Negation in English Language

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ABSTRACT

Negation in English is surely one of the most careful and complete syntactic analyses ever attempted. It is a grammatical construction that contradicts all or part of the meaning of a sentence. The history of negation in English has been recorded for over 1200 years. However, English has been a language in which the syntactic expression of negation appears remarkably unstable. Negation is a function that has been universally grammaticalized in the world's languages. Data in various languages give many significant inferences about the underlying structural principles of negation. Jespersen's cycle of negation modelled changes in the syntax of negation in various European languages, provides five stages for English, whereas the other languages that have undergone cyclical change in negation typically needed no more than three. Despite the simplicity of the semantic core meaning of negation, the domain of negation appears to be complex and fascinating knowing the multiple ways negation is expressed in languages and how it interacts with other domains of grammar.

KEYWORDS: Negation, English Language, Origin, Incidence and History

Introduction

For several years, negation has been on the most extensively discussed topics in generative grammar, and the subject of a great deal of important work (Miestamo, 2005). Negation is as universal linguistic notion. Indeed, it is one of the most basic elements in human mind that makes it an indispensible part of natural languages which are the tools for human thoughts. Every language has negative particles or expressions; statements that involve negative particles are called negative statements. As it is known, negation is the opposite of affirmation; (positive and negative) one sentence or statement can be the negation or denial of another (Miestamo, 2005). Thus, negation is the process of making a sentence negative usually by adding negative particles within the structure.

Negation in English, for example, is surely one of the most careful and complete syntactic analyses ever attempted. It is also a grammatical construction that contradicts (or negates) all or part of the meaning of a sentence. Also known as a negative construction or standard negation (Nordquist, 2019). Negation is a function that has been universally grammaticalized in the world's languages. This is something we can state with a high level of confidence, since no language has ever been reported to lack a grammaticalized expression of negation. Some languages may show a stylistic dereference for the direct expression of negation but grammatical means to express negation are always found (Forest, 1993).

Negation data in various languages give many significant inferences about the underlying structural principles of negation (Gleason, 2001).

Concept of Negation in English Language

Negation is a subject of variation across languages. Every language has its own syntactic, semantic and morphological devices expressing negation (Willis, Lucas & Breitbarth, 2013). Negation is one of the few truly universal grammatical categories: every language seems to have some grammaticalized means to deny the truth of an ordinary declarative sentence. Yet the expression of this category varies significantly both from language to language and historically within the same language. For the historical linguist, changes in the way that negation is expressed are therefore an ideal testing ground for theories of change, with every language having the potential to provide important data. A great deal of research has been conducted in English and other Languages on the similarities and differences of negation (Alnawaisheh, 2015). The type of negation sentential or constituent negation may also be accounted for in terms of the scope of the negative element. Sentential negation requires the negative element to have scope over the sentence (or at least the matrix clause), whereas in instances of constituent negation the negative element scope sonly over the local constituent.

In English language, negative clauses and sentences commonly include the negative particle not or the contracted negative n't. Other negative words include no, none, nothing, nobody, nowhere, and never. In many cases, a negative word can be formed by adding the prefix un- to the positive form of a word (as in unhappy and undecided). Other negative affixes (called negators) include a-, de-, dis-, in-, -less, and mis- (Nordquist, 2019). In addition, although sentential negation logically implies negating sentences, it is possible to negate a subordinated clause without affecting the nature of the whole sentence. Negation has been the subject of a vast body of scientific literature. Typological work, building on the pioneering surveys of Dahl (1979), Dryer (1988), and more recently Miestamo (2005) and van der Auwera (2010a), has revealed the diverse range of ways in which negation is expressed in the world's languages.

