

On The Implicit Negation via Subjunctive Mood

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Abstract

Extensive research on negation in linguistics has not only led to new theories but also dictated a range of ideas.

In the frame of this article an effort is made to reveal semantic-functional traits of verb forms from a modal perspective. The basis of the study is mood-negation correlation. The formal description of the categories allows us to see the immediate differences of negation and changeability of form and meaning in different mood forms.

The corpus at our data shows that the semantic value of implicit negative constructions is context-driven as a result of the close interaction of negation with modal categories. In the paradigm of the subjunctive form some affirmative constructions come into use as negatively charged linguistic items. Moreover, mood categories conflate under the rubric of realis - irrealis.

Keywords: Negative utterance, Semantic-functional value, Reality factor, Truth value, Tense-retrospect shift, Implicit negation, Epistemic modality.

One of the major advances in recent semantic theory of linguistics has been the recognition of the distinction on the one side between the meaning and form of the linguistic item, on the other side implicatures that can be drawn from the use of a linguistic item in a particular context.

In modern linguistics there are strong theories (Palmer, 1986; Horn, 1989; Blokh, 1983; Ivanova, 1981; Toms, 1972) which claim that for each grammatical category, lexical item and perhaps syntactic construction, one can establish a set of necessary and sufficient conditions such that every permitted use of the form will be allowed by these conditions. In different contexts, however, the interpretation of form in question would be predictable on the basis of the interaction of the meaning of the item with the features of the given context, i.e. the meaning itself would be invariable. So, here arises a distinction between the context, independent meaning and interpretation fostered from the form in terms of varying communicative atmosphere, social and psychological conditions of communication, syntactic environment, topical contexts, and stylistic preferences.

Although the principle distinction between meaning and implicature is crucial for an exact semantic analysis of linguistic items, carrying out the distinction in practice is by no means easy, since it often requires the construction of subtle situations to distinguish between the meaning of a form and its implicature. One can find this claim in the implicit interpretation of negative expression mapped by mood forms.

The key modern landmark in the study of the meaning and expression of negation belongs to Jespersen /1917/. The main problems of syntax and semantics of negation lie in the heart of his contemporary monograph "Negation in English and other languages" / Jespersen, 1917/. The chapters of this book examine the pattering of negative utterances in natural languages across time and space, spanning such fundamental issues as how negative sentences are realized, how negation is acquired by the speaker, listener or reader and so on. In accord with the last question we try to reveal the formal and functional correlation of negation via mood forms thus trying to bring down the semantic value of implicit negative constructions.

Negation has some features that make it relatively unique among linguistic items, whether lexical or grammatical: it has a comparatively straightforward basic meaning which varies little among languages at the same time as it tends to have grammatical properties that set it off from other items in the language. Negation interacts with modal categories but it does not constitute a mood category itself. So, like *evidential* negation is not generally treated as a type of mood but as a unique category that is related / Palmer, 2001:8 / (Note 1). A negative is a grammatical

category employed to deny the actuality of an event or some portion thereof. It can occur in any of the traditional mood categories and a negative sentence can be uttered with complete certainty or with some doubt.

Surveying the structure of the category of mood, we try to expose the correlation of formal and semantic features of its verbal forms attempting to reveal the linguistic denotation of this correlation.

The category of mood is the most controversial category of the verb. On the face of its controversiality, it has received and still receives different presentations and appraisals with different linguists. In questions concerning the principles of its analysis, the nomenclature, the relation to other categories, in particular, the tenses. The dynamic scheme of the category has been much clarified in the diverse researches carried out by various linguists.

B. A. Ilyish's / 1971/ words are very significant in connection with the theoretical standing of the category: "The category of mood in the present English verb has given rise to so many discussions, and has been treated in so many different ways, that it seems hardly possible to arrive at any more or less convincing and universally acceptable conclusion concerning it" /Ilyish, 1971:99/.

However, emphasizing the disputability of theoretical points connected with the category of mood, the scholars are apt to forget the positive results already achieved in this domain of both semantic researches and the controversies accompanying them.

Extensive investigations connected with the structure, understanding of its working in the construction of speech utterances have tellingly deepened the study of the mood system. This refers to the significance of functional plans of the category, the exposition of the subtle paradigmatic correlation, the demonstration of the sentence – constructional value of the verb and its mood, its meaningful destination on the level of the semantic- syntactical sphere as a whole.

