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A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF NEGATION IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative analysis of the relation between pragmatics and negation in English. The aim of the first part of the study is to examine the view that meaning can originate from usage and negation can be analyzed within pragmatic point of view. And the second aim is to examine the relation between presuppositions and negation and how listeners can identify the target of negation. The first part of the study is a comparison between two types of negation: descriptive and metalinguistic negation. The study shows that descriptive negation is related to truth-functional meaning and its scope is narrow in contrast to metalinguistic negation in which meaning is not merely a matter of truth-functional but rather usage based. In addition, the scope of metalinguistic negation is wide and it scopes over the whole utterance beyond the scope of the negative operator. The second part of the study is to examine the relation between negation and presuppositions which are strictly within the pragmatic aspects. The study also analyzes two presupposition properties: cancellability and constancy under negation. The finding of the study is that presuppositions are not canceled without negation, aren't normally targeted by negation, and are canceled when there is negation and additional material denying the presuppositional inference. For constancy under negation test, the study shows that it cannot be applied all the time to distinguish presuppositions from entailments.

Keywords: *Metalinguistic negation; descriptive negation; presupposition; corrective clause; cancellation*

INTRODUCTION

All human languages contain a form of negation representation. Scholars and theorists from a variety of different disciplines have made immense contributions to the comprehension and understanding of negation in natural and formal language. Negation is a logical and philosophical phenomenon which is a matter of semantic opposition. The apposition in negation relates a proposition to another proposition with a meaning that is in some way opposed to the meaning of the first one. This type of semantic opposition is related to truth-functional meaning; however, there are some uses of negation in which truth-functionality seems to be lacking and the only explanation is a pragmatic-based use.

1. Negation in semantics and pragmatics

Negation has been discussed both within the subfields of semantics and pragmatics. Before Horn's (1985) claim that ambiguity in negation is a matter of usage rather than semantics, the general view has been that negation is unambiguous. This places negation within the scope of pragmatics rather than semantics. In the article, Horn investigates metalinguistic negation MN versus descriptive negation DN.

Effectively, studying negation from a pragmatic point of view can be highly recommended since meaning can originate from usage and not semantics. For example, in analyzing Russell's famous example as in the following:

- *The king of France is not bald.*
- *The king of France is not bald, since there is no king of France.*

The difference of meaning is due to differences in the scope of negation without implying a change of the meaning in the negative operator.

A simple analysis of these utterances would be that the first utterance is semantically narrow in scope as a mere negation of the predicate 'bald' while a pragmatic analysis with a wide scope would be of the whole utterance 'the king of France is bald' as a negation of an existential presupposition.

Thus, one of the aims of this study is to explain how a single linguistic meaning could be linked to two or more different meanings in use. Furthermore, the study is in line with Horn's pragmatic view in which he claims that negation is not semantically ambiguous (Horn 1985). This study adopts a different analysis which does not argue for pragmatic ambiguity but rather to argue for a pragmatic contextualist approach in which

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the scope of negation is a matter of context.

From the previous statement, it can be inferred that what is meant by 'descriptive negation' is a semantic narrow scope analysis related to the truth-conditional of the proposition of the utterance. On the other hand, 'metalinguistic negation' can be seen as a wide scope pragmatic analysis defined as a non-truth-conditional use of negation related to the context of the utterance. Moreover, a metalinguistic negation extends over not only the proposition but on the act of uttering a sentence or proposition. Hence, the paraphrase of a metalinguistic negation would be:

- *It is not the case that 'the king of France is bald'.*
- *I cannot affirm that 'the king of France is bald'.*

These paraphrases would bring about two issues in regards to the descriptive and metalinguistic distinction. The first issue is to define the status of utterances that contain an example of metalinguistic negation and the second one is about the constitution of the criteria that could make the distinction applicable.

To deal with the first issue, a metalinguistic negation is connected to what is referred to as 'metarepresentation'

by Wilson who defines it as "a representation of a representation: a higher order representation with a lower representation embedded within it" (Wilson 2012, p.230). The embedded representation is an utterance, a thought or a proposition/sentence which in turn can be a public, mental or an abstract representation. In other words, if metalinguistic negation uses are metarepresentations according to Wilson, negation is a higher-order representation, whereas the utterance that is the scope of the negation is a lower-order representation. The following sections are on the properties of descriptive and metalinguistic negation and how they function both semantically and pragmatically.

