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ENGLISH NEGATION ITS TYPES, DIFFICULTY AREAS FOR POLISH STUDENTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

The article presents a brief outline of English negation. Apart from negative forms occurring with auxiliary, the notions of multiple and implied negation are introduced. Because of the Polish counterpart *nie-* of English negative affixes, a chapter has also been devoted to English morphological negation. The author used the outline as theoretical background to her experiment with English negation spoken by Polish learners of English. The research proves English negation, especially multiple and implied to be unclear and difficult area of learning for the Poles. The grammatical rules concerning syntactic negation are introduced and stressed at beginners' level, and these seem to be the only ones properly understood, memorised and applied without hesitation. The experiment and the conclusions hint at solution for English speaking Poles and their teachers as far as the process of teaching – learning negation is concerned.

1. Introduction

In linguistics negation is quite a capacious term. Language possesses a great deal of possibilities to express the negative fact, negative opinions and acts of refusing, denying or opposing something. This is one of the areas of research in linguistics which can be looked upon from different perspectives. The following paper provides a short review of forms of negation on the syntactic, morphological and pragmatic levels. Sentence negation is presented briefly with more attention directed to variations of negative forms (initial negative element in the sentence). The next part is devoted to the variety of morphological exponents of negation. A short comparison of multiple negation in English and Polish provides some information about its usage and context in both languages. Similar description and comparison give a picture of implied negation, and here apart from English and Polish examples, Japanese sentences are given. The review precedes the presentation of the results of a research carried out by the author in order to determine how Polish students of English use negation. In the conclusions the reader will find hints for avoiding and preventing negation errors, which may be useful especially for teachers.

2. Sentence negation

Sentence negation in English is accomplished by exponents of negation described by Quirk et al. in "Grammar of Contemporary English" (1980:376) as negative words. Apart from *not* he includes *no, neither, nor, none, nothing, nobody, no one, nowhere, never* and presents their assertive and non-assertive counterparts. The sentence with negative element can be paraphrased with an assertive or non-assertive element. The following examples given by Quirk et al. (ibid) illustrate the usage:

- 1) We have had *none*.
We haven't had *any*.
We have had *some*.
- 2) London I haven't bought *anything* for you.
I've bought *nothing* for you.
I've bought *something* for you.
- 3) London We haven't had *any* lunch.
We've had *no* lunch.
We've had *some* lunch.

The assumption appears that negative words, their assertive and their non-assertive counterparts are assigned a place in structure of the sentence and transformations may be performed, according to a scheme, within the groups with three elements each. This type of negation, although different from the Polish, seems to be relatively easy to learn.

2.1. Initial negative element

The problems arise with variations of syntactic negation. The difficult area includes the usage of the initial negative element in sentence. There are two cases:

- I. Initial negative element is part of noun phrase (NP) being its determiner.
- II. Initial negative element is in deep structure represented as negative adjunct.

In the first case the structure of the sentence that follows the negative element is intact:

- 4) Not many students failed.

In the second case the negative adjunct causes an inversion process:

- 5) I will never make that mistake again. →
Never will I make that mistake again. (neg-fronting + inversion)

The difficulty may be caused not only by change in structure but by change in meaning as well (emphasis).

Another variety occurs in reported speech:

- 6) He promised not to lie again.
- 7) He said that he wouldn't lie again.

In sentence 6 the negative particle precedes the infinitival clause without operator. This pattern is followed in orders and sentences that include reporting verbs if they are not followed by a *that*-clause. A *That*-clause is an embedded sentence with a subject and a full verb phrase, so negative particle does not change its place in reported speech.

2.2 Scope and Focus

The scope of negation and its focus are problematic phenomena for Polish speakers of English. Both are interconnected and both influence meaning. The information focus is made explicit by applying stress and intonation contour. Quirk et al. (1980:382) explain:

“The scope must include the focus. From this it follows that one way of signalling the extent of scope is by position of the focus”. The influence of scope and focus on sentence meaning is revealed by Hoffman (1993:47). He interprets one sentence in 7 different ways by creating questions referring to the negated part of the sentence. The scope of negation and focus are the main part of the question.:

- 8) He didn't kiss his wife last night.
- 8a) When did he?
- 8b) *Which night was it?*
- 8c) Who was it that he kissed?
- 8d) Whose wife was it?
- 8e) What did he do to her?
- 8f) Who kissed her?
- 8g) What did happen?

