

NOTES ON THE USE AND MEANING OF NEGATION IN CONTEMPORARY WRITTEN ENGLISH

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This paper is intended to study several features of negation in contemporary written British English. A corpus-based approach has been adopted and a sample of 20,000 words of academic and journalistic writing have been selected. This investigation was carried out in four steps: (1) Frequency and distribution of negatives in the two samples, (2) Uses and meanings of those types of negation, (3) Use of affixal and non-affixal negation, and (4) Distribution of *not*-negation and *no*-negation. It is suggested that the frequency, distribution, meanings and pragmatic uses of negatives may vary according to the format, the purpose, the subject matter and the relationship established between the writer and a hypothetical reader. As expected, journalistic language seems to be closer to speech than academic language as far as the frequency, meaning and use of negatives are concerned.*

1. Introduction

Polarity and, in particular, negation have always been highly controversial issues in English studies. The potential interest of the latter transcends linguistic theory itself. It also has close connections with the world of psycholinguistics, logic, and the philosophy of language and mind.¹ This complexity and interest are reflected in Seifert and Welte's

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¹ Psycholinguistic research has paid special attention to the acquisition of negation in L1 and L2 because of its complicated nature, its early appearance in the child's repertoire, and its importance in the language system. Relevant studies in this area include the following: McNeill and McNeill (1968); Bloom (1970, chap. 7); Clark (1972), Horn (1989, chap. 3), and Déprez and Pierce (1993). Special investigations on negation with respect to second language acquisition have been conducted by Cancino, Rosansky, and Schumann (1974), Hatch (1978), and Wode (1978). For a historical perspective of the place of negation within traditional and modern theories of thought and logic, see Horn (1989, chap. 1).

Basic Bibliography of Negation in Natural Language (1987), which lists about 3,200 articles and books in over 200 languages. Moreover, the potential presence of negation in all units of the language (word, phrase, clause, text), emphasize its importance, as well as its implications in the organization and structure of the morphological, phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels. Not unexpectedly, the relevance of negation is also acknowledged in most grammars of modern English whether traditional or theoretically oriented, such as Quirk *et al.* (1972, 1985), Leech and Svartvik (1975), Huddleston (1984, 1988), Sinclair (1990), Downing and Locke (1992), Givón (1993) and numerous others, as they all devote a specific section of their work or even a whole chapter to the study of this domain.

It was Jespersen who in 1917 paved the way for the great number of publications on negation which were to follow. Broadly speaking, these could be classified into two main groups: one concerned with the syntactic features of negation, and the other dealing with the semantic ones. The first concentrate on aspects such as the distinction between clause versus local, or constituent, negation² (Klima, 1964; Payne, 1985), the explanation and status of negation as a transformational rule within the framework of Generative Grammar (Klima, 1964; Jackendoff, 1969; Culicover, 1976; Gabbay and Moravcsik, 1978) and, finally, the notion of transferred negation, negative raising or *not*-transportation (Fillmore, 1963; Lakoff, 1969; Horn, 1978; Sheintuch and Wise, 1976; Bublitz, 1992).

Semantic studies, on their part, have mainly focused on the interaction of negative expressions with quantifiers (Jackendoff, 1968; Baker, 1970a, 1970b; Carden, 1976; Kempson, 1977; Bolinger, 1977; Horn, 1989), the use of negative polarity items (Lakoff, 1969; Linebarger, 1987; Progovac, 1992), the scope of negation with modal auxiliaries (Tottie, 1985; Bublitz, 1992), and the function of double or multiple negation (Baker, 1970b; Labov 1972; Bolinger, 1977). Affixal negation (*true vs untrue, agree vs disagree, possible vs impossible*), has also been given considerable attention; its interpretation, productivity and restrictions in word-formation have been studied by Jespersen (1917), Zimmer (1964), Marchand (1969, 1974), Horn (1989, chap. 5), and Tottie (1980, 1991, chaps. 4 and 5).

² While Klima (1964) speaks of sentence and constituent negation, Quirk *et al.* (1985: 776-797) prefer to use *clause negation* and *local negation*. Klima's terms are the ones most widely used in the literature.