2. Descriptive negation DN in semantics

As mentioned above, DN is associated with truth-conditional negation. Logically, DN is the negation of proposition; however, linguistically, DN is realized as sentence negation or constituent negation. To differentiate the two realizations, Klima (1964) proposes to use 'neither' or 'not even' as a test. According to him, both 'neither' or 'not even' can be used with sentence negation while constituent negation allows 'neither' only as in the following examples:

Sentence negation - *Jim did not leave [neither Mike, not even on Sundays].*

Constituent negation - *I had some money in the house not long ago [*not even, even] in the bank.*

If the negation of the proposition indicates the semantic focus of the negative operator and its syntactic representation is in with the sentence negation the explanation must specify the semantic focus of negation as in:

Semantic negation - *Joanne is not married.*

Propositional negation - *It is not the case that Joanne is married.*

Although the proposition seems to indicate it is true, the corrective clause, henceforth COR, indicates that the proposition is actually false. Thus, in order for a proposition to be deemed false it must contain a COR. Hence, the assumption would be that there should be an alternative positive counterpart POS of the negative clause NEG whether an explicit or an implicit one (Moeschler, 2013). According to Moeschler, negative utterances have the implication that there is a relationship between NEG, POS and COR. So, when the COR is implicit or overt, there should be a group of alternatives to POS. On the other hand,

when COR is explicit or covert there should be a group of interpretations of NEG such as the following:

NEG interpretations [*Joanne is engaged, Joanne is single, Joanne is divorced*]

This relation is vital to the explanation of the distinction between DN and MN which is what the next section is about. In order to test this relation, Moeschler (2013) proposes three categories: entailments, scope of negation, and discourse connectives but since connectives are related to discourse analysis the next sections will be on entailments and scope of negation since both are semantic.

2.1 Entailment in DN

Entailment in linguistics is simply a relationship between two sentences. If the first is true, the second must also be true (Beth, 1955). For instance, the sentence *John's father always drives him to school* entails that John's father knows how to drive. Entailment in DN is represented in the relationship between NEG and COR which indicates that COR entails NEG such as the following examples:

1- Joanne is not married, she is single - single (Joanne) → not-married (Abi)

2- Joanne is not beautiful, she is ordinary - ordinary (Joanne) → not-beautiful (Joanne)

In the previous examples, entailment is semantic and truth-conditional. In scalar predicates (predicates that can be measured on a scale), normally there is a strong predicate which entails the weak one. On the other hand, the affirmation of one predicate entails that the other is negative when there is an antonym. This only applies when the antonyms are complementary. This property of entailment is contrastive between MN and DN (Moeschler, 2013).

2.2 Scope of negation in DN

The scope of negation is over an aspect of logical form like a full proposition or a propositional function. The domain on which the scope of negation falls can be a full proposition, a presupposition or an implicature (Moeschler, 2018). In contrasting MN and ND the indication is that COR entailments resemble the scope of negation (a proposition). In DN, there is an asymmetry between the affirmation and negation of antonyms. For example, when someone is described as smart, consequently, this entails that he or she is not stupid whereas when describing someone as not stupid

there is a possibility that he or she is may be smart to a certain degree.

The concurrence between COR entailments in MN and the scope of DN propositional negation is an indication that COR must be covert. This also implies that an explicit COR confirms the wide scope of MN in contrast to the narrow scope of DN negation. Thus, it is essential to examine MN next in order to fully certify the previous statement.

3. The pragmatics of metalinguistic negation

The term metalinguistic negation is "a device for registering objection to a previous utterance (not proposition) on any grounds whatever, including the way it was pronounced" (Horn, 1985, p.121). The following examples from Horn (1989, p.384) are classic examples to understand how MN functions pragmatically:

- *He doesn't have three children, he has four.*
- *You didn't eat some of the cookies, you ate all of them.*
- *It isn't possible she'll win, it's downright certain she will.*
- *John isn't patriotic or quixotic; he's both patriotic and quixotic.*

All the examples employ COR sentences in order to make the utterances as

pragmatically negated and not merely negations of the first proposition.