3. Negation on morphological level

Syntactic negation is insufficient for conveying all the negative messages in language. The type presented next is rarely mentioned as negation. Morphological negation supports the speakers with its vast, continuously transforming part of the lexicon.

Bauer (1983:26-27) defines three classes of word formation:

- I. inflection
- II. derivation
- III. compounding

Negation refers only to derivation and compounding. Some of the compound negative words have already been mentioned under the heading of sentence negation. Although they play a significant role in syntax they originate from compounding. Compound negative words are all lexemes produced from the *no-* free morpheme and free or bound morphemes like *ever, where, -thing, -body, one, -ne, either* and *or* by the means of compounding. Thus the products of the process are respectively: *never, nowhere, nothing, nobody, no one, none, neither, nor*. These negative items create a connection between syntax and morphology: they carry lexical meaning but can cause the change in the structure of the sentence. An interesting example of complex compound with negative meaning is given by Szymanek (1989: 45-47):

- 9) Never-to-be-forgotten occasion.

Compounding appears to be an unlimited class; however, Polish students reluctantly take advantage of it.

Negative affixation in English is even more confusing in comparison to the few Polish negative affixes. The prefixes that possess negative meaning are *un-, dis-, in-, a-, non-, il-, im-* and *ir-*, whereas the only one negative suffix is *-less*. Szymanek (1989:64) defines the difference between suffixation and prefixation in the following way: “the attachment of a prefix does not normally affect the category of a base – if a base is a noun the prefixed derivative must be a noun, too. (...) In suffixation, on the other hand, category shift is a frequent phenomenon”.

While the mentioned prefixes do not change the category of the prefixed item, the suffix *-less* combines with nouns to form adjectives. Moreover its derivatives do not have to possess negative meaning. Its negativity may be pointed out with the correlation to its counter-

part-*ful*. As Szymanek (1989:245) says: "In such cases, the semantics of the Xless adjective is roughly, the opposite of whatever the exact meaning of its Xful counterparts is."

The Polish counterpart for the majority of prefixed items is *nieX*. The suffix *-less* is translated into the Polish prefix *bez-* in most cases. Although they exist, the prefixes *non-* and *a-* are seldom used in Polish. As it might be expected, the variety of negative affixes, not to mention the lack of a production rule, causes problems for Polish learners of English.

4. Multiple negation in English and Polish

In the past, negation in English was used similarly to its related languages and to Polish: the number of negative words was increased to emphasise the content of the sentence. Chaucer used that kind of negation in "Canterbury Tales" in the 14th century. An example taken from the Prologue shows multiple negation in the past.

10) "He never yet no vilenye ne sayde

In al his lyf, un-to no maner wight"

A few centuries later, however, schoolmasters decided to apply Aristotle's logic to the English language, which resulted in a new grammar rule for negation. Multiple negation was no longer correct and appropriate. Occasionally in the proper context it's possible to insert more than one negative element into a sentence:

11) We didn't find nothing.

Some fixed phrases contain multiple negation:

12) My work was not for nothing.

In some contexts it is possible to use negative particle *not* as prefix e.g.:

13) I couldn't not-help her.

The usage and meaning is not only vague for learners of English. Teachers of English also find considerable difficulty in explaining the rules of double negation. Polish language negation is realised by means of negative exponents: *nie*, *nikt*, *nic*, *nigdy* and *nigdzie*, without limitations imposed on the number of exponents appearing in the sentence as long as the sentence is understandable e.g.:

14) Nikt nigdy nie powiedział nikomu, co tu się działo.

15) Nie tylko nie powiedziałem, że nie przyjdę, ale nie dodałem nic o niezadowoleniu. (Misunderstanding is possible).

5. Implied negation

This type of negation is controversial to many linguists because it is represented in affirmative form. The negative meaning appears from reading "between the lines". Implied negation can be realised by two forms:

a – ironical negative implication

b – indirect negative statement

Type a) often appears in informal speech, and has the form of question or statement, sometimes with question tag. The phrase is usually loaded with irony, irritation or amusement, e.g.:

16) Am I my brother's keeper?

17) Much I care.

- 18) – Are you happy?
 – Do I look happy?
 19) – I think it's answer c.
 – So you think it's c...