In connection with the last item, in the present, an effort is made to shed a new light on the semantic – functional aspect of mood – negation correlation. On the basis of the materials investigated and results obtained I will try to outline this interesting categoric correlation from their formal and functional diversity.

The category of mood expresses the character of connection between the process denoted by the verb and the actual reality, either presenting the process as a fact that really happened, happens, or will happen, or treating it as an imaginary phenomenon, that is the subject of hypothesis, speculation and desire (Blokh, 1983:186). Whereas Payne describes mood as a grammatical category through which speakers of a language can indicate whether they believe that an event or state actually occurs, does not occur, or has the potential to occur (Payne, 2001).

Mood often works in consort with tense and aspect in languages to capture the temporal nature of a linguistic utterance. Although this is certainly true, there is a strong sense in which mood differs from the other two categories. Aspect describes the temporal contours of an event as it occurs in time. Tense depicts where in time the event occurs relative to the moment of speech or some other event. Whereas mood is ontologically more basic. It is concerned about the truth value of statements revealing a speaker's attitudes and assumptions, regarding the reality of what he or she is describing.

Traditionally, grammarians and linguists have categorized sentences into major types based on what mood is employed. Those sentences that directly assert the truth of some propositions are said to be in the Indicative Mood. In the Indicative the formal and functional presentations coincide. The semantic content of this form determines a reality factor of the verbal action as follows.

I shot the sheriff but did not shoot the deputy.

Both clauses are indicative despite the fact that the first is affirmative and the second is negative. This is because they are both assertions about the truth value of the propositions they describe. Cross linguistically declarative sentence verbs tend to bear no special formal marking. Similarly, in question forming we have no special verbal morphology as in the following example.

Why were you carrying a gun?

Let's note that most questions presuppose a proposition with a positive truth value. Here we assume the fact that "you were carrying a gun". So it bears some similarity to declarative sentences.

In accord with the grammatical principles of analysis it is easy to see that the imperative mood is a semantically direct mood. However, M.Y. Blokh (1983) does not find this convincing in case of transformation for it may display attitudes.

Do as I ask you! = I insist that you do as I ask you / Blokh, 1983:186 /.

Imperatives are encoded by using a verb form that is morphologically deficient and the nature of an imperative is to issue a command to a listener. If we accept the view expressed by Blokh then we should believe that the imperative is an optative mood. Whereas the core function of the optative is to express desires, the imperative is employed to issue commands or exhortations.

The mood system, as any grammatical category, is basically binary. Its functional opposition is constituted by the forms of oblique mood meaning, those of unreality, contrasted against the forms of direct mood meaning, those of reality, thus marking strong - weak members of the opposition.

Hardly consistent with adequacy would appear the division of the general mood system into several moods: Imperative, Subjunctive, Conditional, Suppositional- all these put in a separate contrast to the Indicative, thus again touching the oppositional approach. The attempted survey of the system of English mood is based on an extensive study of the subjunctive mood, its negative interpretation when transformed, and the formal and functional presentation of its structure. The range of its uses differs from language to language but commonly it is used to express an attitude of uncertainty on the part of the speaker in a hypothetical situation.

Once more underlying the unity of the whole system, we can assert that there is the one integral form of the Subjunctive standing in opposition to the one integral form of the Indicative. The formal mark of the opposition is the tense-retrospect shift in the Subjunctive, the latter being the strong member of the opposition. The shift consists in the perfect aspect being opposed to the imperfect aspect. This shift reveals the semantic nature of the Subjunctive, since, from the point of view of the semantics, it is rather a mood of imagination which in its turn brings to the change of meaning, here into negative.

But before going into details, we should emphasize that the most general interpretation of the category of mood is the statement of the semantic content as determining the reality factor of the verbal action and denoting a real or unreal action, i.e. introducing action as real or imaginary.

The formal description of the category allows us to see the immediate differences of negation and changeability of form and meaning in different mood forms. Semantic observations show that oblique mood forms within the general meaning of desired or hypothetical actions express different attitudes, desire, supposition, speculation, suggestion, recommendation, and inducement of various degrees of insistence. Blokh (1983) calls this mood of attitudes, especially stressing the Subjunctive. So this is why linguists call Subjunctive a “*spective*” mood, employing the Latin base for the notion of attitudes” /Blokh, 1983:188/.

