

## NEGATIVE TRANSFER IN ENGLISH AND IN MACEDONIAN SEEN THROUGH THE TRANSLATION EQUIVALENTS OF THESE TWO LANGUAGES

*Marjana Vaneva, PhD*

University American College Skopje, School of Foreign Languages

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### **Abstract**

The notion of negative transfer, which is of crucial importance for understanding negation not only in Macedonian, but also in German, Spanish, French, Russian and many other languages, has attracted the attention of a lot of linguists interested in defining this process. During the second decade of the last century, Jespersen starts talking about the syntactic phenomenon called *anticipatory negation*, but different authors name this process differently. Fillmore (Fillmore 1963) calls it *transposition*, Klima (Klima 1964) uses the term *absorption*, Bolinger (Bolinger 1967) - *negative raising*, while Robin Lakoff and George Lakoff (R. Lakoff 1969, G. Lakoff 1970) use the string *negative transfer*. We will look here at the ways in which negation is being carried and transferred from one clause to another, and analyse the semantic differences and implications of this transfer in English and in Macedonian, as the analysis takes into consideration the translation equivalents of these two language structures.

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**Keywords:** Negation, transfer, subordinate, superordinate, meaning

### **Introduction**

One of the universally used methods for identifying the verbs that allow negative raising is based on checking the equivalence of the truth conditions which apply to the complex sentence when a verb in the subordinate clause is negative, and those used when the verb of the main clause undergoes negation. If these conditions are the same in both cases, that is, if both sentences have the same meaning, then we should say that the verb from the main clause belongs to the class of verbs which allows negative raising.

The second method used for checking the type of the verb, actually whether it can transfer the negative element, is the possibility of expanding the complex sentence with new content. In cases when the verbs of both the main and the subordinate clause are negative and

added new content, and when despite the changes the sentences are synonymous, then the verb from the main clause is a member of the verb group that allows the negative element to be transferred. If we accept the fact that negation is primarily a syntactic process, the information on the conditions for its realization will be offered as grammatical or lexical rules. Wasow (Московљевиќ 1996: 96) established the rules for distinguishing these two categories and, according to him, lexical rules are those that do not change the structure of the syntactic construction, and that have many idiosyncratic, lexically determined exceptions, while grammatical rules are with no or with very few exceptions. Lakoff (Lakoff 1970: 30) describes this explanation of negative transfer as ‘*a minor transformational rule*’ whose structural description satisfies only a limited number of predicates, and is therefore a lexically determined process.

For example:

a) *I do not drink to be happy; I drink not to be afraid.*

(=I drink, not in order to be happy, but in order to be unafraid.)

(Mišeska-Tomić 1987: 190-191)

*Не пијам за да бидам среќен, пијам за да не се плашам.*

b) *This is not nothing.*

*Ова не е ништо.*

c) *Their children are not nobody.*

*Нивните деца не се никој.*

An important characteristic of the use of these negative sentences is the fact that they are acceptable only under the assumption that the presence of more than one negative element, as in the first group, is justified by the different scope of negation to which the negative elements belong, while in the second group, the pronouns **nothing** and **nobody** are particularly emphasized; otherwise, as will be seen and discussed in the text in continuation, English does not allow more than one negative element to be used in the same scope of negation.

So far, the phenomenon *negative transfer* has not been fully studied in the Macedonian language, but the examples and the explanations that come from the corpus analysis presented here and others found in the literature tell us that the Macedonian grammar keeps the negation in the clause where it logically belongs to, as distinct from a certain group of English verbs which transfers the negative effect from the subordinate to the main clause.

Negative transfer is an issue that also occupied David Crystal in his *Linguistics Dictionary*, where he says that in the new linguistic science there has appeared special interest for the sentence expansion, when by adding certain particles, variation in the scope of negation is created, and it influences both the logical and the semantic analysis of the sentence. This term of negative transfer refers to the negative raising, that is, to the transfer of negation from the subordinate/embedded to the superordinate/main clause, and to its lowering, which is transferring the negative element from the main to the embedded clause.