In spite of the abundant research in this area, empirical and corpus-based studies about the pragmatic uses and meanings of negation in different types of discourse are relatively scarce, and include, basically, only those by Givón (1978, 1979, chap. 3), Horn (1989, chap. 7), and Tottie (1982, 1991).

Givón (1978) proves that negation in natural language differs from negation in logic since negative expressions in human language are more presuppositionally marked; in logic, however, there is no place for presupposition of any kind as negation only serves to reverse the truth value of a proposition.

Tottie (1982) further supports this hypothesis and engages in a close analysis of written and spoken samples drawn from the files of the *Survey of English Usage* at University College London. Negatives are divided into two major groups: *rejections* (including *refusals*) and *denials*. The former imply the refusal or rejection of a previous suggestion. The latter consist simply in the negation of something that has been said before; they can, in turn, be of two types, *explicit* and *implicit*, according to whether they involve a definite negation of an assertion made in the context, or the negation of something that is “contextually inferred, presupposed or entailed” (1982, 97). After a close survey of these types of structures in a corpus of 100,000 words, Tottie concludes that there are twice as many negatives in the sample of discourse as in the sample of written language of the same size, and also notes that rejections and explicit denials are not found in written communication although they are typical of speech.

After her preliminary study, Tottie (1991) carried out a second investigation to find out about the use of negation in general, as well as about its specific use in typical spoken discourse, as represented by conversation, versus typical written discourse, which she defined as expository prose. On this occasion, a subsample of 15,000 words taken from the spoken corpus originally used in Tottie (1982) was carefully examined together with a 20,000 word sample of a subset of the London-Lund Corpus and of the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus (LOB). Tottie here concludes that rejections and explicit denials cannot by themselves account for the larger proportion of negatives in spoken than in written language. There are other discourse functions which are responsible for this, such as the collocation of negation with mental verbs, questions, supports, repetitions and imperatives. What is important

in this second study is that additional discourse functions, apart from denials (implicit and explicit) and rejections, are identified as determining factors for the higher number of negatives in spoken language. Moreover, it is also found that affixal or morphological negation is much more frequent in written than in spoken language. She explains this on the basis of the discourse strategy used in the preparation of text. Finally, a long section of this study is devoted to the analysis of the distribution and variation of *Not*-negation and *No*-negation, together with the factors intervening in that choice. It is shown that *Not*-negation dominates in spoken language while *No*-negation prevails in written language.

Within the framework just summarized, this study is intended to investigate various syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of negation in contemporary written British English, and to replicate and expand on Tottie's previous studies.

As a working hypothesis, it is assumed that if the use and frequency of negative structures varies according to the type of language (written vs spoken), then that must also be true for different genres of written and spoken texts. In this study it is suggested that the frequency, distribution, meanings and pragmatic uses of negatives may oscillate according to the format, the purpose, the subject matter and the relationship established between the writer and a hypothetical reader in various types of written texts. Furthermore, it is also assumed that the frequency, use and distribution of affixal vs non-affixal negation, as well as those corresponding to *Not*- vs *No*-negation may change according to the style and conventions of the written text under consideration.

2. Method

A corpus of written British English was designed following the general guidelines in the literature (Quirk and Svartvik, 1966; Aarts and Meijs, 1984; Atkins, Clear and Ostler, 1992). This amounted to 20,000 words. Samples of equal proportions from academic and journalistic writing were selected. Although the size of the corpus selected is not large for a study of this nature, it does not differ greatly in this respect from Tottie's book length investigation.

For the journalistic sample, material from three well-known British newspapers was surveyed, namely *The Sun*, *The Daily Mirror* and *The Guardian*. These three newspapers can be considered as representative of three different styles and journalistic conventions. The texts extracted from these newspapers deal with a wide variety of topics, from sports or famous stars' love lives to serious and dry editorials on national and international politics. In the case of academic writing, excerpts were taken from three major British Journals (*British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *British Journal of Educational Studies* and *The Philosophical Quarterly*) with wide international audiences.

