

SOME REMARKS ABOUT THE PRAGMATICS OF NEGATION IN POLISH AND ENGLISH*

MARIA KAWIŃSKA

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

1.1. There are several syntactic differences between negation in Polish and in English. The most basic one is that Polish is a language of multiple negation, i.e. it admits of up to six negation markers in a simple sentence, while sentences of standard English can have only one. The cases of sentences with double negation have a fully positive meaning, as in:

1. A node of any kind cannot dominate nothing.
2. No one did nothing last night.
3. Not all the boys didn't leave.

If there is a quantitative negator in a Polish sentence (*nikt, nic, nigdy, nigdzie*,) the verb is automatically assigned a negative particle too. This is not true for English. Compare:

4. *Nikt nie* podlał mojego ulubionego kaktusa.
Nobody watered my favourite cactus.
5. *Nikt nic nie* zrozumiał z ostatniego referatu.
Nobody understood anything from the last paper.
6. Jestem gotowa przysiąc nawet przed sądem, że *nikt nigdy nikomu niczego nigdzie nie* szmuglował.
I am ready to swear to that even in court that *no one* has ever smuggled anything anywhere to anybody.

1.2. Let us now compare the two languages from the point of view of negative assertion as a speech act. Consider the following examples:

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7. A: Karol nie napisał referatu na konferencję.
Charles didn't write a paper for the conference.
B: A co, miał napisać? Nic o tym nie wiedziałem.
Oh, I didn't know he was supposed to write one.
8. A: Chyba jednak nie rzucę pracy i nie wyprowadzę się do Gdyni.
I guess I won't quit my job and move to Gdynia after all.
B: Czy chcesz przez to powiedzieć, że miałaś taki zamiar?
Do you mean to say that you intended to do so?
9. A: Uważam, że malowanie pokoju na różowo nie jest najlepszym pomysłem.
I think that painting the room pink is not the best idea.
B: Źle mnie zrozumiałaś. Różowy ma być tylko sufit.
You misunderstood me. Only the ceiling is going to be pink.
10. A: BARBARA na pewno nie podlała mojego kaktusa.¹
BARBARA certainly didn't water my cactus.
B: A czy ktoś twierdzi, że to ona?
Why, does anyone insist it was her?
11. A: Przecież to wcale nie jest ZIELONY samochód.
But it isn't a GREEN car.
B: Chcesz powiedzieć, że nie rozróżniam kolorów?
Are you implying that I can't distinguish colours?

As can be seen from the above fragments of discourse, for negative sentences to be used felicitously they must be uttered in a context in which corresponding affirmative propositions have already been discussed, mentioned or implied, or in which the speaker assumes that the hearer, mistakenly, believes in (and thus is familiar with) the corresponding affirmative. To quote Leech (1974: 319), "one doesn't bother to negate an assertion unless someone has or might have a reason to imagine it is true". If this requirement is not met, the hearer may react like B, implicitly or explicitly informing the speaker that he overestimated his knowledge of the facts (examples 7 and 8) or was mistaken in the assumption of his beliefs (examples 9 and 10).

This assumed knowledge belongs to a Pragmatic Universe of Discourse (the term used by Ruth Kempson 1975), which can be defined, informally, as a set of propositions the speaker and the hearer believe in and which they

¹ In negative sentences contrastive stress, "the phonetic marker of focus" (Jackendoff 1972: 272), helps to narrow down the scope of negation. While in sentences with normal stress (the intonation centre placed on the final lexical item) the scope is indeterminate, in sentences with contrastive stress it is restricted to the focused item or the phrase containing it.

know they share. To make negative assertion a felicitous speech act, the Pragmatic Universe of Discourse will have to contain not only the presuppositions (=the speaker's assumptions of what the hearer knows) that make the corresponding affirmative felicitous, but also the affirmative itself. In other words, negative sentences are presuppositionally more complex (marked) than the corresponding affirmative.

1.3. An obvious consequence follows from the fact that most of the communicative contents expressed by negative sentences is already a part of the Pragmatic Universe of Discourse, the new communicative contribution of negative assertion being the denial by the speaker of the hearer's beliefs.² This consequence is a greater amount of definiteness in negative sentences than in corresponding affirmatives. "Negative sentences are not used in discourse to introduce new arguments (i.e. indefinites), but rather are used in contexts in which the referential arguments have already been introduced in the preceding context, and are therefore referred to in the negative as definite" (Givón 1975: 71). If they are indefinite, the most natural interpretation is that they are non-referential, i.e. have no referent.³ Compare:

² There is a class of negatives whose function is not the speaker's denial of the hearer's beliefs, but rather the expression of the speaker's attitude towards the content of his utterance. Consider the following examples:

- i. Oni nie śpiewali tej piosenki, oni ją wyli!
They didn't sing the song, they yelled it!
- ii. Adam nie zjadł tej kanapki, on ją pożarł.
Adam didn't eat the sandwich, he devoured it.
- iii. To nie pada, to leje!
It isn't raining, it's pouring!

The corresponding affirmative must have already been implied and both participants of the discourse essentially believe it (they did sing the song, Adam did eat the sandwich, and it is raining). The speaker only objects to the inappropriate strength of the verb used.

