

UNIVERSIDAD DE HUELVA

FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES

**A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF NEGATION IN
CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH.**

**ANÁLISIS DESCRIPTIVO DE LA NEGACIÓN EN
INGLÉS CONTEMPORÁNEO**



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TUTORA: BEATRIZ RODRÍGUEZ ARRIZABALAGA

ABSTRACT

The present work focuses on negation, a universal and complex phenomenon that entails an interrelationship of different syntactic, prosodic, semantic and pragmatic aspects. For reasons of time and space, I only deal with negation in contemporary English; specifically, with those issues that, to my view, seem to be the most problematic ones for students of English as a foreign language: among others, (i) the different kinds of negation that are available in this language; (ii) the concepts of scope and focus of negation; (iii) the forbidden phenomenon in standard English of double/multiple negation; and finally, (iv) the subsequent and necessary distinction that has, thus, to be made between assertive and nonassertive forms and contexts. This work consists of two main parts: the first one, theoretical in nature, presents a review of how these topics have been accounted for in the literature; and the second one, intended to complement the previous section, sets forth the major findings derived from the preliminary corpus-based analysis which I have carried out in a corpus of 941 negative sentences extracted manually by myself from Siri Hustvedt's (2011) novel *The Summer Without Men*, which show how negation is really used in contemporary English.

Key terms: negation, operator, assertive, nonassertive, scope of negation, focus of negation, multiple negation.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo estudia la negación, fenómeno lingüístico universal muy complejo debido a la interrelación de factores sintácticos, prosódicos, semánticos y pragmáticos que implica. Por razones de tiempo y espacio, en él me centro únicamente en la negación en inglés contemporáneo; específicamente, en los aspectos que, a mi modo de ver, son los más problemáticos para los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera: entre otros, (i) los distintos tipos de negación que existen en la lengua inglesa; (ii) los conceptos de rango y foco de la negación; (iii) el fenómeno de la negación doble/múltiple, inaceptable en inglés estándar; y finalmente, (iv) la necesaria distinción entre formas y contextos asertivos y no asertivos que, como consecuencia, ha de hacerse. El trabajo se divide en dos partes principales: la primera, de naturaleza teórica, presenta una revisión acerca de cómo estas cuestiones se han tratado en la literatura; y la segunda, diseñada como complemento de la anterior, expone los resultados principales que se derivan del análisis de corpus preliminar que he llevado a cabo en un corpus de

941 oraciones negativas extraídas personalmente de la novela de Siri Hustvedt's (2011) *The Summer Without Men*, que pone de manifiesto el uso real de la negación en inglés contemporáneo.

Palabras claves: negación, operador, asertivo, no asertivo, rango de la negación, foco de la negación, negación múltiple.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Negation is a universal concept, fundamentally important to all human thought. Specifically, it is a relation derived from assertion used either to communicate that an element lacks a specific property, (1-2), or to deny a fact, (3-4). As Horn (2010: 1) explicitly puts it forward, “In many ways, negation is what makes us human, imbuing us with the capacity to deny, to contradict, to misrepresent, to lie, and to convey irony”:

- (1) This is not complete.
- (2) The movie wasn't interesting.
- (3) Jane didn't have any substantial earnings.
- (4) I won't come to the party.

Since negation is a concept which plays an important role in all human languages, it has received much attention in the literature (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1985; Huddleston and Pullum 2002; Horn 2010, among others). However, the linguistic description of negation has proven to be an extremely difficult subject matter in the many and diverse grammatical models where it has been studied, owing to the complex interrelationship of syntactic, prosodic, semantic and pragmatic aspects that it entails.

Notice, for instance, in this regard that in English, as well as in all natural languages, there are several means to express negation. According to Bublitz (1992: 554), for example, “English has the following set of forms: *no* (sentence adverb or “response word”, Quirk *et al.* 1985: 793), *not* (“clausal negator”, Quirk *et al.* 1985: 776), *no*, *none*, *nobody*, *no one*, *nothing*, *nowhere*, *never*, *neither*, *nor* (“negative determiners”, “negative pronouns”, Quirk *et al.* 1985: 392, 782), prefixes and suffixes (e.g. *in-*, *un-*, *dis-*, *non-*, *a-*, *-less*) (cf. Tottie 1981; Welte 1978)”. As illustrated in the series of examples below, this means that in English, at least, negation can be expressed in three different ways: syntactically, by means of the clausal negative particle *not*, (5-

6); lexically, through any word negative in meaning, like, for instance, the adverb *never* in (7), the indefinite pronoun *nobody* in (8), the indefinite determiner *no* in (9) and the preposition *without* in (10); and also morphologically, by any affix negative in meaning, like the prefix *dis-* and the suffix *-less*, for example, in (11-12):

- (5) George didn't attend English class.
- (6) I want the blue shirt not the green one.
- (7) Never will I talk with him again.
- (8) Nobody likes to clean.
- (9) No credit cards are accepted at the market.
- (10) Karen came to the party without a present.
- (11) Daniel dislikes Chinese food.
- (12) The students who cheated in the exam are shameless.

Apart from the diverse ways how it is encoded, there are, furthermore, some fundamental concepts and phenomena related to negation that require some revision due to their complexity and the confusion they usually cause among Spanish students of English: on the one hand, the concepts known as (i) polarity; (ii) scope of negation; and (iii) focus of negation; and, on the other, (i) the phenomenon of multiple negation; and, as a consequence, (ii) the distinction between assertive and nonassertive forms and contexts.

For these two reasons, in this work I am going to focus on the universal phenomenon of negation in contemporary English, which I consider a topic that requires some clarification for students. Apart from the introductory section, the conclusions obtained, and the list of references consulted throughout my research, my work will contain two other different parts: an initial one, theoretical in nature, being basically a descriptive review of the literature on this topic, that will account, on the one hand, for the different resources that are available in English to express negation, thus distinguishing among total and partial syntactic negation, lexical negation and morphological negation; and on the other, it will describe and clarify those issues that are considered to be the most problematic ones among foreign students of English to comprehend the phenomenon of negation in this particular language; namely, (i) polarity, which, briefly described, is a cover term for semantic relations that categorize the vocabulary according to particular dimensions of semantic opposition; or put it

differently, the system of contrasts in a language between the positive and the negative ‘poles’; (ii) scope of negation, which can be defined, in turn, as the range of semantic reference that negation has in a clause; and finally, (iii) focus of negation, which has to be understood as the negative informational content in a sentence which the speaker wishes to express. To finish, the phenomenon of multiple negation, forbidden in standard English, will be dealt with and, as a consequence, the distinction between assertive and nonassertive forms and contexts will be described.