We regarded as negative, in the first place, those grammatical items that are negative from both a syntactic and semantic perspective such as *never* as head of an Adv phrase; *no* as determiner in an NP structure or modifier in the structure of comparative AdjPs or AdvPs (as in *I have no money* and *She is no longer living with her parents*); *none* as head in an NP structure or modifier in the structure of comparative AdjPs or AdvPs preceding *the* (as in *None of them turned up*; *You are none the better off after all that studying*); the particle *not* including enclitic forms such as *hasn't*, *isn't*, *mustn't*; *not* as modifier to several determinatives (*much*, *many* and *enough*); *nobody*, *nothing*, *nowhere*, *neither* and *nor*; sentence pro-form *No* represented by Upper case N to distinguish it from the determiner *no* (as in "Is John there? No") and, finally, all the words containing the suffixes *-less* and *out* (which only occurred in the word *without*) and the negative prefixes *un-*, *dis-*, *in-* (including all its allomorphic variants *il-*, *ir-*, *im-*, as in *illogical*, *irregular* and *impossible*), *non-*, *de-*, *a-* and *not-*. The sentence pro-form *No* functions grammatically as a sentence, whereas all the other forms are intrasentential.

Apart from these, some lexical words with an inherent negative meaning and which also behaved syntactically as negative within the text (*fail*, *eliminate*, *prevent*) were also included, as were the semantically negative adverbs *rarely*, *hardly*, *scarcely* and the quantifying determiner *little*.

The inclusion of the last two groups can be justified on two grounds: firstly, the meaning of all these words is basically negative and, secondly, from a syntactic point of view they may function as typical negative items requiring the occurrence of non-assertive forms, i.e.:

- (1) She has even taken court orders to prevent him coming anywhere near her.
(*The Sun*, June 14, 1994, p.15)
- (2) Forms of the Magical Ideation were also used which eliminated any items clearly relevant to parapsychological phenomena.
(*British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1994, vol. 33, p.79)
- (3) When a club XV player, I hardly ever saw any trouble.
(*The Daily Mirror*, June 10, 1994, p.26)

Furthermore, both the negative adverbs and the quantifier *little* fulfill the most basic conditions to be classified as negatives, namely, they usually bring about a change in word-order when they are placed in initial position in the clause, and trigger a positive question tag in the same way as nuclear negatives do.³

Throughout our analysis, following Tottie, we distinguish between *sentence* and *intrasentence negation*, between *affixal* and *non-affixal negation* and thirdly, between *sentence* and *constituent negation*. The frequency of negation was determined on the number of occurrences of the negative items per 1,000 words; percentages were calculated as necessary.

This investigation was carried out in four steps. The first part concentrated on the general frequency and distribution of negatives in the two samples under analysis, whereas the second stage focused on the uses and meanings of negation. The third was reserved for the study of affixal negation, drawing a comparison between the frequency

³ In the consideration of these two subsets of words as negatives, we deviated in part from Tottie (1982, 1991) who in her quantity analysis only considered the items which could be always defined as negative from both a semantic and a formal perspective. She supported her decision with arguments that, in our opinion, are not completely convincing. She maintains that in the case of the inherently lexical negative items (*absent, fail, lack, forget*), it is really difficult to make a computerised lexical search; moreover, she believes, quoting Jespersen (1917), that for the very same reason that they are taken as negative, the order could be logically inverted and then be viewed as positive. However, the fact is that for any user of language, no matter how we put it, expressions such as *accept something* and *succeed in an enterprise* will be seen as positive, while their opposites will contain negative connotations unless contextual elements prevent it. Secondly, as Tottie herself says, psycholinguistic studies clearly show that they are processed as negative. Thirdly, if we analyse the properties of these words individually at the clause level, it is perfectly possible to identify those cases as above (1, 2), where these items behave syntactically as typical negative forms as they bring about noticeable changes in the clause structure. As for the exclusion of the words negative in meaning but positive in form, which she calls *fuzzy negation*, no justification is actually given apart from pointing out that incomplete negation had been treated elsewhere (Tottie 1977).

and distribution of affixal and non-affixal negation in the two types of linguistic materials chosen. Finally, the four stage was concerned with the distribution of *not*-negation and *no*-negation.

3. Results and Discussion

As is evident from Table 1, little difference can be observed in the frequency and distribution of negation in the two samples of journalistic and academic writing chosen. The figures obtained correlate quite highly with Tottie's results, which yielded a frequency index of 12.8 of negatives per 1,000 words. In fact, the slight differences in results may be explained by the inclusion in our survey of some semantically negative lexical words. The use of *No* as a sentence pro-form is almost null as this reaction signal is generally restricted to the spoken language. Only one instance has been identified in the journalistic sample; namely, when the writer, commenting on the results of the political elections held in Britain last June 94, encourages the reader to think of a person for Central Office and then resorts to the sentence pro-form *No*, followed straight away by the name of the politician in question. The journalist makes use of this form as a discourse or textual strategy with the purpose of keeping the readers' attention and in order to involve them in their story.