Indirect negative statement as opposed to ironical negative implication appears in formal language. In certain social interactions the etiquette does not allow the usage of *no*, *not* or direct refusal. It demands an Indirect Speech Act in order to express politeness, not bad manners. Apart from the language of politicians, business language provides the most frequent context. The following examples in English, Japanese and Polish illustrate the usage:

- 20) We will take your offer into consideration.
 21) We will call you.
 22) It is interesting, indeed, but we need some time to discuss it.
 23) Zensho shimasu. (I will do my best to meet your wishes).
 24) Kentou shimasu. (We need some time to study your proposal).
 25) Mata renraku. (We will contact you later).
 26) Dziękujemy za pańskie zaangażowanie, zajmiemy się tym. (Thank you for your involvement, we will take care of it).
 28) Dziękujemy za pańską ofertę, skorzystamy z niej w przyszłości.
 (Thank you for your offer, we will take advantage of it in future).

Polish students of English are usually unaware of the usage of implied negation.

6. Analysis of English negation used by Polish speakers

Negation seems to be a complicated structure with a lot of various forms used in different contexts. It appears to be difficult at some level not only for foreigners but also for some native speakers of English (especially multiple negation). The author carried out some research on a group of 36 Polish students of English at different levels of fluency. The students were given a survey with 8 situations in which they should express their negative ideas. The situations were presented in Polish so as not to suggest the answers. The last two questions were given to let the students express negation without negation, i. e.: implied negation. The survey was as follows:

1. You are a parent. Your son seems to have trouble with the grades in 1st semester. Express your dissatisfaction and say what kind of restrictions result from this.
2. You go by tram and you sit. Near you there stands an older man with reproach in his eyes directed to you. You don't feel very well. Explain it.
3. You are at the party. There is a person, whom you dislike, approaching. Probably you will be asked to dance. Anticipating his/her wishes refuse with an excuse.
4. The teacher blames you for the fight. Explain this misunderstanding (it was different).
5. Your mother persuades you to marry somebody quickly. You not only disapprove of a hurry but also disapprove of marriage as such. How would you say it to her (delicately)?
6. The boss told you to do something that is not realisable. Try to convince him that it is impossible (you really care for this job).
7. Your friend is seeing a new boyfriend who has bad influence on her. Try to make her split up with him.

8. Your new friend persuades you overbearingly to try drugs. You are not interested. What would you say?
9. Write down ten words in English, which in your opinion carry negative meaning.
10. Write down ten words in English, which in your opinion may sometimes sound negatively (in context).

There were 11 papers of upper intermediate level, 18 of advanced level and 7 of proficiency level. The following chart illustrates the results of research both in quantity and percentage because of different number of students in upper intermediate, advanced and proficiency groups. The negative forms were summed up and analysed according to the type of negation. If in some situation more than one type appeared they were counted separately but if eg. syntactic negation appeared several times it was treated as one negation. As far as questions 9 and 10 are concerned they were analysed separately. The words given by students were divided into groups according to their meaning. The following types appeared: emotive words (this group included mainly the swear words and the words conveying some emotional message), morphological negation, *no* – compounds, semi-negatives, some contextual negation and combinations of *no*, *not* + modal verbs. The lower level the more emotive words and morphological negation were used. Semi-negatives and contextual negation appeared only at proficient level.

Fig. 6.1

Level	Question 9	Question 10
Upper intermediate	Morphological negation, emotive words	Morphological negation
Advanced	Emotive words, morphological negation	Emotive words
Proficiency	No-compounds, emotive words, morphological negation	No, not + modal verbs, semi-negatives, contextual negation

Fig. 6.2

Summary	Upper-intermediate		Advanced		Proficiency	
	quantity	percent	quantity	percent	quantity	percent
Syntactic negation	71	80,7%	101	70,1%	43	76,8%
Morphological negation	12	13,6%	17	11,8%	8	14,3%
Implied negation	6	6,8%	14	9,7%	9	16%
Double negation	—	—	1	0,7%	—	—
Syntactic + morph. Negation	3	3,4%	9	6,2%	5	8,9%
No negation	6	6,8%	11	7,6%	3	5,3%

After analysing the numbers what strikes us straightforwardly is the preponderance of syntactic negation usage in all situations at all levels. Another thing which is certain is that the Poles do not like to use double negation. They rarely mix two types: morphological and syntactic. The students at upper-intermediate level do not feel fluent enough to use implied negation. Although syntactic negation seems to dominate, morphological negation it is not far behind it.

