A Natural History of Negation (review)

Chaoqun Xie

➡ *For additional information about this article*
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/174200

Vancouver Island" (p. 422). Despite the existence of national and regional dictionaries and style guides, CE remains largely understudied (p. 424), which unfortunately renders some of their generalizations questionable. A number of phonological and grammatical features characteristic of CE are discussed, including Canadian raising, the [ɑ]/[ɔ] merger and discourse *eh*. As a result of increasing influence from French, the English spoken in Quebec is said to be somewhat distinct from standard CE (pp. 425, 439), though more recent empirical studies of this variety (e.g., Boberg 2002; Poplack and Walker 2002) suggest that this claim is exaggerated. Similarly, the view that increasing multilingualism in the major urban centres (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver) is likely to promote the maintenance of "ESL varieties" which will change standard CE in the future (p. 426) remains empirically untested.

   Although containing a number of assertions which specialists in the field may find misleading or controversial (e.g., the discussion of Labov's study of New York City [p. 76]), the volume is relatively comprehensive and should be accessible to the general educated public. The inclusion of a list of phonetic symbols (pp. xxx–xxxii) and a glossary of linguistic terms (pp. 497–515) will be particularly helpful to those without a training in linguistics. Despite the abovementioned focus on American English, this volume serves as a good introduction to the various diachronic and synchronic issues in the origins, development and status of varieties of English spoken in North America.

REFERENCES

Bailyn, Bernard. 1986a. *The peopling of British North America: An introduction*. New York: Random House.

Bailyn, Bernard. 1986b. *Voyagers to the West: A passage in the peopling of North America on the eve of the American Revolution*. New York: Random House.

Boberg, Charles. 2002. Ethnic diversity and the "authentic speaker": The acquisition of Canadian English in Montreal. Paper read at New Ways of Analyzing Variation 31, Stanford University.

Fischer, David Hackett. 1989. *Albion's seed: Four British folkways in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Poplack, Shana, and James A. Walker. 2002. An English "like no other"? Language contact and change in Quebec. Poster presented at New Ways of Analyzing Variation 31, Stanford University.

Laurence R. Horn. *A Natural History of Negation*. In the *David Hume Series on Philosophy and Cognitive Science Reissues*. Stanford: CSLI Publications. 2001. Pp. xlviii + 637. US$30.00 (softcover).

Reviewed by Chaoqun Xie, *Fujian Teachers University*

A Natural History of Negation turned out to be an important book of far-reaching and influential significance, after its original appearance in 1989. Ever since then, "there has been an explosion of interest in the grammar, semantics, pragmatics, and psycholinguistics of natural language negation" (p. xxiii). Negation has been continuously and enthusiastically

studied by researchers and scholars of different academic backgrounds. And this reissue confirms that this brilliant, voluminous work is indispensable in the field of negation studies.

The book contains seven chapters. In Chapter 1, "Negation and opposition in classical logic", Horn presents a historical account of "all the various moral, psychological, histor- ical, and moral theories of negation" (p. 94). Human interest in negation dated back to thousands of years ago, and it was Aristotle who shifted negation studies "from the domain of ontology to that of logic and language" (p. 6). After introducing the legacy of Aristotle, Horn touches upon "the paradox of negative judgment" and discusses Eastern and Western traditions. Chapter 2 explores negation, presupposition, and the excluded middle, focussing on future contingent statements, vacuous singular terms, category mistakes, external nega- tion in presuppositional and nonpresuppositional logics, and conventional implicature and contradiction negation. Horn shows that "there is no royal road to negation" (p. 152). In Chapter 3, Horn discusses "markedness and the psychology of negation", placing much em- phasis on the relationship between markedness and the acquisition of negation, markedness and the processing negation, and markedness and the Asymmetry Thesis.

In Chapter 4, "Negation and quantity", Horn elaborates on the historical roots of scalar implicature, universals and the scope of negation, and quantity and negative incorporation, among others. For Horn, that negation, "when associated with numerals and related (gradable) notions, means 'less than', . . . is not a matter of negation mysteriously taking on a reading which is neither contradictory nor contrary in such contexts, but results instead from the nature of scalar operators" (p. 266). In Chapter 5, "The pragmatics of contra(dicto)ry negation", Horn discusses affixal negation, neg-raising and contrariety, and contrariety and understatement, arguing among others that "ordinary sentential negation yields formal contradictories which can nevertheless be filled in or pragmatically strengthened in certain specifiable scalar contexts to yield functional contraries" (p. 445).