### Main Text

#### The Negative Transfer in English and Macedonian

Lakoff (Bradley-Smith 1977: 435) uses the concept of negative transfer to explain the ambiguity of sentences like this:

1) *Mary **didn't** write to Sam because she was bored.*

*Мери **не му пиша** на Сем бидејќи ѝ беше здодевно.*

The original English sentence has two interpretations which are not synonymous:

1a) 'It is because she was bored that Mary **didn't** write to Sam.'

'Бидејќи ѝ беше здодевно, Мери **не му пиша** на Сем.' and

1b) 'It **is not** because she was bored that Mary wrote to Sam.'

'Мери му пиша на Сем, но **не** затоа што ѝ беше здодевно.'

The high position of the negation in the deep structure explains the ambiguity of the only one surface structure. There are many objections to this Lakoff's analysis, the first given by Craak (Craak 1967), who says the sentence

*Mary wrote to Sam because she was bored.*

lacking in negation, is as ambiguous as the one already mentioned but with negation.

Namely, this sentence structure can be regarded as an answer to the following questions:

What did Mary do? and

Why did Mary write to Sam?

In the answer to the first question, the new information is that 'Mary did write to Sam', but this same information in the answer to the second question is assumed and known. If we accept that the deep structure makes formal difference between confirmation and assumption, we ought to consider the sentence:

*Because she was bored, Mary wrote to Sam.*

in which case Mary wrote to Sam is new information which, as such, cannot be a proper answer to the second question previously mentioned.

The negation *Mary **didn't** write to Sam because she was bored.* and the affirmative sentence *Mary wrote to Sam because she was bored.* share the same ambiguity with two deep structures: one is for the paraphrase which confirms that Mary didn't write to Sam, thus having the negation in exactly this clause:

*Mary **didn't** write to Sam.*

and the other paraphrase for the interpretation that assumes the fact that Mary did write to Sam, and confirms that it didn't happen because she was bored, but for some other reason; in which case, the negation is connected with the *because* clause.

This analysis of Craak does not question Lakoff's claim that the source of negation is located in two different clauses. Consequently, Craak gives one remark, while Lasnik, taking into consideration that the back pronominalisation happens in the subordinate clauses, explains that the sentence:

*\*She **didn't** write to Sam because Mary was bored.*

should be considered to be an acceptable transformation of the starting

*Mary **didn't** write to Sam because she was bored.*, but this is not the case.

This process makes the following two sentences connected:

*Aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she could believe it **wasn't** her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown-up.*

*Тетка Петунија се вдаде да плаче и рече дека може да поверува дека тоа навистина **не** е нејзиното мало Дадличе, изгледаше толку пораснат и убав.* and

*Aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she **couldn't** believe it was her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown-up.* H.P. p.93

*Тетка Петунија се вдаде да плаче и рече дека **не може да поверува** дека тоа навистина **не** е нејзиното мало Дадличе, изгледаше толку пораснат и убав.* X.П. стр. 31

The second sentence of the pair is ambiguous, since it can denote simple negation meaning:

'It is not that aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she could believe it was her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown-up.' which simply denies the sentence 'Aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she could believe it was her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown-up.'. In this way, it doesn't oblige the speaker to any kind of belief.

Yet, the second, and, for us, more significant meaning of this sentence is the one synonymous to the meaning of the previous sentence, where the negative element is explicitly used in the main clause, but logically it is the embedded clause that undergoes negation. According to Fillmore, both sentences are synonymous, and the second sentence stems from

the same structure upon which the first one is created, but this time transferring the **not** element from the embedded to the main clause.

However, not all verbs can undergo the process of ‘**not** transportation’, which means that certain verbs like *hope* and *know* are likely to form sentences as those illustrated with the verb *believe*, and such sentences are not synonymous. This can be clearly seen in the examples in continuation:

*She hoped he **would not bang** his books on the floor above their heads, she thought, still thinking how annoying Charles Tansley was.* L. p. 173

*Се надева оти тој нема да бумне некоја од своите книги на подот што е над нивните глави, помисли таа, размислувајќи сè уште дека Чарлс Тензли е здодевен.*

С. стр. 83 and

*She **didn't hope** he would bang his books on the floor above their heads, she thought, still thinking how annoying Charles Tansley was.*