Origin of Negation in English Language

Over the centuries, there has been tremendous scholarly and philosophical interest in negation. This preoccupation is reflected in Seifert and Welt's Basic Bibliography of Negation in Natural Language (1987), which lists some 3200 titles in over 200 languages. The fact that much of the literature is in English means that many problems of negation in English have been treated, although this is of course coincidental. Many problems have attracted particular attention, and one may even speak of a canon of problems to which scholars have been drawn, generation after generation. Such problems typically have to do with negative scope when negation and quantifiers co-occur (as in All boys didn't leave.), neg-raising (as in I don't think he's coming) or double or multiple negation (I don"t know nothing no more), depending on the particular interests and backgrounds of individual scholars. In this study, I treat negation in English, but I'll focus on implied negation which has not been given too much attention in the literature, even though this phenomenon is ubiquitous.

Negation in English

In many ways, negation is what makes us human, imbuing us with the capacity to deny, to contradict, to misrepresent, to lie, and to convey irony." (Horn 2010). Negation is a language

universal, found in all known languages, and unique to human languages (Lindstad 2007). A further uniform characteristic is that sentential negation (including what could be termed 'clausal negation') always involves "the *addition* of an overt morpheme to an affirmative clause". The function of negation is fairly straight-forward: it negates parts of or the entire sentence or clause. The formal realisation, however, is more complex and varies across languages, across speakers, and even in the same speaker across contexts (Lindstad 2007). Negation is more common in spoken language than in writing text because we can use face to face negative form to make what to say less direct. In English, negative markers can be divided into three groups. Not- negator, N-negator or No-negator and negative affixes (Al-salmi, 2019).

Not-negator, according to Alsalmi (2019) is the most used markers, however, it cannot be placed anywhere. He formed a negative statement with *not* or *n't* after be, modal and auxiliary verbs. He considered these examples as ways of explanation:

1- They are not German.

2- I did not call Sarah yesterday.

3- She could not fix the pipe.

As it hinted at the example (1), *Not* negates through adjective phrase. Here it comes after the verb *(to be)* but it places next to the word or phrase it modifies. In example (2), *Not* negates through verb phrase and it is negating the action of calling. As it can be seen in this example, it comes before non-finite verb *(verb without tense)* and after the finite auxiliary verb *(auxiliary with tense)*. It is worth noting that the scope of negation may affect more than one part and causes semantic ambiguity and this is due to intonation and stress. Regarding example (3), *Not* negates the modal auxiliary verb (could) and it also places before non-definite verb and after a modal auxiliary definite verb. However, ambiguity might arise here in interpretation the third example. One possible interpretation is that *Not* negates the ability *(could not)*. The other possibility is that *Not* negates the action VP (not fix the pipe).
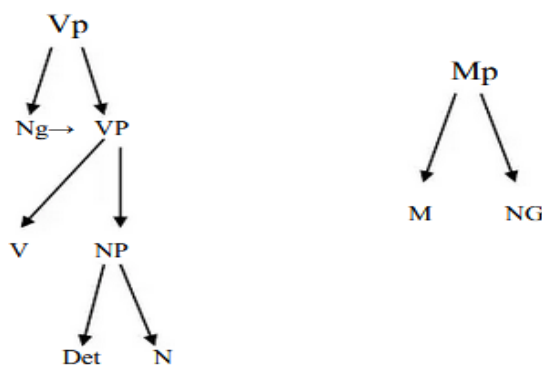
N-negator or No- negator in English sentence occurs by inserting the determiner *No* in front of the noun phrase. It can be also occurred by using indefinite pronouns such as (no one, nobody, none). Or through adverb *never* which places before main verb and it does not need an auxiliary verb. These particles are mostly negating statement. For more clarification examine these examples according to Al-salmi (2019):

1- There are no storms in the weather forecast.

2- She bought no one a present.

3- None of the students were able to finish the exam. (it follows by a definite article)

4- He never sings.

It is worth mentioning that "No" and "Not" can have different implied meaning, though, they might be interchangeable. The example below indicates the idea of difference:

5- She is not a mother.

6- She is no mother.

In example (5), it means that she is not being a mother yet, does not have any son or daughter. Whereas in example (6), it means she is a mother of someone, but she does not practice the role of mother (Al-salmi, 2019).