This first theoretical part will be complemented with a corpus-based section in which the major findings concerning the syntactico-semantic behaviour of negation in everyday real English will be presented. For this purpose, I myself have manually collected and analysed a corpus of 941 negative sentences, extracted from the novel *The Summer without men* by Siri Hustvedt. These results will mainly reveal the use and frequency of occurrence the different kinds of negation exhibit in contemporary real English and the peculiarities associated with each kind of negation that have been found in my corpus-based analysis.

II. STATE OF THE ART. THE STUDY OF NEGATION IN ENGLISH LINGUISTICS

1. Kinds of negation in English

The research on English negation (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1985; Pullum & Huddleston 2002; Horn 2010, among others) postulates that there are three different kinds of negation in this particular language: (i) the so-called syntactic negation, which can be either total or partial; (ii) lexical negation; and, finally, (iii) morphological negation.

1.1. Syntactic negation: clausal or total negation versus constituent or partial negation

Clausal syntactic negation is the most universal and simple form of expressing the phenomenon of negation since, as illustrated in the following series of examples, it just consists of inserting in the positive clause that is going to be negated the sentence adverb *not* after the first auxiliary verb in the verbal string. This first auxiliary, carrying tense, person and number, like the future auxiliary *will* in (13a-13b), the conditional tense auxiliary *would* in (14a-14b) and the modal auxiliaries *can* and *may*, for example, in (15a-16b), is traditionally called “operator” in the literature (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1985). As Quirk *et al.* (1985: 776), for instance, put it forward, “a simple positive sentence (or a positive finite clause within a complex sentence) is simply negated by inserting the clause negator *not* between the operator and the predication”:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| (13a) I will buy you a present. | (13b) I will not buy you a present. |
| (14a) We would make him an offer. | (14b) We would not make him an offer. |
| (15a) She can read. | (15b) She cannot read. |
| (16a) Jeff may be getting the job. | (16b) Jeff may not be getting the job. |

When dealing with syntactic negation, a major distinction has to be made, however, between “sentential or clausal negation” and “constituent or local negation” (cf. Haegeman 1996: 71-ff). Whereas sentential or clausal negation typically involves

It should be noted here, nevertheless, that the verb *have*, especially in American English, can also be negated, when functioning as the clause main verb, as any other lexical verb is, through the insertion of the dummy operator *do/did*. Thus an alternative paraphrase to the negative sentence illustrated in (25b) would be the negative pattern provided in (25c):

(25c) Her new coat does not have large buttons.

On the other hand, when *be* and *have* are the first auxiliary verbs in a verbal sequence conjugated in the passive voice or in any progressive or perfective tense, respectively, they display the function of operator, having, therefore, the clause negator particle *not* immediately placed after them, as can be seen in (26b-27b):

(26a) He is teaching immigrant children.

(26b) He is not teaching immigrant children.

(27a) The students have acceded to the exam.

(27b) The students have not acceded to the exam.

Although their negation does not entail any syntactic or structural problem, because, as described above, they carry, as any other auxiliary verb functioning as operator, the clausal negator *not* immediately after them, modal verbs are semantically quite complex when negated. This is so because, as noted by Quirk *et al.* (1985:794), the negative particle *not* may or may not include the meaning of the modal auxiliaries at issue. As a consequence, two kinds of negative structures have to be identified at this point: those that imply auxiliary negation, on the one hand, and those entailing main verb negation, on the other. In order to illustrate this difference, Quirk *et al.* (1985: 794) provide the example with *could not* in (28), which is ambiguous between the two interpretations presented in (28a-28b) below:

(28) You could not go to the party.

(28a) “What you could not do was go to the party”. (Lack of permission)

(28b) “What you could do was not go to the party”. (Possibility)

As can be seen, in (28a) we have a case of auxiliary negation since what the sentence conveys is the “lack of permission to go to the party”; however, (28b) illustrates a case of main verb negation, excluding, thus, the modal verb from the scope of negation. Notice here that the meaning of the modal verb —possibility— is kept intact, as deduced from the paraphrase given, and what is denied is just the fact of going to the party.

In a similar line of thought, Warner (2000: 176) points out that with modal verbs “the negation may have either wide scope (including the semantics of the auxiliary) or narrow scope (excluding it)”.¹ He exemplifies this dual behaviour that English modal verbs have with the following three sentences in which, as will be immediately seen, the modal verb at issue —*could*, *should* and *may*— may have just one single interpretation, (29-30), or two different readings, (31-32):

(29) Tom could not have made such a noise, could he? No, he could not.

(30) Terry should not have been swimming, should he? No, he should not.

(31) Paul may not drink alcohol, and neither may his younger sister. Indeed he may not.

(32) Paul may not be at home, and neither may his sister. Truly, he may not.

According to Warner (2000: 176), in (29) the negative particle *not* has to be interpreted as having wide scope since it extends over the epistemic meaning of possibility implied by the modal verb *could*: this sentence signifies, in fact, impossibility; in (30), quite on the contrary, the same particle has narrow scope of negation since it excludes the deontic meaning of the modal verb *should*; finally, the negation of the modal verb *may* can have, as illustrated in the pair of examples (31-32), both interpretations: wide scope of negation in (31) and narrow scope of negation in (32); notice, in fact, that whereas in (31), which implies the lack of permission Paul has to drink alcohol (cf. ‘Paul is not permitted to drink alcohol’), the deontic meaning of the modal verb *may* is negated, being included in the scope of the negative particle *not*, in (32) what is negated is the fact that Paul is at home (cf. ‘It is possible that Paul is not home’), but not the epistemic meaning of possibility of that same modal verb.

Besides the semantic difficulties entailed by the negation of English modal verbs just commented upon, I deem convenient to make some other observations concerning

¹ The concept of scope of negation will be discussed later in this work, in section 2.1.

the modal verbs *must* and *need* when negated, since they are a common source of errors for non-native speakers of English. Starting with *must*, it should be pointed out that whereas in the positive or affirmative mode it can be ambiguous between an epistemic interpretation that denotes logical necessity or certainty, (33), and a deontic value, implying, in turn, some kind of subjective obligation imposed by the speaker, (34), its negative counterpart *mustn't* only conveys deontic modality; as seen in the paraphrases given between brackets in (35-36), with this modal value *mustn't* implies prohibition, or what is the same, the imposition of a new obligation:

(33) John must be in his office. ('It is certain that John is in his office.')