The same categories-entailments and scope of negation- used earlier to analyze DN utterances will be utilized in the analysis of MN utterances. However, the difference between these analyses is that MN utterances are pragmatic based.

3.1 Entailments in metalinguistic negation

It is important to first review a proposal by Gazdar (1979) who suggests that "entailments are stronger than implicatures and presuppositions". This proposal is further explained in that semantic meaning is stronger than pragmatic meaning (Moeschler, 2018). So, in order to analyze entailments in MN, it is of high importance to distinguish semantic and pragmatic entailments. Thus, Moeschler (2018) divides MN into:

MN1: when MN scopes over a potential scalar implicature

MN2: when MN scopes over a potential presupposition

3.2 Entailments in MN1 and MN2

According to Gazdar (1979) a potential scalar implicature is "all the implicatures which the sentence could possibly have prior to contextual

cancellation" (1979, p.55). For instance in the utterance *Joanne is not beautiful, she is gorgeous* the COR entails POS and the scope of negation is over the scalar implicatures. Whereas potential presupposition is defined as a presupposition when there is no "projection problem," no "ambiguity" in negative sentences, and no context sensitivity" (Gazdar, 1979, p.124). An example of potential presupposition is the example mentioned before: -*The king of France is not bald, since there is no king of France.* Here, the COR entails both negation of the implicature and the presupposition.

3.3 Scope of MN1 and MN2

To put it simply, Moeschler (2018) suggests that the scope of negation MN1 is narrow and the scope of negation in MN2 is wide. He further suggests that MN2 is a direct consequence of COR entailments. In order to understand Moeschler's claim the following sentences should first be distinguished as either MN1 or MN2 and secondly, their scope of negation is analyzed. The following utterances will be used in the analysis:

1- *Around here, we don't like coffee, we love it*. (Horn, 1989, p.382)

2- *This Birthday Card is NOT from one of your admirers! It's from TWO of your admirers.* (Horn, 1992)

3- *Abi does not regret having failed, because she passed.* (Moeschler, 2018, p.9)

4- *Jake's wife didn't divorce him, because he has never been married.*

In the analysis of 1, the scope of negation is over the scalar implicatures (like, love) which indicates that the utterance is an example of MN1 and the scope is narrow since it negates only the verb (like) and replaces it with a higher verb (love). In the utterance 2, is similar to 1 as an example of MN1 but the difference is that it replaces the (one) with (two) in which (one) is typically included in (two) and the scope is also narrow. However, the utterance 3 is obviously different from 1 and 2 because the first proposition contains a presupposition which in turn is canceled by the COR. This indicates that 3 is an example of MN2 and the scope is wide in that it scopes over the whole proposition/presupposition. Furthermore, the utterance 4 is similar to 3 and different from 1 and 2. It is also an example of MN2 in that COR cancels the first presupposition and the scope is over the whole proposition/presupposition.

This analysis introduces the important pragmatic phenomenon of presupposition and presupposition cancellation. So, it seems reasonable to examine the relation between presupposition and negation.

4. Negation and presupposition

According to Huang (2007) "presupposition can be informally defined as an inference or proposition whose truth is taken for granted in the utterance of a sentence" (p.65). Presuppositions are effective in structuring the information and allow interlocutors to focus on what is important and leave in the background some of the information. Presuppositions are normally initiated by certain lexical items and linguistic constructions which are called presupposition triggers. There are some properties that are distinctive to presuppositions such as constancy under negation and defeasibility or cancellability (Huang, 2007). Furthermore, cancellability sometimes induces what is known as the projection problem. Beaver and Denlinger (2020) define projection as "a signature property of presuppositions… used as a diagnostic to distinguish them from other types of inferences like implicatures and entailment" (p.2).

The aim of this section is to examine the relation between

presuppositions and negation and how can hearers identify exactly what material a negation is intended to target. In fact, Beaver and Denlinger (2020) describe the relation between presuppositions and negation as "notoriously complex". In order to analyze the complexity of the relation between presupposition and negation, the following set of utterances, with at least one presuppositions, are useful to highlight this point:

1a. Jimmy stopped smoking.

1b. Jimmy does not smoke now.

1c. Jimmy smoked in the past.

1d. Jimmy stopped smoking—in fact, he never smoked in the first place.

