University of Huddersfield Repository

Nahajec, Lisa

Negation-Form, Function and Effect

Original Citation


This version is available at http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/4788/

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

• The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
• A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
• The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/
Effect

The effect that the use of negation has on understanding texts can be powerful. In non-fictional texts such as scientific and technical contexts, negation can be used to highlight the absence of certain elements, creating a sense of exclusion or elimination. This can be particularly persuasive in emphasizing the importance of the information that follows.

Lisa Nahajec MA BA(Hons)
Department of English School of Music, Humanities and Media
University of Huddersfield

Research questions:

Negation has the interesting property that allows us to conceptualise and understand the world in terms of what doesn’t happen or what attributes something does not have. It is not only that we can conceptualise negative states, but that these states are both relevant and meaningful. This research takes a theoretical approach and aims to answer the questions of what textual appearance negation has, how it functions to instantiate and deny or reject a previous assertion, and what effect this has in natural language.

Form

Types of negators

Syntactic
My dog is not barking.

Morphological
John unfastened his shoes.

Inherent/lexical
The bus failed to arrive on time.

Conditional
If the bus had arrived late I could have caught it.

Modals
He should have moved.

Prototypical

Peripheral
"They want to maintain an attitude that keeps women unhealthy, unfed, uneducated. This is not culture. This is not custom. This is criminal.” — Hillary Clinton in Times Online 14/01/09

Function

Negation functions to deny or reject a previous implicit or explicit assertion. It can also instantiate the opposite positive counterpart from which the hearer/reader constructs a mental representation of that which is being rejected.

Effect

Negation and the use of negative accomodation, the simultaneous construction of an expectation and defeat of it, creates a background norm that tinned tuna is usually associated with drama or stress, a problem which ‘no drain tuna’ solves.

The effect that the use of negation has on understanding texts can be powerful. In non-fictional texts such as advertising, the creation of a non-state can manipulate readers/hearers into assuming that the background positive counterpart is the norm.

"No drain tuna from John West. It’s delicious tuna without the drama.”

With thanks to my supervisors, Prof. Lesley Jeffries and Dr. Dan McIntyre.

For further details on this research see: Nahajec, L (2009 forthcoming) ‘Negation and the Creation of Implicit Meaning in Poetry’ Language and Literature