(34) You must study harder. ('Your obligation is to study harder')

(35) Milk *mustn't* be left outside fridge. ('Milk must be left inside the fridge')

(36) You *mustn't* go now. ('You must stay')

Therefore, the student of English as a foreign language should be aware of the fact that the negation of the epistemic modal value of logical necessity conveyed by *must* is never encoded through *mustn't*, but through *can't*, (37):

(37) John *can't* be in his office. ('It is not possible that John is in his office')

As regards *needn't*, on the other hand, it should be noticed that it implies absence of obligation since, as explicitly indicated in the paraphrases provided between brackets in (38-39), *needn't* signifies, basically, that something is not compulsory or necessary. What is curious about this particular modal verb is, thus, as Thomson and Martinet (1986: 142) state, that "*need* as an auxiliary is seldom used in the affirmative, except when a negative or interrogative is preceded by an expression which changes the negative verb into an affirmative". This particular phenomenon is illustrated in the pairs of example in (40a-40b), where the presence of the negative verbal phrase *don't suppose* at the front of the sentence converts the negative *needn't* into the affirmative mode:

(38) You *needn't* write your English essay now; you can do it next week.

(39) We *needn't* buy tickets for the concert in advance.

(40a) I *needn't* wear a coat. →

(40b) I don't suppose I need wear a coat.

As has been illustrated throughout this section, the negative particle *not* can adopt one of two forms indistinctly: either it is placed immediately after the operator as an independent single word, (41), or it is attached to it, adopting the contracted form *n't*, (42):

(41) This perfume cannot be sold.

(42) People aren't aware of the pollution in this city.

Though both are always possible in oral speech, it should be noticed here that if the operator is contracted with the clausal subject, (43b-46b), the negative particle cannot be contracted with the auxiliary verb. In these cases, it must adopt the form of a single independent word and be placed immediately after the contracted subject. There are, thus, two different formal ways of encoding negation. As Quirk *et al.* (1985: 777) put it forward, “if the operator can be contracted to a form enclitic to the subject, there are two possibilities for contraction in negative clauses (though neither is used in formal English) auxiliary contraction and subject contraction”:

(43a) Kevin isn't too young to drive. (43b) Kevin's not too young to drive.

(44a) They haven't lived abroad. (44b) They've not lived abroad.

(45a) Peter wouldn't wash the car (45b) Peter'd not wash the car.

(46a) Mary won't buy the book. (46b) Mary'll not buy the book.

There is, however, one exceptional context in this regard, pointed out by Horn (2010:19) and traditionally known as auxiliary fronting, in which the two previously described forms that the negative particle *not* may adopt is somehow different. Notice here that the negative particle only moves to the front of the sentence, together with the auxiliary, if it takes the contracted form, (47a); if it remains as an independent word, it appears separated from the operator by the clausal subject, (47b). Quoting Horn (2010: 19) literally, when “a verb is moved to the front of the sentence, the suffix *n't* but not the free morpheme *not*, has to move with it”:

(47a) Isn't he here?

(47b) Is he not here?

1.2. Lexical negation

Besides the particle *not*, used to negate a sentence syntactically, as previously illustrated, there are some other English words, whose meaning is negative, also employed to negate a sentence. The study of this phenomenon, known as lexical negation, mainly deals with the classification of these negative words in different groups, according to the lexical category they belong to. However, to start with, a distinction has to be made between two types of lexical negation since not all the negative lexical in English items behave similarly. Thus, following Quirk *et al.* (1985: 778-783), among other scholars, “words negative in form and meaning” have to be distinguished from “words negative in meaning but not in form”.

Within the former class —words negative both in meaning and form—, the most common ones are the determiner *no*, (48-49), and pronouns and adverbs of the type of *nothing*, *nobody*, *no one* and *nowhere*, (50-53):

- (48) I have no time.
- (49) It makes no difference to me.
- (50) Nobody knows that boy.
- (51) I know nothing about it.
- (52) The culprit was certainly no one we know.
- (53) There is nowhere like home.

On the other hand, among the words that are only negative in meaning, but not in form, the most recurrent lexical categories are adverbs of the type of *ever*, *rarely*, *seldom*, *scarcely*, *hardly* and *barely*, (54-56), verbs such as, for example, *deny*, *fail*, *refuse* and the like, (57-58), and determiners such as *little* and *few*, (59-60):

- (54) He rarely sees her these days.
- (55) We seldom pray before any meal.
- (56) She hardly comes here anymore.
- (57) He denied having anything to do with the smear campaign.
- (58) The child refused to eat his spinach.
- (59) Sarah drinks little coffee.
- (60) Few teachers have ever indicated economic problems.

1.3. Morphological negation

Besides the negative lexical items previously stated, English also possesses a variety of bound derivational affixes with negative meaning, like the prefixes *dis-* and *im-* in *disagrees*, (61), and *imperfect*, (62), and the suffix *-less* in *homeless*, (63), for instance, used to negate a sentence morphologically:

(61) Peter disagrees with the results of the elections.

(62) Sarah's last boyfriend was imperfect.

(63) Charles Dickens wrote novels about the homeless in London.

Specifically, in English there are more prefixes than suffixes negative in meaning; as far as I know, there only exists one suffix with this kind of meaning: the previously mentioned adjectival *-less*, that converts a noun into an adjective of the type of *careless* in (64). Among the most common English suffixes with a negative meaning, however, the following ones have to be identified (cf. Horn 2001: 289): (i) *a-*, which attaches to adjectives to create new adjectives with the opposite meaning, like *amoral* in (65); (ii) *dis-*, which attaches to verbs to produce new verbs, like *disagree* in (66), and, less frequently to adjectives and nouns to derive new adjectives and nouns, like *disobedient* and *disharmony*, in (67-68); (iii) the set of phonetically conditioned allomorphs *in-*, *im-*, *il-* and *ir-*, which attach to adjectives to create new adjectives, like *inaccurate*, *imperfect*, *illiterate* and *irrelevant* in the set of examples (69-72);² (iv) *non-*, prefixed to adjectives or nouns to derive, respectively, new adjectives, such as *nonconformist* in (73), or nouns, like *nonviolence* in (74); and finally, (v) *un-*, which also creates negative adjectives, like *unpredictable*, for example, in (75), from originally positive adjectives in meaning:

(64) There are too many careless drivers on our busy streets.

(65) Margaret behaves amoral lately.

(66) Peter disagrees with the results of the elections.

(67) Jim was a disobedient child.