7. Conclusions

The author has presented a brief review of several aspects of negation to serve as background for analysing the results of the survey. Basically syntactic negation is acquired at the beginner level, and later it is only extended. As the results show it proves to be the easiest type of negation for Polish learner. It appears to be the easiest type as to learn it the students have to memorise the pattern which they do together with learning a new tense pattern. Each time the students acquire new tense structure they revise, extend and memorise the usage of syntactic negation. Their output of negation is somehow habitual. They associate the notion of negation with "not" following the auxiliary. Advanced and proficiency students have a kind of fossilised competence as far as negation is concerned. Although they do not make errors producing the sentence which includes negation, but they avoid using other types of negation. It means they do not feel fluent enough in English but, at the same time, have hardly any motivation to improve their skills. The knowledge they already have is enough to communicate fluently. Although their overall knowledge is proficient, the knowledge of this particular area is insufficient.

Both morphological and implied negation are not mentioned by teachers under the label of negation. Teachers of English forbid the use of multiple negation, and what is worse, they often do so without any explanation or additional information.

What action should be taken to improve the fluency of Polish speakers of English? Teachers of English should be encouraged to practise implied negation especially on advanced and proficiency levels. Role-play is useful during conversation classes. Permission for student improvisation may produce good results. Insufficient drill is usually limited to translations and to filling the gap with a suitable word. As far as negatives in initial position are concerned, inversion should be introduced as a part of the transformations made either within negative sentences or from negative to positive, negative to interrogative and the reverse. Inversion is introduced at the beginner level but the extension of it with negation should be introduced and practised as soon as the student is able to form sentences in basic tenses. The variety of double negation structures should be introduced and clarified. The practice should stress the usage of variety of negative components in common with correctness. The practice may be provided by conversation classes where the students are given a certain situation and have to use their knowledge to express a lot of negative ideas in a short time (that would exclude the use of separate short sentences in favour of longer, well-built and coherent sentences). More complicated paraphrases may be constructed by teachers to practise mixed types of negation. It is important that although the theory of negation may be introduced separately, it is impossible to separate negation from other structures and forms of language. Students should find no difficulty in transforming their ideas into English expressions. Hopefully this analysis will help teachers to change their attitude toward teaching negation and in future will help Polish speakers of English to express negation with confidence and without problems.

Appendix:

ANKIETA NA TEMAT NEGACJI W JĘZYKU ANGIELSKIM

Przeczytaj opis sytuacji i wyobraź sobie, co byś powiedział, po czym wpisz to w pozostawione miejsce.

1. Jesteś rodzicem. Syn jest zagrożony na półrocze. Wyraź swoje niezadowolenie, oraz powiedz jakie ograniczenia z tego wynikają.
2. Jedziesz tramwajem siedząc. Nad tobą stoi starszy pan i patrzy na ciebie z wyrzutem. Ty się źle czujesz. Wyjaśnij mu to.
3. Jesteś na imprezie. Zbliży się chłopak/dziewczyna, której/go nie lubisz. Chyba chce z tobą zatańczyć. Uprzedź jej/jego prośbę z góry odmawiając z usprawiedliwieniem.
4. Nauczyciel ma do ciebie pretensje myśląc, że bójka była z twojego powodu. Wyjaśnij mu, że to nieporozumienie.
5. Mama namawia cię do szybkiego małżeństwa. Ty nie tylko nie chcesz pośpiechu. Nie podoba ci się instytucja małżeństwa. Powiedz jej to (delikatnie).
6. Szef każe zrobić ci coś niewykonalnego. Spróbuj przekonać go, że to niemożliwe (zależy ci bardzo na tej pracy).
7. Koleżanka spotyka się z nowym chłopakiem, który źle na nią wpływa. Spróbuj odwieść ją od ciągnięcia tej znajomości.
8. Twój nowy znajomy namawia cię dosyć nachalnie na spróbowanie narkotyków. Nie jesteś zainteresowany.
9. Napisz pierwsze dziesięć słów, które według ciebie mają duże negatywne znaczenie.
10. Napisz pierwsze dziesięć słów, które według ciebie czasami mogą brzmieć negatywnie (np. wraz z przeczeniem itp.)

Uwaga: nie tłumacz powyższych zdań!

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