Negative affixes occur by adding a suitable affix to the word so the meaning of that word is revised. Nonetheless, selecting the appropriate affix is a problematic part in negative affixes. It means that the initial letter of any word might determine the type of prefix.

According to Mohsen (2011), a major distinction to be made is between constituent (or local) negation and sentential (or clausal) negation (cf. Haegeman 1996). Sentential negation typically involves negating the finite (non-lexical) verb, since this may be said to be the link of the sentence, or the 'nexus' in Jespersen's (1917) term: "as the (finite) verb is the linguistic bearer of a nexus, at any rate in all complete sentences, we therefore always find a strong tendency to attract the negative to the verb" (Jespersen 1917). Constituent negation means that one of the constituents is negated without the result being a negative sentence:

(1).   They live ***not*** far from here

Although the sentence contains the negative element ***not***, the sentence is not interpreted as negative: not negates the constituent ***far from here***. This could be argued to be because the negative element follows the finite lexical verb and thus does not have scope over the verb. However, even when the negated constituent precedes the finite verb, local negation is possible, as the following examples illustrate (Klima 1964, cited from Haegeman 1996):

(2)   In ***not*** many years will Christmas fall on a Sunday (in not many years = not often)

(3)   In ***not*** many years will Christmas fall on a Sunday, will it?

(4)   In ***not*** many years Christmas will fall on a Sunday (In not many years = soon)

(5)   In ***not*** many years Christmas will fall on a Sunday, won't it?

Sentence (2) is negative; sentence (4) is not. This is proven by the fact that in (2) the preposed negative element triggers inversion, while in (4) it does not. The tag questions in (3) and (5) preposed negative elements with sentential scope trigger inversion, and negative sentences require positive tag-questions (Mohsen, 2011). According to Haegeman, the contrasts between sentential and constituent negation may be explained in terms of operators: "negative constituents which trigger inversion are operators and those that don't trigger inversion are not" (Haegeman 1996). In other words, sentential negation seems to require a negative operator (Mohsen, 2011).

History and Incidence of Negation in English Language

Over the 1200 years or so of its recorded history, English has been a language in which the syntactic expression of negation appears remarkably unstable (Ingham, 2013). Jespersen's (1917) cycle of negation, which modelled changes in the syntax of negation in various European languages, provides five stages for English, whereas the other languages that have undergone cyclical change in negation typically needed no more than three. Sentential negation, where proclitic *ne* gave way to postverbal *not*, and then to enclitic negation in the form *-n't*, was entirely refashioned. Changes have also occurred with indefinites under the scope of negation, leaving the language with two systems in this context, the *any/ever* series and the *no/never* series. The overall scale of these developments well exceeds those that took place in Slavic, Romance, and other Germanic languages, even though some of them were also affected by Jespersen's cycle (Ingham, 2013).

The Old English period is taken to have extended until the mid-12th century, the Middle English period from then until about 1500, after which the next 250 years form Early Modern English. The syntax of negation in English did not evolve in step with these conventionally recognized periods: insofar as it has any linguistic basis, the conventional periodization of the history of English uses the evolution of inflectional morphology (Lass 2000), which did not affect negation as such. There was thus little difference between the syntax of negation in Old English prose and in early Middle English prose, but between the Early and Late Middle English periods sharp differences appear. In addition, the Old English period presents traces of developments that took place during the Anglo-Saxon era (van Kemenade 2000, Ingham 2007).

Information sources become more plentiful and diverse in genres as time proceeded, by and large, though there are noticeable gaps in the textual record between the 12th and 14th centuries, when Latin and then French were extensively used as languages of record (Ingham 2007). From the 15th century onwards, however, textual deficiencies place no serious limits on our understanding of how negation evolved, at least in the written medium. Old English sources are less diverse than those for the Early Modern period, but they are without doubt the most plentiful of any early medieval European vernacular language. They fall into two broad categories, poetry and non-fictional prose, and negation is realized rather differently in these two types of data source. The Middle English period has the opposite problem: there are such great differences between early Middle English of the 13th century and late Middle English of the 15th century that we are really looking at two different states of language (Ingham, 2013).