² Notice in this regard that *im-* attaches to adjectives that begin with either an [m-] or a [p-] sound: *immortal*, *impossible*, *imperfect*; the prefixes *il-* in *illiterate* and *illicit* and *ir-* in *irrelevant* and *irregular*, for instance, join, in turn, to adjectives, positive in meaning, that start with an [l-] or a [r-] sound, respectively; and finally, *in-* prefixes to those adjectives that start either with a vocalic sound, like *(in)accurate*, or a consonant sound not mentioned before, like *(in)decent*.

- (68) After Turkish coup people live in disharmony.
- (69) That machine gives inaccurate results.
- (70) An imperfect person has faults or weaknesses.
- (71) It's better to be silent than to make illiterate observations.
- (72) The witness has irrelevant information for the police.
- (73) John is a nonconformist person.
- (74) Many celebrities defend nonviolence towards animals.
- (75) The weather has been unpredictable lately.

Moreover, as regards the negative prefix *un-*, it should be noticed, following Horn (2001), its tendency to join naturally to adjectival stems with deverbal suffixes such as *-able* and the participial inflectional morphs *-ed* and *-ing*. As Horn (2001: 277) himself puts it forward:

It is for this reason that Jespersen, in discussing the tendency for *un-* negatives to be read as contraries, explicitly exempts ‘words in *-able* (*-ible*) and participles’; his examples (1917:144) include *unabsorbable*, *unadaptable*, *unabbreviated*, *unadapted*, *unavailing*, and *unbefitting*.

2. Key concepts and phenomena in the study of English negation

2.1 Scope and focus of negation:

The scope of negation is a complex linguistic phenomenon, hard to define from a syntactic point of view, which, if not understood in the proper way, may cause misunderstandings or ambiguities. Quirk *et al.* (1985: 85), for example, refer to the concept of “scope” as “the general term used to describe the semantic influence which certain words have on neighboring parts of a sentence”; and Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 790) explicitly describe the concept of “scope of negation” as “the part of the meaning that is negated”. Taking both observations into consideration, the scope of negation, which usually extends from the negative item itself to the end of the clause, can be defined as the part of the sentence over which the negative element exerts its influence; that is, the semantic coverage in a clause of the negative element.

In order to illustrate this concept, Quirk *et al.* (1985: 779) use the negative pair of examples in (76a-76b); in the former the negative particle *not* is located in subject position, so its scope includes the quantifier determiner *many* in the noun phrase subject

many people; in the latter, however, the same subject noun phrase lies outside the scope of negation because in this case the negative particle *not*, located in the verb phrase predicate, does not affect the determiner *many*:

(76a) Not many people came to the party.

(76b) Many people didn't come to the party.

As will be immediately explained, this fact has important consequence for the semantic interpretation of both sentences. Notice in this regard that the first sentence implies the presence of few people at the party and the second, in turn, the absence of a large group of people at the party.

Apart from quantifiers of the type of *many*, there are some other elements in English over which negation can have different scope: among others, adverbials of any kind —adjuncts, conjuncts, subjuncts and disjuncts—³ and modal verbs, as pointed out earlier in this work. For Quirk *et al.* (1985: 788), the adjuncts that appear in negative sentences are, in particular, difficult to interpret because they may or may not lie outside the scope of negation:

(77a) I wasn't listening all the TIME.

(77b) I wasn't listening all the TIME.

According to Quirk *et al.* (1985:788), “the difference of scope, which is here marked by intonation, reflects an important difference of meaning”; (75a) means ‘For the whole time, I wasn't listening’, whereas (75b) means ‘It is not true that I was listening all the time’. That is, the adverbial lies within the scope of negation in (77a), but outside of it in (77b).

The interpretation of disjuncts of the type of *unfortunately* in (78) and conjuncts, such as *however* in (79), in turn, is not problematic at all because, according to Quirk *et*

³ From a semantic point of view, adverbials are traditionally classified in the literature in the following four groups (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1985; Huddleston and Pullum 2002): (i) adjuncts: those that express diverse circumstantial information about the sentence (i.e. manner, place, time, extent, reason, etc); (ii) subjuncts: adverbials that express some property of the subject of the clause; (iii) disjuncts: those that express a comment made by the speaker on the content of the whole clause; and finally, (iv) conjuncts: adverbials that link two utterances or part of utterances and express the semantic relationship that exists between them.

al. (1985: 788), they typically lie outside the scope of negation, regardless their position in the sentence:

(78) Helen doesn't speak English, unfortunately.

(79) Helen doesn't speak English, however.

The second concept that is essential to understand the complex and universal phenomenon at issue in this work is the so-called focus of negation. Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 790) define it as “the part of the scope that is most prominently or explicitly negated” and later in the same work they further explain that, as a consequence, it is usually marked by vocal stress and intonation. As these scholars literally remark:

A constituent marked by stress as being crucial to the way in which an instance of negation should be understood is called the focus of that negation. English provides ways of making negatives more informative by giving some indication as to which condition fails to hold. The way we are concerned with here involves the use of stress and intonation to highlight the part of the clause that is associated with that condition. (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 797)

For the comprehension of this concept, Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 797) provide the example illustrated in (80), whose meaning is going to vary depending on the constituent on which the focus of negation lies:

(80) Your students don't hate school.

As shown by means of capital letters, the focus of negation in the previous example can be placed on different constituents: on the determiner in subject position, (80a); on the head noun of the subject constituent, (80b); on the main verb, (80c); and finally, on the nominal constituent that functions as direct object in (80d):

(80a) YOUR students don't hate school.

(80b) Your STUDENTS don't hate school.

(80c) Your students don't HATE school.

(80d) Your students don't hate SCHOOL.

Since it is these particular constituents the ones that are emphasized in the sentences and carry, thus, the focus of negation, the interpretation of the neutral sentence in (80) is going to acquire a different meaning in this series of examples. Thus, (80a) has to be understood as “If there are students who hate school, they are not yours”; (80b) as “If some people hate school, it is not your students”; (80c) as “If your students harbor an attitude towards school, it is not hatred”; and finally, (80d) as “If your students do hate something, it's not school”.

2.2. Multiple negation:

As illustrated in (81-82), the phenomenon of double/multiple negation is unanimously considered to be ungrammatical in standard English, since the meaning of the two negatives —*n't* and *nothing* in (81) and *scarcely* and *no* in (82)— is cancelled, thus creating a positive statement. Notice in this regard what Lowth (1775) stated in his *Short Introduction to English Grammar*, as recorded in *The Oxford English Dictionary*: “Two Negatives in English destroy one another, or are equivalent to an Affirmative”:⁴

(81) *I don't know nothing about computers.

(82) *This first satirical TV comedy made scarcely no impact.