2a. Jimmy didn't stop smoking.

2b. Jimmy smokes now.

2c. Jimmy didn't smoke in the past.

2d. Jimmy does not smoke now.

2f. Jimmy didn't stop smoking—he never smoked in the first place.

As seen in these utterances, the complexity of the relation is due to the fact that by using the presupposition trigger 'stop', it triggers not only the inferential in 1b that Jimmy does not currently smoke, but also the presupposition in 1c that

Jimmy did smoke at some point in the past. This leads to the property of cancellability. The inference in 1c cannot be canceled since it will assert 1a. Thus, by denying the inference in 1c the result will be an infelicitous discourse similar to 1d.

So, if the sentence 1a is negated, the question that arises is what will happen to the inference in 1b? Is it the same as 2a? The clearest way to answer the question in regard to the sentence 2a is that the negation is targeting the present semantic content in regards to Jimmy's current smoking habits as in 2b.

Nevertheless, the presupposition is unchanged by the negation. And if someone hears the sentence 2a, he or she might still be judgmental that Jimmy smoked previously as in the sentence 2c. This will give rise to a projection problem. The presupposition is said to project through the negation embedding. So, the fact that the inference in 1c/2c withstand even when the affirmation 1a is negated. This leads to the conclusion the inference at hand is in fact a presupposition.

To further analyze the sentences, there is a possibility that 2a actually targets the presupposition and not the present semantic content. This leads to inferences such as 2d-e in which the presupposition seems to be canceled. However, in order to

understand this cancellation, the negation should be combined with an explicit COR like in 2f. The COR seems to need an accompanied shift in prosody to make it easier for the hearer. In summary, the analysis of the previous sentences has some important revelations. It seems that presuppositions are similar to entailments in that they are not canceled without negation, and furthermore they aren't normally targeted by negation, and are canceled when there is negation and additional material denying the presuppositional inference.

The final relation between presuppositions and pragmatics to be examined in this study is the negation under constancy test. The constancy under negation is a test to distinguish presuppositions from entailments. Constancy under negation is when "a presupposition generated by the use of a lexical item or a syntactic structure remains the same when the sentence containing that lexical item or syntactic structure is negated" (Huang, 2007, p.67). For example, the sentence 'The king of England was assassinated' entails that the king is dead which will be false if the sentence was negated—'The king of England was not assassinated' entails that the king is alive. On the other hand, the same sentence 'The king of England was assassinated' presupposes the existence of a king of England which remains true even if the sentence was negated—'The king of England was not assassinated'.

However, the constancy under negation test has some problems. First, some argue that constancy under negation may not be necessary such as Green (1996) for example. He gives examples of sentences in which there is a presupposition yet seems very difficult to negate such as 'Long live the king of France!' And second, some others suggest that constancy under negation may not be sufficient (Levinson, 1983). For example, although in the sentence 'Do/don't bring the camera here', the constancy under negation test can be fulfilled, the inference in the negative counterpart 'The camera is not here' former is analysed as a felicity condition on the speech act of requesting.

5. Conclusions

One of the aims of this study was to examine negation as a pragmatic process which adopts Horn's (1985) view that negation can be unambiguous and depending on usage which places it within the scope of pragmatics rather than semantics. As the study has shown, the change of the meaning of negation is due to a change in the scope of the negative operator. The semantic scope of negation is often narrow which is different from the

wide scope of pragmatic negation. This difference between the scope of negation in pragmatics and semantics, divides negation into a descriptive and metalinguistic negation. Additionally, metalinguistic negation is linked to the notion of metarepresentation in which representation is in higher order. Metalinguistic negation has a covert corrective clause which distinguishes it from propositional negation.

The second part of the study is on the relation between negation and presuppositions. The analysis of the relation between presuppositions and negation seems to indicate that presuppositions show a unique behavior when negated. The behavior is shown in cancellation and projection within independent contexts. The relation between presuppositions and negation is a reflection of the phenomenon of presupposition in almost all aspects. Thus, when presuppositions behaviors are subjected to alterations, negation also interacts in similar ways with presuppositions accordingly. For example, the alteration and shift of presuppositions from a semantic point of view to a pragmatic one, it was accompanied by similar shifts from truth-functional operators and towards pragmatic denials.