When investigating the Subjunctive we need to consider the identification of the specific form “*be*”. This is the only manifestation of the categorical expression of unreal process. This phenomenon marks something entirely new from the point of view of its semantics.

Turning to functional considerations of the expression of the oblique mood semantics, we see that the system of the subjunctive rather begins at this point. The tense –retrospect shift within the framework of the Subjunctive mood semantics is almost imperceptible, almost entirely hidden under the cover of morphemic identity.

We come to this in the Subjunctive patterns by the subjunctive *were*.

In such constructions *were* practically means *not*. The approach based on the purely morphemic principles leads to the identification not only of a specific form, but also a specific expression of unreal process.

“*If I were as rich as Mr Darcy*”, cried a young Lucas, who came with his sisters, “*I should not care how proud I was. I would keep a pack of foxhounds, and drink a bottle of wine every day*” / J. Austen, 2016:17 /.

“*Your plan is a good one*”, replied Elizabeth, “*where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it*” / J. Austen, 2016: 19/.

In construction with *would - should* similar environmental conditions are also possible. Reformed semantically feature of past reveals a negative meaning in the given situation.

Had she found Jane in any apparent danger, Mrs Bennet would have been very miserable; but being satisfied on seeing her that her illness was not alarming, she had no wish of her recovering immediately, as her restoration to health would probably remove her from Netherfield / J. Austen, 2016: 36/.

“*Oh! I am not at all afraid of her dying. People do not die of little trifling colds. She will be taken good care of. As long as she stays there, it is all very well. I would go and see her if I could have the carriage*” / J. Austen, 2016:28/.

Although positive in their outer forming Subjunctive mood forms in the above mentioned sentences imply negative shade of meaning.

In clauses of *wish* featuring the Subjunctive, whatever is implied depends on the expressed desire of the situation contrary to reality, regarding the existing state of things.

But when she does find me out, she makes no row at all. I sometimes wish she would; but she merely laughs at me” / O. Wilde, 2016: 8/.

I do not mind his not talking to Mrs Long,” said Miss Lucas, “but I wish he had danced with Eliza” / J. Austen, 2016:16/.

In the above cases we deal with the linguistic case of *epistemic modality*: beliefs or desire from the part of the speaker (Note 2).

There is a tendency in modern English to regard the personal finite *was* as a form that penetrates into Subjunctive thus liquidating the remnants of the Indicative of past order. Here we must pay attention to how verbal time changes the semantic observation of construction. This phenomenon marks something entirely new from the point of view of the categorical status of the verbal time in the indicative. The indicative of the spective *be* in the past plane context expresses past action and is essentially absolute. Whereas in the sphere of Subjunctive it is used relatively and expresses negation.

I was told that the elections start on Monday (past action).

If he was as open hearted as you are(past order, unreal process, expresses a fact that he is not as open hearted as ...)

All the cases evidently state a hypothetical action where negation is rendered by means of words expressing desire, wish, and consideration and so on.

Languages, however, vary considerably as to how much of their morphology and syntax they devote to making its distinctions explicit. To adequately describe the cases, one would need to untangle in both languages complex verbal morphology and sets of auxiliaries to explicitly describe the various moods.

Thus, negation is a multifunctional phenomenon.

Examining mood – negation correlation we revealed not only the implicit expression of negation, but also the realis-irrealis marking of the mood system. Certain of the mood categories naturally conflate under the rubric of realis-irrealis.

The cited examples of the subjunctive mood usage are vivid manifestations of flatly negations. Surveying the structure of the category of mood, trying to expose the asymmetric relation of formal and semantic features, we can emphasize that being a unique embodiment of form and meaning, subjunctive verb forms can display various manifestations in different linguistic environments.

There is an internal conflict reigning between the form and meaning of the same verb form. In a flourishing context a positive verb form can imply negative meaning thus breaking the symmetry between the plane and meaning.

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Notes

Note 1. Evidentials are special set of markers , which more explicitly convey the quality of information on which an assertion is based / Palmer, 2001 /.

Note 2. Epistemic modality- speakers express their judgments about the factual status of the proposition / Palmer, 2001: 8/.