*He се надева оти тој ќе бумне некоја од своите книги на подот што е над нивните глави, помисли таа, размислувајќи сè уште дека Чарлс Тензли е здодевен.*

as well as

*Wilbur knew what **not to do** or which way **not to run**.*

*Џанко знаеше кој пат да не го фати, на каде да не бега.*

*Wilbur **didn't know** what to do or which way to run.* C.W. p.19

*Џанко не знаеше кој пат да го фати, на каде да бега.* П.К. стр.16

We obviously cannot transfer **not** from one clause to another in any of these two cases because that would change the meaning of the sentence.

Contrary to the verbs that don't allow negative transfer, and produce non-synonymous sentences and different sentences by changing the position of the **not** element in the main or the subordinate clause, those like *believe*, *expect*, *think*, *want* and many others do not distinguish positional variations and limitations to the meaning. Hence, if the following sentence is acceptable:

*Aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she could believe it **wasn't** her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown-up.*

and if we accept Fillmore's analysis of the fact that the sentences with *believe* are synonymous, then we can expect the negative element from the subordinate clause of the previous sentence to be transferred to the main clause, thus the following sentence is grammatical:

*Aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she **couldn't believe** it was her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown-up.* H.P. p.32

This makes us conclude that in the sentence with *believe* where the negation is placed in the main clause, the negative element stems from the embedded, not from the main clause, but after applying the '**not** transportation', it negates the verb from the superordinate clause (G. Lakoff 1970: 149-150).

Discussing the use of '**not** transportation', George Lakoff also gives Bolinger's attitude regarding the similarity or difference between the following sentences:

a) "***don't think** I can be a wizard.*" H.P. p.58

"*Мислам дека од мене **не може** да биде волшебник.*" X.П. стр. 52

b) "*I **can't** be a wizard.*"

"*Мислам дека од мене **не може** да биде волшебник.*"

In the first sentence, the process of negative transfer takes place, but the speaker is more confident when in order to express their opinion, they use the second sentence. The translation of both English sentences in Macedonian shows that in Macedonian regardless of the position of the negative element in English, whether it is in the main or in the subordinate clause, it is the element in the subordinate/embedded clause that is made negative, and therefore the translation is the same.

This statement leads us to the fact that the '**not** transportation' implies uncertainty on the part of the subject of the main clause, which confirms the research done by Paul and Carol Kiparsky that this kind of negative transfer does not take place with so-called 'factive' verbs, a stand presented by Robin Lakoff in her review of the article "Progress in linguistics" that appeared in *Linguistics* (Bierwisch and Heidolph eds. 1973: 690).

Jackendoff's stand is ungrounded when he says that there is no rule for '**not** transportation' and that negation is positioned in the deep structure on exactly the same place where it appears in the surface structure, as well as when he mentions the rule for semantic interpretation, which actually connects the negative element with the sentence it logically negates. (Jackendoff 1971). He even claims that whether one verb is used in '**not** transportation' or not, can be predicted by the meaning of the verb, which makes a natural semantic class. But, because the verb class varies and differs from person to person, this leads us to the fact that by accepting Jackendoff's explanation, the grammatical theory will need to be drastically changed.

However, it is inevitable that '**not** transportation' is a syntactic rule, and Bolinger claims that by moving the negation from the verb that it refers to and negates, we do not

denote uncertainty. As a matter of fact, taking away the negation from its usual position is a natural way of neutralizing the negative statement. This concept also known by the name NEG – raising and studied by Fillmore, G. Lakoff, R. Lakoff, Carden, Langacker and others, has been explored in English to explain the ambiguity of sentences from transformational point of view.

R. Lakoff gives syntactic evidence for the rule of NEG raising or negative transfer in English, which refers to the reversed polarity of ‘tag questions’.

We can look at the following sentence:

*I **don**' suppose (that) you will think about it and let it trouble you, will you?*

It is acceptable with ordinary intonation, and by NEG - raising it is being derived from the deep sentence:

*I suppose (that) you **won't think** about it and let it trouble you, will you? while*

*\*I **don**' suppose (that) you will think about it and let it trouble you, won't you?* is unacceptable regardless of the intonation (Prince 1976, 407-408)

but

*I **don't** suppose they'll win. and*

*I suppose they **won't** win.* are synonymous as opposed to the previous pair of sentences.