- (4) What would be dramatic? Start with the undramatic retirement of Sir Norman Fowler to spend more time with his board-room. Put the heaviest, most dangerous hitter- and rival- you've got into Central Office. No, we mean Ken Clarke, who moves every 15 months on average anyway.
(*The Guardian*, June 14, 1994, p.3)

Another aspect that is worth pointing out is the similar proportion of inherently negative forms with a negative syntactic function identified in the sample of academic writing as compared with the language of journalism. This set of words includes forms such as *eliminate*, *fail*, *reject*, *ignore*, *ban*, *prevent*, and so on. Certain idiomatic phrases which usually appear in the negative form have also been grouped in this category, namely *there is not a hint*, *not at any rate*, *whether or not*, *no flash in the pan*, *never mind*, *it doesn't matter*, *there is no point*

and so on.⁴ These last three, at least, have already become partly lexicalised since they mainly occur in the negative. Many of them take negation with *no* functioning as determiner of a NP; it is also quite common for them to be introduced by existential *there* constructions.

- (5) A lead which the opinion polls show is no flash in the pan.
(*The Guardian*, June 14, 1994, p.3)
- (6) There is no point switching to a lower factor if you are trying to protect your skin from getting burned...
(*The Daily Mirror*, June 10, 1995, p.5)
- (7) I couldn't afford to pay back the loan on the car, never mind my mortgage.
(*The Sun*, June 14, 1994, p.6)

Table 1:
Frequency and distribution of negation in two samples of
modern British English writing

Text type	Intrasentence	Sentence pro-form No	Words inherently negative	Total	Negatives per 1000 words
Journalistic	129	1	8	138	13.8
Academic	145	-	5	150	15.0

The higher frequency of negatives in the academic texts did not actually conform to our main hypothesis. Considering Tottie's findings on this issue, we had expected to identify a significantly greater percentage of negatives in the journalistic texts than in the academic ones, given the fact that the former are closer to speech as regards the degree of formality and preparation, the relationship between the sender and the receiver of the message, and the purpose of communication. Journalistic language is usually characterized by the directness with which readers are addressed

⁴ Several instances of the expressions *There is no doubt*, *(I) have no doubt* have also been found. The problem with these lies in the fact that although they seem to be negative in form, they are actually affirmative. Eg. *But I have no doubt that Tim will be in the right mental state to produce another big game for us on Sunday*. With this, the writer is explicitly making the point, and even emphasizing, that he feels completely certain that what he is asserting is really true.

and by its relative improvisation, since journalists have little time to meet very strict deadlines, especially as compared to contributors to academic journals. Although there seemed to be strong reasons for a larger quantity of negatives in the journalistic sample, the results mentioned above showed the opposite tendency; a tendency that thus demanded further investigation in order to explain it.

After this preliminary survey, the second stage of the project, which consisted in the survey of the discourse functions of all negative sentences in the two samples, was undertaken (see Table 2). As explained before, there were 288 negatives in all. However, the discourse functions of at least one fourth of these could not be tagged, as many instances of affixal negation were semantically restricted to only one clause constituent, thus making it impossible to classify them from the point of view of their function. The same was true for at least 6 instances of subclausal or local negation, that is, negation that just affected a constituent or part of the clause, namely, the form *not* modifying either the postmodification of subject NPs or the focusing adverbs *even* and *merely* as well as the emphazier *entirely*; these three adverbs in turn frequently modify a NP. The following two examples illustrate these two variants of local negation:

- (8) A few thousand votes in seats not normally resonant of socialism such as Sussex ... would have won them for Labour.
(*The Guardian*, June 14, 1994, p.7)
- (9) Labour can seriously begin to contemplate a return to government, not entirely in a hung parliament but as an outright winner.
(*The Guardian*, June 14, 1994, p.3)

Finally, some of the forms grouped under the category of inherent negative lexical words could not be characterized according to this parameter since they did not possess any textual function. The total subsample that was subjected to discourse study amounted to 203 negatives.