As a consequence, the meaning of the sentences in (81-82) is to be interpreted as affirmative (‘I know something about computers’ and ‘This first satirical TV comedy made too much impact’), which is precisely the opposite meaning to the one the speaker intends to communicate: ‘I don't know anything about computers’ and ‘This first satirical TV comedy made scarcely any impact’.

In order to reestablish the grammaticality of these two sentences, one of the negative elements has, thus, to be deleted so that the sentence only contains one single negative element: in the pair of examples (81a-81b) either the clause negator *n't*, that negates the clause syntactically, or the pronoun *nothing*, negative both in form and meaning, that negates, in turn, the sentence lexically; and in (82a-82b) only one of the

⁴ It should be noticed at this stage, however, that the phenomenon of double/multiple negation was allowed in English up to the 17th century, as the following examples extracted from Chaucer's (1387-1400) *The Friar's Tale* and Shakespeare's (1591) *Richard III*, respectively, illustrate: *Ther nas no man nowher so vertuous ; I never was nor never will be.*

two lexically negative elements appearing in (82): either the determiner *no*, also negative both in meaning and form, or the adverbial *scarcely*, only negative in meaning, but not in form:

(81a) I don't know anything about computers.

(81b) I know nothing about computers.

(82a) This first satirical TV comedy made scarcely any impact.

(82b) This first satirical TV comedy made no impact.

The phenomenon of multiple/double negation has to be, in sum, avoided in formal English for the reasons just described.⁵ It is here, then, where the distinction, so frequently pointed out in the literature, among assertive, nonassertive and negative elements plays a central role (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1985).

2.3. Assertive, nonassertive and negative elements

As illustrated in (81a-82a), the nonassertive items *anything* and *any* have replaced, respectively, the negative elements *nothing* and *no* to reestablish the ungrammaticality of the original examples provided in (81-82). Their presence makes the sentence acceptable because they remove from the sentence the second negative element they contain, thus leaving the particle *not* as the only negative element in them. The insertion of this kind of nonassertive elements is not, however, just activated when the sentence at issue contains the syntactically negative particle *not*. It does become necessary as well when the sentence is already either lexically, (83-85), or morphologically, (86), negated:

(83) Susan denies having anything to do with the smear campaign.

(84) I fail to find any justification for these expenses.

(85) Fred is against deforestation anywhere in his country.

(86) Mark is unpredictable ever to sing for us tonight.

⁵ Nevertheless, in very informal situations, such as pop music, for example, the phenomenon of multiple/double negation is frequently attested.

We have to conclude, thus, in the same line as Quirk *et al.* (1985: 781), that “verbs, adjectives, and prepositions with negative meaning may be followed by nonassertive items, particularly *any* and its compounds”.

As a consequence, as Downing and Locke (1996: 173) point out, rather than distinguishing simply between positive and negative forms in English, a distinction has to be made between positive/assertive and non-positive/nonassertive lexical items. It is in this last class, as seen in the following table taken from Quirk *et al.* (1985: 782), where the negative items have to be included:

SYNTACTIC CLASS	ASSERTIVE	NONASSERTIVE (NON-NEGATIVE)	NONASSERTIVE (NEGATIVE)
Determiner	<i>Some</i>	<i>Any</i>	<i>No</i>
Pronoun	<i>some</i>	<i>any</i>	<i>none</i>
Determiner or Pronoun	<i>(one or the other)</i>	<i>either</i>	<i>neither</i>
Pronoun	<i>something</i>	<i>anything</i>	<i>nothing</i>
Pronoun	<i>somebody</i>	<i>anybody</i>	<i>nobody</i>
Pronoun	<i>someone</i>	<i>anyone</i>	<i>no one</i>
Adverb	<i>somewhere</i>	<i>anywhere</i>	<i>nowhere</i>
Adverb	<i>someplace</i>	<i>anyplace</i>	<i>no place</i>
Adverb	<i>sometime(s)</i>	<i>ever</i>	<i>never</i>
Adverb	<i>always</i>	<i>anytime</i>	<i>no time</i>
Adverb	<i>already</i>	<i>yet</i>	-
Adverb	<i>still</i>	<i>any more</i>	<i>no more</i>
Adverb	<i>(to some extent)</i>	<i>at all</i>	-
Adverb	<i>somewhat</i>	<i>any</i>	<i>no</i>
Adverb	<i>as well, too</i>	<i>either</i>	

As Downing and Locke (1996: 173) explain, the basic difference between both kinds of forms lies, on the one hand, on the context in which they appear, and on the other, on their meaning: whereas the former typically occur in assertive contexts, expressed by positive declarative clauses, and have a factual meaning (i.e. fulfillment and non-potentiality), the latter appear in nonassertive contexts and have a non-factual meaning (i.e. non-fulfillment and potentiality).

Anyway, and despite their differences in meaning, all assertive forms and contexts have, as deduced from the relationship that exists among the elements in the three columns above, at least, one parallel nonassertive form. As Quirk *et al.* (1985:783) literally put it forward, “The combination of *not* with a nonassertive form can be replaced, in most instances, by the negative word in the right-hand column; there are consequently two negative equivalents of each positive sentence”:

(87) Jean and Laura have had some coffee.

(87a) They haven't had any coffee.

(87b) They have had no coffee.

(88) I've bought something for you.

(88a) I haven't bought anything for you.

(88b) I've bought nothing for you.

As illustrated in the previous series of examples, for instance, the assertive contexts expressed through the positive declarative clauses in (87-88) have been converted into their corresponding nonassertive contexts by using one of the following two strategies: either by inserting the negative particle *not* to negate the clause syntactically and replacing the assertive form they contain —*some* and *something*, respectively— for their nonassertive and non-negative counterparts —*any* and *anything*—, (87a-88a), or just by changing the assertive forms just mentioned by their nonassertive negative equivalents *no* and *nothing*, (87b-88b).

In this regard some attention has to be paid, furthermore, to the position occupied by these nonassertive (negative and non-negative) items since they cannot be placed randomly. As Quirk *et al.* (1985: 787) state, “if a clause is negative, it is usually negative throughout, or at least until the beginning of a final adjunct. Nonassertive items must normally be used after the negative element in place of *every* assertive item that would have occurred in the corresponding positive clause”, as seen in the series of examples above. Or put it differently, the negative elements, usually only one, must always precede the nonassertive and non-negative elements, as illustrated in (89a-89d):

(89a) James *doesn't* give *any* cigarettes to *any* of his friends at *any* time.

(89b) James gives *no* cigarettes to *any* of his friends at *any* time.