*Bill **didn't** suppose / imagine / guess that they had won.*

*Bill supposed / imagined / guessed that they **hadn't** won.*

These last two sentences are not synonymous although the same verb is being used in the main clause.

To say explicitly, of all verbs that allow negative transfer, it is *think* that is most widely used, while *suppose* is used most rarely, with *believe*, *imagine* and *guess* being in the middle. In this case, the major role is played by the distinction between present simple and present continuous tense, which determines the use of negation. The crucial fact is that the progressive form is not used with metastatement verbs, whereas the present simple tense form of the verbs like *think* will convey habitual meaning, when used literally. Therefore, if we exclude the usual meaning, in present simple the verb of the main clause will generate an unacceptable sentence, but its progressive form will yield an acceptable result:

*\*Right now, I **don't** guess that John **hasn't** any money.*

*Right now, I'm **not guessing** that John **hasn't** any money.*

Performative verbs form the ‘tag question’ on the lower, not on the main clause, as we saw in the example with *suppose*:

*I suppose they **won't win**, will they?*

But the other verbs like *think*, which are not performative, do not apply this rule, so that the result is rather surprising:

*I **don't think** they'll win, will they?* and not

{\**think*}

*I **they won't win**, will they?*

{\**believe*}

This shows the reasoning that the 'tag question' goes with the verb of the addition, which is illustrated by the plural *they*, while the question is positive. This last fact about the positive form can be explained with the position that at the time when the rule for these question formations was applied, the negation must have been on *win*, rather than on *suppose*, but by further use of the rule for negative transfer, that is, by transferring the negative particle, the **not** negation has been moved to *suppose*.

In Macedonian, the tag questions do not illustrate negation because the form of the tag part of the question is universal and it is same for both types of polarity of questions in the first part of the question. Therefore, if in English the tag part demonstrates opposite polarity of the one used in the beginning of the question, and consequently there can be positive and negative tag, in Macedonian the end of the tag question is always the same and it never changes its form.

Following this, the English sentences

*I suppose they **won't win**, will they?* and

*I **don't think** they'll win, will they?*

which show different transfer, when *suppose* doesn't accept transfer, but *think* does, in Macedonian are translated as

*Претпоставувам **нема да победат**, нели?*

*Мислам дека **нема да победат**, нели?*

The translations show that in Macedonian negation is placed near the element subject to negation, and the negative element is not that freely carried from one clause to another. In this way, clear form is used, straightforward expression is ensured, and, eventually, ambiguity is avoided.

Macedonian particles widely used in questions, which are implicitly negative and question the truth value of the given statement, are the forms *дали*, *зар*, *зарем*, *ли* and *нели*.



*“Не горчи?” праша Нијази седнувајќи крај мангалот од кај Милтон го прогонувааше чадот со дување и кашлање.*

П.Г. стр.69

*“Is it bitter?” Niazı asked as he sat on a chair while Milton chased the smoke with heavy breaths and coughing.*

E.C.A. p.71

Here, the Macedonian particle is found at the beginning of the sentence and is followed by the verb. In Macedonian, it can be treated as a short form of *нели* as part of the structure *не ли*. In its English translation, there is a positive form because we expect such a state, event or condition, and we don't need to question it by using negation. Both sentences, English and Macedonian, mean 'I expect it to be bitter. / It should be bitter. / Is it bitter? / Isn't it bitter?'

### **Conclusion**

The scope of negation or the sphere of negative impact is a very important language characteristic, considering that the domain where negation spans determines which sentence element undergoes negation in English. This leads us to the conclusion that when there is only one negative element in the domain of negation, every other element that is in this domain and should have a negative form is transformed in unassertive form, to satisfy the need for only one negation in the sphere where the negation spans. Contrary to this, there is no strictly selected sphere of negative impact in the Macedonian sentence. Thus, every element that is semantically subject to negation, without exceptions and limitations, accepts the negative element as its own formal feature.

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