Here the figures found for implicit and explicit denials were similar for the two text types, with implicit denials clearly predominating in both cases. As anticipated, the overall number of occurrences of explicit denials was extremely limited. However, the language of the press appears to be richer than academic writing in discourse functions other than denials. From Table 2 it is seen that refusals (all of them implicit) amounted to 5/104, or 4.8% of the total number of negatives

sentences considered for that sample, and strong determination or promises to 4/104, or 3,8% of all negatives for that type of text. Furthermore, similar values were obtained for both directives and hedges, and each accounted for 2/104, or 1.9% of all the negatives studied.

Table 2:
Distribution of discourse functions in the two samples of written texts

Text type	Implicit denials	Explicit denials	Refusals	Strong promise	Quests.	Directives	Hedges	Total
Journal.	86	5	5	4	-	2	2	104
Academic	94	4	-	-	1	-	-	99
	180	9	5	4	1	2	2	203

Adding up the number of occurrences of refusals, strong promises, directives and hedges, we arrive at a figure of 13/104, or 12.5%. This percentage of negative sentences used in journalistic language is peculiar to it, since these were not found in the sample of academic writing. Apart from that, it is important to mention that these textual functions are in all circumstances conveyed by clauses that represent the words said by a particular character in a conversation, or, alternatively, as a reply to a question in an interview. Strong promises or determinations are expressed formally by *will + never*, *would + never* or *to be determined + would never*.

- (10) "I will never vote for them again".
(*The Sun*, June 14, 1994, p.5)
- (11) "I was determined my little girl would never be poor and hungry like me".
(*The Sun*, June 14, 1994, p.16)
- (12) "I would never allow Mary to pollute her body with sweets".
(*The Sun*, June 14, 1994, p.16)
Directives, on their part, take the form of auxiliary negation with *must*.
- (13) "You mustn't pollute yourself with sweets".
(*The Sun*, June 14, 1994, p.25)

As said above, two instances of hedges are also found. In these constructions some modal verbs are negated and they are usually employed by speakers to avoid sounding impolite or committing themselves to an opinion. The following two examples will help to illustrate this.

- (14) "I shouldn't think we'll get back together – but it's a funny world".
 (*The Daily Mirror*, June 10, 1994, p.18)
- (15) "I can't think anything other than this is a very serious issue- and he takes it very seriously himself".
 (*The Daily Mirror*, June 10, 1994, p.25)

The finding of all these discourse functions in the journalistic sample is in harmony with the main initial hypothesis of this paper, and, in certain respects, proves that, broadly speaking, the language of the press is closer to speech than is academic writing.

Before closing this section on the discussion of the textual functions, two further points should be made. The first is concerned with the nature of an important group of implicit denials; the second is related to the role of certain discourse markers or connectors.

As defined above, denials involve the negation of a statement which has been explicitly asserted (explicit), or has not been asserted by anyone but is expected or easily inferred from the context (implicit). In most cases, by means of a denial the speaker or writer responds, reformulates or clarifies a proposition made previously in the discourse sequence. In the survey several examples were noticed in which the writer, contrary to the general rule, first presents a negative proposition and then contrasts it with a positive one. This was usually done as a discourse strategy in order to give more prominence to the second part of the message. It also makes communication more direct: by breaking the norm with a negation in the first part, the reader's attention is drawn more immediately to the second point.⁵ In the example that follows, the writer is trying to clarify the differences between thought echo and hallucination:

- (16) An important difference between thought echo and hallucinations is that the former is not experienced as alien; it is experienced inside subjective speech and thus resembles inner speech.
 (*British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1994, 33, p.81)

⁵ This meaning of negation is already pointed out by Marchand (1974, 96-97). He provides the following examples: (i) *In this dispensary, this resolution had seemed not easy, but simple and natural*; (ii) *the produce of sane living consisted not in fighting temptation... but in teaching one's mind how to hold its tongue*; (iii) *You watch a man die that you've known all your life and, quite suddenly, in the moment of death he becomes a stranger. He's not finding something new; he's falling back on something old, something familiar to him in the way that his childhood would be familiar if he could re-enter it.*

The same sort of phenomenon is seen in the following passage from *The Philosophical Quarterly*.