(89c) James gives cigarettes to *none* of his friends at *any* time.

(89d) James gives cigarettes to his friends at *no* time.

This is so because, as Quirk *et al.* (1985: 787) themselves further explain, “the further the negative word is postponed, the more questionable the sentence is, because the sentence is at first perceived as positive and then has to be reinterpreted as negative”.

For this reason, therefore, the syntactically, lexically or morphologically negative constituent, no matter the syntactic function it displays —direct object in (90) and adverbial in (91-93)—, is sometimes fronted to clausal initial position, thus triggering the syntactic operation of subject-operator inversion that becomes necessary in this context (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1985:779; Leech and Svartvick 2002: 342, among others):

(90) Not a penny would I pay for this awful breakfast.

(91) Under no circumstances will Bob sell the car.

(92) Rarely had he seen such a sunset.

(93) Hardly had we started our holiday when we become ill.

2.4. Nonassertive contexts:

Apart from the negative contexts that have been illustrated, there are some other syntactic environments usually classified in the literature as nonsassertive (cf. Quirk *et al.* 1985: 784; Downing and Locke 1996: 173-174). The most common ones among them are listed and illustrated below:

(i) Interrogative sentences: on the one hand, *yes-no* questions that, like (94), for example, either expect a negative response or are neutral in expectation, and on the other, *wh-* questions of the type of (95):

(94) Do you think anyone will like this CD?

(95) Who has ever taken up karate?

(ii) a wide array of compound and complex clauses, among which the following types are the most common ones: (a) those ones containing the so-called “putative *should*”, (96);⁶ (b) conditional clauses, (97); (c) comparative clauses, (98); and finally, (d)

⁶ The putative *should* is the particular use this modal verb extensively has in *that*-clauses, (96), to convey the notion of possible existence or coming into existence.

restrictive relative clauses that modify generic noun phrases like *students* in (99) and have a conditional meaning:

(96) She insisted that we should ever stay.

(97) If anyone ever says that, pretend not to hear.

(98) I have more stamps than I've yet shown you.

(99) Students who have any complaints should raise their hands.

2.5. Distinguishing features between simple positive and non-positive sentences:

Though negative simple sentences are basically said to derive from their affirmative or positive counterparts, there are several syntactic traits that distinguish both kinds of clauses. Among them, the following ones are recurrently stated in the literature (cf. Quirk et al. 1985; Huddleston and Pullum 2002):

(i) the form that confirmatory or question tags adopt: although confirmatory tags are usually employed in discourse to elicit agreement from the part of the hearer on the statement previously uttered by the speaker, their form is going to vary, being completely dependent on the mode of such a previous statement; thus, it must be negative, when following a positive statement, (100a); and if preceded by a negative statement, the confirmatory tag has to be positive, (100b):

(100a) They have read my book, haven't they?

(100b) They haven't read my book, have they?

It should be noticed here, however, that the confirmatory tag sometimes maintains the mode, positive or negative, of the statement to which it is attached, as seen in (101a-101b). In these cases the confirmatory tags cannot be considered real questions because they are not used to ask, but to express different kinds of emotions (interest, surprise, anger, etc.):

(101a) She wants to marry him, does she? Some chance!

(101b) So you don't like my looks, don't you?

(ii) The negative adverb phrase *not even* that introduces a noun phrase into discourse also differentiates between positive and negative clauses since it can only be inserted after negative clauses, as the grammaticality contrasts illustrated in the pair of examples (102a-102b) show:

(102a) *I have read your book, not even the introduction.

(102b) I haven't read your book, not even the introduction.

(iii) Coordination: the coordinating conjunctions used to link together two or more clauses are going to be different, depending on the polarity of the clauses to be coordinated. Thus, positive clauses are joined by the additive conjunction *so*, (103a), and clauses negative in their mode are coordinated, in turn, by means of *neither* or *nor*, (103b). It should be noticed here that, due to the inherent negative meaning of the lexical items *neither* and *nor*, the second conjoined clause placed after them has to be syntactically positive in order to avoid the previously discussed phenomenon of multiple negation, which is forbidden in English:

(103a) I have read your book, and so have my students.

(103b) I haven't read your book, and neither have my students.

(iv) Intensification: the kinds of intensifiers used in English positive and negative clauses are also different. Notice in this regard, to start with, that there are some intensifiers in English, like *quite*, *pretty*, and *rather*, for example, that are positive and excluded, as such, from negative contexts, as the grammaticality contrasts in (104-105) show:

(104) The policemen stood quite/pretty/rather close behind him.

(105) *The policemen didn't stand quite/pretty/rather close behind him.

The reverse situation applies, thus, to the nonassertive item *at all* that, together with other intensifiers like *in the slightest* and *in the least*, for example, are restricted to negative contexts (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 785):

(106) I found nothing at all the matter with him.

(107) Your bad habits don't bother me in the slightest.

(108) Sure, you can borrow five dollars, I don't mind in the least.

Besides the previously stated negative intensifiers, Quirk *et al.* (1985: 785-786) point out the existence of some others which are just associated with particular and specific negative items; among them, we find the following ones: (i) *whatever* and *whatsoever*, used to emphasize negative determiners, like *no* in (109), and pronouns like *anything* in (110); and (ii) *never*, (111), or *in (all) my life*, (112), as intensifiers of the adverb *never*:

(109) You have no excuse whatever.

(110) I don't know anything whatsoever about Greek history

(111) Anna will never, never eat that again.

(112) Robert has never in all his life seen such a tornado.

These scholars also highlight in this regard the patterns *not one* and *not a (single)* as stressed alternatives to the negative determiner *no*, as seen in the following pairs of examples:

(113a) No bus came in the stop because of the strike.

(113b) Not one bus came in the stop because of the strike.

(114a) The thief left no trace behind.

(114b) The thief left not a single trace behind.

III. CORPUS ANALYSIS

In this section I am going to present the major findings derived from the analysis I have carried out in a corpus of 941 negative sentences, which I myself have manually extracted from the novel *The Summer Without Men* by Siri Hustvedt (2011). The results concerning the frequency of occurrence of the three different kinds of negation described in the theoretical part of this work are not surprising since, as expected, the most frequent type of negation attested in the corpus is the one known as syntactic negation; specifically, 593 clauses syntactically negated have been found out of the total number of examples analysed; a figure that represents the 63.01% of the corpus. Syntactic negation is followed at a distance by lexical negation (25.50% of the corpus), which has been attested, in turn, in 240 of the examples examined. And finally, morphological negation occupies the last position, having just been located in the remaining 108 sentences that conform the corpus; a figure that stands for the 11.47% of the corpus.