Chapter 6 is devoted to "metalinguistic negation". For Horn, metalinguistic negation is used to object to a previous utterance due to its unassertability, which is a marked, pragmatic, non-truth-functional use of negation and which should be distinguished from descriptive negation, the ordinary, truth-functional use of negation operating on a proposi- tion. For Horn, "negation must be taken as pragmatically ambiguous" (p. 363), and he also discusses three diagnostics for metalinguistic negation, namely, "the inability of metalin- guistic negation to incorporate prefixally, to trigger negative polarity items, and to co-occur with one particular variety of *but* clause" (p. 363). This chapter has triggered much heated debate (cf. pp. xxx–xxxi). For Carston (1996), for instance, both metalinguistic negation and descriptive negation are truth-functional; they are different in the negated material. And what Horn describes as pragmatically ambiguous is actually still at the semantic level. Carston argues within the framework of relevance theory for metalinguistic negation as implicit echoic use. And Noh (2000) goes a step further by arguing that the negated part is not necessarily echoically used as defined in relevance theory. For Noh, metalinguistic negation involves metarepresentations of form or content or both, and the most impor- tant thing in metalinguistic negation is that "it contains an attributive metarepresentational element, which needs to be pragmatically enriched" (Noh 2000:143–144).

In Chapter 7, the last one, Horn touches upon negative form and negative function, dealing with varieties of negative experience, negation in extended term logic, and two descriptive negations of term logic within the grammar of English, predicate denial and predicate term negation.

To sum up, this is a landmark contribution to the study of negation. Those interested in negation would surely find it a must read they would not miss. I am extremely impressed with the very detailed notes to every chapter covering 55 pages, along with the adequate references, name and subject indices. Needless to say, this is only a very superficial sketch of this voluminous monograph. Actually, I find it hard to think of a more comprehensive account of negation than Horn's. This is not to say, however, that everything Horn says in this book is right. After all, no book is perfect. In fact, as mentioned above, recent years have witnessed that Horn's theory of negation has been under challenge and criticism. Of course, this is not a bad thing in that only in this way can human understanding of negation be adequately pushed forward.

For this reissue edition, Horn writes a new introduction, providing a very detailed, exhaustive survey of conferences, workshops, and especially, an excellent overview of recent development of those major themes explored in the 1989 edition. Some readers might notice that Horn's survey in this new introduction has largely focussed on the syntax, semantics and pragmatics of negation and other areas covered in the original edition. In point of fact, it would be much better if other approaches to the study of negation, say, the discourse–pragmatic (see e.g., Koike 1994; Hidalgo Downing 2000), were also mentioned. Following this new introduction are two appendices, where errata, reviews, and book notices of the first edition are listed. Horn also provides a supplementary bibliography to track down the work done after the original release of his work. Of course, given the current enthusiasm in the study of negation, it is not surprising that this bibliography is extensive but not exhaustive and many more titles can be added to this list: Apothéloz et al. (1993), Iwata (1998), Jack et al. (2001), Ladusaw (1996), Meisel (1997), and Miestamo (1999, 2000), to name just a few. In point of fact, this confirms once again that negation occupies a doubtless central position in human language studies. In November 2001, the *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* made a call for papers for a special issue devoted to negation. And more recently, the *Journal of Pragmatics* devoted two issues (Volume 34, issues 10–11) to "tap[ping] a cross-section of register, linguistic, and cultural factors which influence how speakers vary their use of negatives" (Yaeger-Dror 2002:1334).

REFERENCES

Apothéloz, Denis, Pierre-Yves Brandt, and Gustavo Quiroz. 1993. The function of negation in argumentation. *Journal of Pragmatics* 19:23–38.

Carston, Robyn. 1996. Metalinguistic negation and echoic use. *Journal of Pragmatics* 25:309–330.

Hidalgo Downing, Laura. 2000. *Negation, text world, and discourse: The pragmatics of fiction*. Stamford, Connecticut: Ablex.

Iwata, Seizi. 1998. Some extensions of the echoic analysis of metalinguistic negation. *Lingua* 105:49–65.

Jack, Hoeksema, Hotze Rullmann, Victor Sanchez-Valeria, and Ton van der Wouden, eds. 2001. *Perspectives on negation and polarity items*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Koike, Dale. 1994. Negation in Spanish and English suggestions and requests: Mitigating effects? *Journal of Pragmatics* 21:513–526.

Ladusaw, William A. 1996. Negation and polarity items. In *The handbook of contemporary semantic thoery*, ed. Shalom Lappin, 321–341. Oxford: Blackwell.

Meisel, J.M. 1997. The acquisition of the syntax of negation in French and German: Contrasting first and second language development. *Second Language Research* 13:227–263.

Miestamo, Matti. 1999. Negation. In *Handbook of pragmatics 1999 installment*, ed. Jef Verschueren, Jan-Ola Östman, Jan Blommaert, and Chris Bulcaen, 1–25. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Miestamo, Matti. 2000. Toward a typology of standard negation. *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 23:65–88.

Noh, Eun-Ju. 2000. *Metarepresentation: A relevance-theory approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Yaeger-Dror, Malcah. 2002. Introduction. *Journal of Pragmatics* 34:1333–1343.