- (17) Empedocles and the Greek Atomists seem to have thought not that objects simply bring about effects in sense-organs but that there is some sort of interaction between objects and sense-organs.
(1994, 44/175, p. 139)

Although it occurs in both samples, this particular textual strategy is much more common in the academic writing material; this could perhaps be due to the fact that scholars usually take as starting point a series of hypotheses which are later on scrutinized, discussed, compared and/or reconstructed.

The second issue that emerged was the high number of discourse markers or connectors that collocated with negatives. These are as follows: *but, nevertheless, though, although, however, nevertheless, at all events, while, whereas* and *by contrast*; of these *but* was by far the most common. They all express a divergence or an antithesis between two items or points. The contrast may arise out of the unexpectedness of what was said in the second proposition in the light of the content of the first statement. Normally, these markers or conjuncts introduce or anticipate a negative structure (18), although there are also instances where the opposite tendency was detected (19). The function of these conjuncts is clearly related to the nature of denials, in which a proposition is first negated and then new information is presented which replaces that which was negated.

- (18) Nevertheless, assessment and funding were not directly linked in the sense of being carried out by the same body.
(*British Journal of Educational Studies*, 1994, 42/2, p.158)
- (19) There was nothing you could do about the constant pressure, but we did not let it affect our relationship.
(*The Daily Mirror*, 1994, June 10, p.18)

The collocation of these discourse connectors with negation was common to both journalistic and academic writing although it was more frequent in the latter.

A close analysis of the frequency and distribution of affixal and non-affixal negatives helped to clarify the first hypothesis even more as regards the use and meanings of negatives in journalistic and academic writing. As

is clearly illustrated in Table 3, non-affixal forms in the journalistic sample unquestionably outnumber those in academic writing; when put in terms of percentages, non-affixal forms in journalistic texts represent almost 74% of the total number of negatives, while in scientific writing the corresponding figure is only 66%. Furthermore, the sum of affixal forms in the sample of academic writing is almost double that in the press sample.

Table 3:
Distribution and proportions of negatives in two samples of modern British English writing

	Non-affixal forms		Affixal forms		Words inherently negative	Pro-form No	Total all types
	Prefix	Suffix	Total	Total			
Journalistic Total	102	19	8	27	8	1	138
Percentage	74			19.5	5.9	0.6	
Academic Total	99	34	12	46	5	-	150
Percentage	66			30.6	3.4	-	

This could be interpreted as the existence of a direct correlation between the use of this type of negation and the attitude to the reader, to the topic, and to the purpose of communication; in other words, the higher the degree of formality, the higher the use of affixal negation. On the other hand, this finding also supports the premise that journalistic language is closer to speech than the written language of academics, given the fact that affixal negation was much more common in the latter type of text than in the former (Tottie 1982, 1991). In short, the different purposes of communication, and the different situations in which each of these two genres is produced may account for the higher frequency of affixal negation in journalistic as compared to academic writing.

As Table 3 also illustrates, negation by prefixing was much more common than negation by suffixing in both the journalistic and the academic material. Only 8/27 (29.6%) of all affixal negatives in the journalistic sample were suffixal; in the academic one, the proportion was even lower: 12/46 (26%).

Table 4 shows the distribution of negative suffixes in the two samples. The two items *unless* and *without* account for half of the tokens in the journalistic sample and for more than 90% in the academic language. The suffix *-less* was reported on only 4 occasions in the former, and on only 1 in the latter.

Table 4:
Distribution of negative suffixes

Text type	-less	unless	without	Total
Journalistic	4	1	3	8
Academic	1	2	9	12

The distribution of negative prefixes is presented in Table 5. It shows that the prefixes *un-* and *in-*, followed by *dis-*, are by far the most recurrent in both samples. Thus, *un-* accounts for 8/19 instances in the journalistic sample (42%) and a similar proportion 15/34 (44%) in academic writing. *Dis-* amounts to 4/19 (21%) examples in the journalistic texts, while in the sample of academic writing this is reduced to just 6/34 instances, or 17.6%. The occurrence of the other prefixes (*non-*, *de-*, *a-* and *not-*) is not significant. *Non-* and *de-* occur in both types of texts but only on 1 occasion each in the journalistic sample, and 1 and 2 respectively in the academic one. Instances of *a-* and *not-* are only found in the academic texts.