As stated before, this disproportion is not surprising at all because, whereas the negative particle *not* can be freely inserted in any verb phrase to negate the clause completely or within any other clausal constituent to syntactically negate the clause partially, the group of negative lexical items (lexical negation) and affixes (morphological negation) constitute a somehow closed set of elements in English; thus, their frequency of occurrence is going to be much more restricted than that of the syntactically negative particle *not*.

A more detailed analysis of the sentences from the corpus that are syntactically negated has revealed, furthermore, that the presence of the negative particle *not* is more frequent within the verb phrase (attested in 467 instances) than within any other kind of clausal constituent (found in 126 examples). This fact means that total or clausal syntactic negation presents a higher level of frequency of occurrence than local or constituent syntactic negation. In the 467 examples of total syntactic negation located in

the corpus the dummy operator *do/did* has been found in 153 instances; different modal verbs functioning as operators, including *will* and *would* as auxiliaries for the future and conditional tenses, have appeared on 116 occasions; the verb *be* has been located in 127 sentences functioning as a lexical verb, and in 16 examples as the operator that is negated either in the passive voice or in any progressive tense; and finally, the verb *have* has only been found, in turn, in 2 instances as a lexical verb, and in 53 attestations as the operator that is negated in any clause in a perfective tense.

Though the source from where I have extracted my corpus of examples is a contemporary novel written in a formal register, the negative particle *not* has been attested in it both: (i) as an independent word immediately following the operator in the verb phrase, (115-119), or the lexical verbs *be* and *have*, (120-121):

(115) The Eleatics did not believe in change, in motion.

(116) We cannot wish our worlds into being.

(117) We would not give it a name.

(118) I noticed she was not wearing her wig.

(119) Boris had not articulated his unhappiness.

(120) Being a famous poet is not the same as being famous.

(121) I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy.

(ii) and contracted to both kinds of verbs with the form *n't*, (122-129):

(122) I don't want to remember the madwoman.

(123) Harry couldn't keep his feet still.

(124) My fingers won't cooperate, the work's too fine.

(125) "It shouldn't be amiss", he said wavering his index finger....

(126) "You mustn't mention it to Abigail," my mother said.

(127) In a place like this, many people aren't touched enough.

(128) But they hadn't really meant it.

(129) It was there and it wasn't there.

Though Quirk *et al.* (1985: 777) comment in this regard that "there are two possibilities for contraction in negative clauses [...] auxiliary contraction and subject contraction",

it should be noticed at this stage that the former kind, illustrated in the series of examples above, has been attested with a much higher frequency of occurrence than the so-called subject contraction, only found in the following example:

(130) It's not polite to burp at the table.

It has also to be noticed here, however, that the negative particle *not* occupies a different position as a free word, but not in its contracted *n't* form, in the syntactic environment known as verb fronting. Notice in this regard that, as Horn (2010: 19) points out, it appears separated from the verb, operator or not, by the clausal subject, (131-132):

(131) *Are you not* “still beautiful” in the words of your mother?

(132) *Isn't* the human business the same?

The 126 attestations concerning partial or constituent syntactic negation reveal, in turn, the presence of the negative particle *not* in all other formal kinds of phrases, besides the verb phrase. It has, in fact, been found negating noun phrases in 54 instances, (133); adverb phrases on 20 occasions, (134); prepositional phrases in 14 examples, (135); and, finally, adjective phrases in 11 sentences, (136):

(133) They see only what they expect to see, sugar, not spice, if you comprehend my meaning.

(134) I rented a small house at the edge of the town not far from my mother's apartment.

(135) She bought her clothes in Minneapolis in a department store, not at the Bonden mall.

(136) “Crooked and deaf, but not dumb”, she said emphatically upon our first meeting.

In the 27 remaining instances of partial syntactic negation attested in the corpus, the negative particle *not* negates a nonfinite verbal form—either an infinitive, (137), or an *-ing* form, (138)—subordinated to the main verb phrase in the sentence:

(137) I told her not to worry about showing me the door.

(138) I laugh with them, not wanting to be left out, and the girls laugh harder.

Although the negative particle *not* always appears, as illustrated in the two previous series of examples, before the constituent that it is going to negate, it can also be placed after it. This position, considered to be pragmatically marked, is used to convey emphasis and, as a consequence, not quite frequent in the corpus. Notice in this regard that it has only been attested in the following two examples, in which, curiously enough, it negates isolated adverb phrases just containing the head of the phrase:

(139) Absolutely not!

(140) No, maybe not.

The results concerning lexical negation reveal that the determiner *no*, (141), is the lexical item, negative both in meaning and form, most frequently attested in the corpus; it has been found, in fact, in 92 instances out of the 240 sentences in the corpus that are lexically negated. It is followed, though at some distance, by the adverb *never*, (142), also negative in form and meaning, which has been attested in 49 examples. The following negative lexical item in the corpus, in terms of productivity, is the adverb *no*, found in 27 instances as an answer to a question, (143):

(141) No expression in Julia's face.

(142) I have never seen her in a radiant state before.

(143) No, dummy, he's fifteen, not sixteen.

With a similar frequency of occurrence, though less higher than that of the three negative words previously mentioned, the following negative lexical items have been attested in the corpus: (i) the preposition *without* (16 instances), (144); (ii) the adjectival intensifier *no* (14 examples), (145); and (iii) the pronouns *no one* (12 attestations) and *nothing* (10 instances), (146-147):

(144) I said I would never speak of it without her permission.

(145) I was no different from Flora.

(146) No one knew who Fredricksen was.

(147) There is nothing noble about emerging victorious from such a squabble.

Some other negative lexical items have also been found in the corpus, though with a very low level of frequency of occurrence; specifically, (i) the correlative pair *neither/nor* or just the former term *neither* in isolation, attested in 5 instances each, (148-149); (ii) the pronouns *nobody* and *none*, found, respectively, in 3 and 2 examples, (150-151); (iii) the verb *deny*, appearing just in 2 instances, (152); and finally (iv) the adverbs *barely* and *hardly*, and the verb *refuse*, attested in one single instance each, (153-155):

(148) Neither my mother nor Peg nor Abigail can say exactly when they first notice the decline in their friend's memory.

(149) I saw a tear dribble from each duct, and because she was supine, neither fell.

(150) Nobody wants twisted shit like that.

(151) After all, we, none of us, can ever untangle the knot of fictions.

(152) No, he didn't confirm or deny it.

(153) And then she said what she never said before, in a barely audible voice.

(154) I can hardly remember what it looks like anymore.