Negation in Discourse

Recent functional diachronic studies have sought to obtain a better understanding of the grammaticalization of discontinuous negation structures by building on the insight that contemporary Italian (non) mica is used to contradict a proposition activated explicitly or implicitly by the preceding discourse or speech-act context (Cinque, 1976). Following Schwegler (1988) and, in particular, Schwenter's (2006) investigation of the extent to which the various negation strategies are governed by information-structure constraints, Hansen and Visconti (2009) aim to refine the traditional view whereby reinforced or metaphorical usage simply loses its original innovatory value through the law of diminishing returns (Haspelmath, 1999). They document the grammaticalization of discontinuous negative structures in French and Italo-Romance, that is the gradual loss of dependency on discourse-old information. The practice of following the denial with adversative statements (introduced by ma 'but', anzi 'on the contrary') that counter previous explicit or implicit propositions

(Schwegler 1988) is seen as a key factor that establishes links with discourse-new information, thus reducing in their view the contextual restrictions on the reinforced strategy.

On the basis of a statistical analysis of written and spoken Italian textual corpora, Visconti (2009) argues that the use of mica shows 'a cline, from a cluster of monologual contexts in which *p* is discourse-old by virtue of explicit textual evocation, to a cluster of dialogual cases in which an increasing amount of inferencing is required'. Such a development is deemed to represent 'an increase in "intersubjectivity", in the sense of an increasing coding of the speaker's awareness of the interlocutor's attitudes and beliefs'. Whether this is a real change in the value of the discontinuous negatives over time, or an effect of the different nature of the early and modern texts, which vary in style and genre, needs further investigation. The reinforced structures, introduced for pragmatic and semantic reasons arising from the controversial nature of denying an active expectation to the hearer's face (although the proposition can belong to a third party), are bound to lose their impact with increased use (Dahl 2001) and eventually lead to their being used for less contentious acts of denial (i.e. less discourse-active), especially if other (e.g. structural) factors make the traditional negator a less efficient negating strategy.

Once a given strategy loses its pragmatically marked value, alternative expressions normally take its place: most modern dialects, whether they are predominantly Neg1,2, or 3, express discourse-active presuppositional negation with a dedicated negative structure, as non . . . mica in Italian, for instance, Pied. pavs normal negator nen (Zanuttini 1997), menga vs brisain Modena (Manzini and Savoia 2005), but some northern dialects use the same form for both, especially if derived from mica (Manzini and Savoia 2005), but also Valdotain pa (Zanuttini 1997). Unlike the normal adverbial negator (in Neg 2 and 3 areas), the pragmatically marked type (indicated by the diacritic before the English translation) can freely co-occur with negative indefinites, as well as in some varieties with the normal sentential negator.

Conclusion

Negation is a language universal, found in all known languages, and unique to human languages. In many ways, negation is what makes us human, imbuing us with the capacity to deny, to contradict, to misrepresent, to lie, and to convey irony. The function of negation is fairly straight-forward: it negates parts of or the entire sentence or clause. The formal realisation, however, is more complex and varies across languages, across speakers, and even in the same speaker across contexts. The history of negation in English has been recorded for over 1200 years. However, English has been a language in which the syntactic expression of negation appears remarkably unstable. Jespersen's cycle of negation, which modelled changes in the syntax of negation in various European languages, provides five stages for English, whereas the other languages that have undergone cyclical change in negation typically needed no more than three. Despite the simplicity of the semantic core meaning of negation, the domain of negation appears to be complex and fascinating knowing the multiple ways negation is expressed in languages and how it interacts with other domains of grammar.

Recommendations

1. Constant research work is needed to be done on the similarities and differences of

   negation in English language and other Languages.

2. There is need to make in-depth studies on both the sentential negation so as to establish the negative element over the sentence or at least the matrix clause. Equally, constituent negation is highly needed to be researched on.

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