Table 5:
Distribution of negative prefixes

Text type	un-	dis-	in-	non-	de-	a-	not-	Total
Journalistic	8	4	5	1	1	-	-	19
Academic	15	6	8	1	2	1	1	34

The total figures obtained for the general occurrence and distribution of negative prefixes and suffixes in written English follow the tendency identified in previous frequency studies (Tottie, 1991; Marchand, 1969, and Baldi *et al.* 1985).

To complete this section on affixal negation, the distribution of the above negative affixes according to the word-class to which they were added was also studied. The results in Table 6 show that the great majority of these affixes were added to adjectives, especially in the case of the prefixes *un-* and *in-*. Thus, *un-* is affixed to adjectives in 17/23 instances, or 74% of the total number of words containing this prefix. This tendency is even more noticeable with *in-*, which occurs in 12 adjectives and in only 1 noun. The figures for *dis-* reveal that it occurs with adjectives in 60% of the cases considered, while it also appears with nouns (2 instances) and verbs (2). Although *non-* and *a-* are present in very few words, those examples which do occur are exclusively with adjectives. *Not-* is only present in one single case with a noun. Furthermore, the suffix *-less* accounts for 5 instances and is always used to form adjectives from nouns.

Table 6:
Distribution of negative affixes with main word-classes

	Adjectives	Nouns	Adverbs	Verbs	Total
<i>un-</i>	17	3	3	-	23
<i>dis-</i>	6	2	-	2	10
<i>in-</i>	12	1	-	-	13
<i>non-</i>	2	-	-	-	2
<i>de-</i>	1	2	-	-	3
<i>a-</i>	1	-	-	-	1
<i>not-</i>	-	1	-	-	1
<i>-less</i>	-	5	-	-	5

Finally, as is clear from Table 7, significant differences between the two samples are not observed as far as the distribution of negative affixes in the main categories. The reduced size of the samples selected may be responsible for the lack of clear contrasts between the two types of texts used in the study.

Table 7:
Distribution of negative affixes in main word classes in the two samples selected

	Academic				Journalistic				Total
	Adjs.	Nouns	Advs.	Verbs	Adjs.	Nouns	Advs.	Verbs	
<i>un-</i>	13	2	-	-	4	1	3	-	23
<i>dis-</i>	4	1	-	1	2	1	-	1	10
<i>in-</i>	7	1	-	-	5	-	-	-	13
<i>non-</i>	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
<i>de-</i>	1	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	3
<i>a-</i>	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
<i>not-</i>	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
<i>-less</i>	-	3	-	-	-	2	-	-	5

The final part of this investigation was focused on the distribution of *Not*-Negation and *No*-Negation. These are also known as *analytical* and *synthetic negation*.⁶ This means constructions such as the following:

- (20) Nichola's family did not know about the tragedy last night.
(*The Daily Mirror*, June 10, 1994, p. 5)
- (21) "I have not been out with anyone for a long time".
(*The Daily Mirror*, June 10, 1994, p. 18)
- (22) It says nothing, of course, about what happens physiologically beyond the sense-organ.
(*The Philosophical Quarterly*, 1994, 44/175, p. 139)
- (23) Probably, in the pits, he will only tinker, wriggle, and complain that nobody gives him due credit.
(*The Guardian*, June 14, 1994, p. 3)

In examples (20) and (21), *not* is associated with the VP, while in (22) and (23), the negation is incorporated into the indefinites *anything* and *anybody*. On many occasions, as Quirk *et al.* (1985: 782-784) claim, it is possible to find two negative equivalents for the same positive sentence. In the present analysis, the general distribution of *Not*-negation and *No*-negation was studied without concentrating exclusively on those cases where variation between the two would be possible. Negatives with *never* were not considered because, semantically, they constitute a group of their own and, on many occasions, it is impossible to find *Not*-negation equivalents without changing the meaning of the original sentence.⁷

From Table 8, it is clear that *Not*-negation is much more common than *No*-negation in the two samples. However, the frequency of these

⁶ This is the terminology adopted by Poldauf (1947/79) to refer to *Not*-negation and *No*-negation respectively. Tottie opts for Poldauf's terms in the 1983 study, although in later investigations she prefers *Not*-negation and *No*-negation. Jespersen (1917) uses the term *negative attraction* to describe the tendency of attracting the negative meaning to any word that can be made negative without great difficulties, eg. *I knew nothing about tennis* instead of *I didn't know anything about tennis*. Klima (1964) adopts the term *Neg-incorporation into indefinites* for *No*-negation, while Labov (1972) and Bolinger (1977) prefer to use, respectively, the expressions *Negative Postposing* and *Negative Rightshifting*.