(155) Regina refused to let her in.

As regards morphological negation, the first conclusion that can be drawn at this stage is that it does not present a high frequency of occurrence in the corpus of examples analysed, if compared with syntactic and lexical negation; in fact, as stated at the beginning of this section, it has been attested in just 108 examples of the corpus (11.47% of the total). Furthermore, as expected, prefixation is more frequent than suffixation, since as pointed out in the theoretical part of this work, there only exists one suffix in English negative in meaning; the suffix *-less* that attaches to nouns to create negative adjectives, found on 23 occasions:

(156) I continued to think of the presence as a speechless version of Mr. Nobody.

(157) Leave me in my wordless sanctum, my fortress of madness.

In relation to suffixation, it has to be highlighted that the five negative suffixes described in the theoretical part of the work have been found in the corpus (85

instances), though with different levels of productivity. The most common one is undoubtedly *un-*, which outnumbers the other four suffixes with 53 attestations:

(158) I felt such deep, unbearable despair.

(159) The door had been unlocked.

(160) I am innocent of the future, and that state, that cloud of unknowing.

As is manifest in the previous series of examples, the behaviour of *un-* is the one Horn (2001) describes, since it shows a clear tendency to attach to adjectival stems with deverbal suffixes such as *-able*, and the participial inflectional morphs *-ed* and *-ing*. Quite more interesting are the corpus attestations where the prefix *un-* appears in combination with other adjectives that are not deverbal, like *ungodly* and *unworldly* in (161-162), and even with deadjectival nouns, like *happiness* in (163), and verbs, like *untangle* in (164):

(161) Mrs. Lorquant seemed genuinely shaken by the whole ungodly mess.

(162) We are not unworldly, are we?

(163) Boris had not articulated his unhappiness, had never told me he didn't want me.

(164) After all, we, none of us, can ever untangle the knot of fictions.

The set of phonetically conditioned allomorphs *in-*, *im-*, and *il-* has also been attested in the corpus. As expected, due to the phonetic conditions that surround the use of each of them, the most frequent suffix in the set has been *in-*, found in 13 instances; *im-* has appeared, in turn, only in 2 examples; and *il-* on just 1 occasion; no attestations of *ir-* have been found, however:

(165) Indifference was the cure, but I couldn't find it in myself.

(166) It is impossible to divine a story while you are living it.

(167) Although her expression was illegible, Ashley's face erect posture had an extra rigidity.

Less frequent are the prefix *dis-*, attested in 8 examples attached to verbs and nouns, (168-169), and the prefix *non-*, found, in turn, joined to nouns and adjectives, (170-171), in only 4 examples:

(168) You may think I would disapprove of this.

(169) But Ashley, you said Alice had a mood disorder, not you.

(170) I turned the city in a nonstop carnival of poseurs, hucksters, and clowns.

(171) This entirely nonviolent encounter consisted of a handshake accompanied by a meaningful gaze.

Finally, it should be noticed that, though also manifest in the corpus, the prefix *a-* shows almost no productivity at all, being attested in just the following example:

(172) Her face wrinkled into an asymmetrical smile.

In the realm of morphological negation, I would like to highlight the attestation in the corpus of some English compounds, negative in meaning, that contain, usually as the first member of the compound, either the syntactically negative marker *not*, (173), or some lexical element, like *no* and *never*, negative both in meaning and form, (174):

(173) not-yet-four- fruitcake; waste-not-want-not-for-children; not-at-all-glad possibility;

(174) no-fault divorce, never-ending;

To finish with the corpus description, I would like to stand out the abundant presence of nonassertive non-negative items —mostly *ever* and *any* and its compounds— in different syntactically, (175-176), and lexically, (177-178), negative contexts so as to avoid the forbidden phenomenon in standard English of multiple negation:

(175) I don't ever want to see you again.

(176) Don't let anything get you down.

(177) I did not have to confiscate any phones.

(178) She never learned to walk or talk or anything.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In the present study I have tried to describe, theoretically first, the most problematic aspects of the universal and complex phenomenon of negation in contemporary English among foreign students of English, illustrating them, later on, in the second part of this work, with real corpus examples.

To start with, after having done a general review of the topic in the literature, I have differentiated and explained the form, use and peculiarities of the three different kinds of negation available in contemporary English: (i) syntactic negation, either total or partial; (ii) lexical negation; and (iii) morphological negation.

Later on, I have briefly focused on some controversial concepts and phenomena related to negation that usually create confusion among students, in order to clarify them: on the one hand, the concepts of scope and focus of negation; and on the other, the forbidden phenomenon in standard English of double/multiple negation and the subsequent and compulsory distinction that has, thus, to be made between assertive and nonassertive (negative and non-negative) forms and contexts.

This initial section of the work, theoretical in nature, has been complemented with a second section in which I have presented the major findings derived from the corpus-based analysis which I have carried out in a corpus of 941 negative sentences, manually extracted by myself from the novel *The Summer without men* by Siri Hustvedt. Among the results and conclusions obtained, the following ones deserve special attention:

(i) Negation, being an universal concept, essential to all human beings, is extremely recurrent in contemporary English. Notice in this regard the high number of examples that conform the corpus.

(ii) The kind of negation with the highest frequency of occurrence is, as expected, syntactic negation, attested in the 63.01% of the total number of examples examined. In

contrast, morphological negation represents the kind of negation with the lowest frequency of occurrence of the three kinds analysed, just found in the 11.47% of the corpus. Finally, half way between the two we find lexical negation, manifest in the remaining 25.50% of the corpus.

(iii) The syntactically negative particle *not* is more frequently used to convey total or clausal syntactic negation than partial or constituent syntactic negation.

(iv) When syntactically negating a sentence completely, the negative marker *not* can adopt two forms and positions: (i) it can be placed immediately after the operator or the lexical verbs *be* and *have* as an independent word; or (ii) it is attached to both kinds of verbs with the contracted form *n't*.

(v) Syntactically negative sentences prefer auxiliary contraction to subject contraction.

(vi) To express lexical negation, the most productive item attested in the corpus has been the determiner *no*, negative both in meaning and form.

(vii) Prefixation is more recurrent in contemporary English than prefixation to convey negation by morphological means, due simply to the existence of just one single suffix —*-less*— with a negative meaning. As regards negative prefixes, *un-* stands out among the five ones attested in the corpus, owing to its high frequency of occurrence.

(viii) Nonassertive and nonnegative items have abundantly been attested in different negative contexts in the corpus so that the phenomenon of double/multiple negation, forbidden in standard contemporary English, is avoided.

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