulate two yet's or two noch's). Furthermore, our discussion supports the view that fundamental types of eventualities (states, processes and events) should be taken as primitives (i.e., semantic primes). It is recognition of these basic distinctions that permits us to formalize the semantic coherence of the adverbs despite different interpretations given different aktionsarten; that this is typical of temporal adverbs, particles, and affixes in general, not just of the two adverbs in question, is strongly suggested by W. M. Jacobsen (this volume).

#### Footnotes

- \* E. König gratefully acknowledges the support he received from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) during his stay at Stanford.
- 1 cf. It's early days yet, of course (C. P. Snow, Last Things, Penguin, p. 157), I think I'm good for some time yet (I. Murdoch, The Unicorn, Penguin, p. 168).
  - 2 This analysis makes use of some of the ideas and the notation proposed by Bach and Partee (1982). Ev is used as a cover term for states, processes and events.  $\alpha$  stands for "immediately precedes," and  $<$  for a ("part-of") ordering relation.
  - 3 Sentences like Are you still writing your dissertation? (suggested by Len Talmy) are not counterexamples, although an expected terminus (of dissertation writing) is implied. World knowledge of the event denoted by write a dissertation assumes a limited period of time, and this, together with the contrastive stress, contributes the sense of boundary. Contrast Are you still teaching at Stanford? where no specific period of time or imminent boundary is necessarily implied.
  - 4 The change from a temporal to a concessive meaning is common in the languages of the world. There is a strong affinity between the notions of "continuation" and "concessiveness" (cf. German dennoch, French encore que, Spanish aunque). The assertion that "q continues" given another fact p gives rise to the general conversational implicature that this persistence is remarkable or unexpected and that therefore p and q do not normally go together. This conversational implicature later comes to be conventionally associated with the temporal adverbs.
  - 5 Ladusaw (1980:125f) has shown that an analogous but reverse process or reanalysis from narrow to wide scope has affected anymore, which is now used by many speakers in affirmative (i.e., "upward-entailing") contexts in the sense of "nowadays."

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