⁷ If we take, for example, the sentence *I will not rest easy till Daddy's little girl comes home to Daddy*, we could not say that the hypothetical corresponding counterpart *I will not ever rest easy till Daddy's ...* is similar in meaning to the previous one. Leaving aside the acceptability of the previous construction in standard English, the meaning of the original has changed. This phenomenon is very common when dealing with negatives using *never*.

two negation variants differs somewhat from one to the other. Thus, in the journalistic sample the proportion of *Not*-negation is 62 out of the 77 cases considered, which is equivalent to 80.5%. Therefore, *no*-negation accounts for 15/77, or 19.5% of the total number of negative instances under analysis. The figures in the academic texts reveal that *No*-negation is more frequent in this sample than in the journalistic one, amounting to 25%, while the percentage for *Not*-negation is 63/84, or 75%.

From this data it can be inferred that the written language of academics tends to use *No*-negation more frequently than journalistic texts. It is true, however, that in this respect the difference between the two samples is equivalent to only 5.5 points, that is, perhaps too small to be seen as statistically significant. Yet, for the purposes of this study, our findings seem to be in line with the initial hypothesis of this paper concerning different uses and meanings of negation in journalistic and academic texts. It should be borne in mind that previous work on the variation between *Not*-negation and *No*-negation has shown that “there is a clear tendency for *Not*-negation to prevail in spoken language and for *No*-negation to dominate in written language” (Tottie 1991, 140). In addition to that, Quirk *et al.* also point out that “in all cases (except possibly that of *never*), the combination of not (-n’t) and the nonassertive word is more colloquial and idiomatic than the negative variant” (1985, 783). Poldauf (1979, 367) expresses himself in similar terms.

Table 8:

The distribution of *Not*-negation and *No*-negation in the academic and journalistic written samples

Text type	<i>Not</i> -negation			<i>No</i> -negation				
	Contracted	Uncontracted	Total	<i>No</i>	<i>Nothing</i>	<i>Nobody</i>	<i>None</i>	Total
Journalistic	30	32	62	9	4	2	—	15
Academic	—	63	63	16	2	2	1	21

4. Summary and conclusions

This paper has analysed some syntactic and pragmatic features of negatives in contemporary written British English. The study was based on data from a 20,000 word corpus of academic and journalistic texts. A comparison has been made between these two genres of written language to identify the frequency, meanings and distribution of negatives in each of them. Significant differences are not detected in the number and frequency of negatives in either sample. However, negatives in journalistic language serve not only to deny a proposition implicitly or explicitly; some of them may also be used to perform other illocutionary acts such as expressing refusals, directives, strong determinations and hedges, unlike the case in academic texts.

Secondly, writing, like speech, seems to have characteristic features with respect to the expression of negatives. These are related to the purpose of communication, the relationship established between reader and writer, and style. In this respect mention was made of the high frequency of collocation of negatives with a series of discourse markers or connectors such as *but*, *nevertheless*, *at all events*, *in contrast*, *although* and so on, as well as the tendency to convey denials reversing the normal and expected order; this means, placing the negative in the first part of the message and then introducing the contrasting positive statement in the second part. This was mainly done for stylistic reasons.

Thirdly, the academic sample shows almost double the proportion of affixal negation as the journalistic material. It was felt that this could well be connected with the degree of formality and preparation involved in each type of text.

Fourthly, as far as the distribution of *Not*-negation and *No*-negation, the latter appeared slightly more frequently in the academic texts than in the journalistic sample.

All these findings seem to support the tenets of the original hypothesis which assumed that journalistic written language possesses more features in common with speech than academic writing. It also suggests a number of new paths for further developments in corpus-based studies on the uses and meanings of negation in different genres of spoken and written contemporary English texts.

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