³ Jackendoff's (1972) interpretation of 'non-referential' as 'having no identifiable referent' does not seem to be precise enough. While it is true for 12b, 13b, 14a and 15a, it may also happen to be difficult to identify the referent of a referential NP. On the basis of its identifiability in indefinite referential NPs, Polish makes a deictic distinction between the determiners *jakiś* and *pewien*. The former may imply that the speaker finds it hard or impossible to identify the existing referent of an NP (cf. examples 16 and 17), and the latter is used when the referent is perfectly identifiable to the speaker but not (the speaker assumes) to the hearer, or when the speaker wants its identity to be kept secret from the hearer. Compare:

- iv. Zgłosił się do mnie wczoraj pewien/?jakiś student — nazwiska ci nie podaje, bo i tak go nie znasz — i poprosił, żebym...
A certain student came to see me yesterday — I don't give you his name because you don't know him anyway — and asked me to...

- 12a. Konferencja nie była specjalnie udana.
The conference wasn't particularly successful.
- b. Jak dotąd, żadna konferencja nie była specjalnie udana.
So far no conference has been particularly successful.
- c. ?Jakaś konferencja nie była specjalnie udana.
?A/some conference wasn't particularly successful.
- 13a. Ten student nie zjawil się jednak na kolokwium.
That student didn't turn up for the colloquium after all.
- b. Żaden student/nikt nie zjawil się na kolokwium.
No student/nobody turned up for the colloquium.
- c. ?Jakiś student nie zjawil się na kolokwium.
?A student didn't turn up for the colloquium.
- 14a. Nie znam żadnego Lakoffa.
I don't know any Lakoff.
- b. ?Nie znam jakiegoś Lakoffa.
? I don't know some Lakoff.
- 15a. Nikt niczego nie pił wczorajszej nocy.
Nobody drank anything last night.
- b. ? Ktoś niczego nie pił wczorajszej nocy.
? Somebody didn't drink anything last night.
- c. ? Ktoś czegoś nie pił wczorajszej nocy.
? Somebody didn't drink something last night.
- d. ? Nikt czegoś nie pił wczorajszej nocy.
? Nobody drank something last night.
- 1.3.1. As can be observed, in negative sentences definite referential NPs and indefinite non-referential NPs sound most natural, i.e. it is easy to find a proper context for them. This is not to say, however, that indefinite referential NPs (as in 12c, 13c, 14b or 15b, c and d) are excluded from negative sentences altogether. Finding a context for them is always possible, although perhaps not so obvious as with the two other types of NPs. Referentiality will determine the choice of *ktoś/coś* forms rather than their non-referential counterparts *nikt/nic* in Polish, and *some-* forms rather than *any-* forms in English. Compare:
16. Jakaś konferencja nie była specjalnie udana, chyba ta w Białowieży, czy może w Tleniu, już nie pamiętam.
A conference wasn't particularly successful, I think it was the one in Białowieża, or maybe in Tleń, I can't remember now.
17. Jakiś student/ktoś nie zjawil się na kolokwium: miało ich być trzy-

nastu, a przepytalam tylko dwunastu.

A student/somebody didn't turn up for the colloquium: there were to be thirteen of them and I examined only twelve.

18. A: O co była ta cała awantura?
What was all this fuss about?
B: Otóż wyszło na jaw, że nie znam jakiegoś Lakoffa, którego ponoć powinnam znać, bo to wybitny lingwista.
Well, it turned out that I don't know some Lakoff, whom it seems I am supposed to know because he is an eminent linguist.
19. Ktoś niczego nie pił wczorajszej nocy; zdaje mi się, że profesor Kowalski.
Somebody didn't drink anything last night; I think it was professor Smith.
20. Ktoś czegoś nie pił wczorajszej nocy, i nawet wiem kto i czego, ale nie powiem.
Somebody didn't drink something last night, and I even know who didn't drink what, but I won't tell.
21. Nikt czegoś nie pił wczorajszej nocy, ale nie pamiętam, czy to była whisky czy mleko.
Nobody drank something last night, but I can't remember if it was whisky or milk.

2.1. There are negative sentences which constitute counter-examples to the claim that for these sentences to be used felicitously their corresponding affirmatives must have been previously mentioned. Notice the strangeness of the following exchange:

22. A: Mój brat nie zdał wczoraj egzaminu.
My brother didn't pass/failed an exam yesterday.
B: O, a miał go zdać/nie oblać?
Oh, was he supposed to pass one/it?

in a situation where B knows A has a brother who is a student, or

23. A: Ted nie poszedł wczoraj do pracy.
Ted didn't go to work yesterday.
B: A miał pójść?

Oh, was he supposed to?

where B knows that Ted has a job, or

24. A: Kryśka nie zjadła wczoraj śniadania.

Christine didn't eat her breakfast yesterday.

B: Zaraz, chwileczkę, a miała zjeść?

Wait a minute, was she supposed to?

The A sentences negate actions whose performance is a *norm* in usual circumstances. Thus, the automatic consequence of being a student is, among other things, taking exams and, preferably, passing them; in the same way being a working man entails going to work. Eating breakfast is also a norm, at least in some parts of the world. This type of information belongs to the discourse participants' knowledge of the world, and is not specific to a particular speech situation.

2.2. Another group of negative sentences devoid of the postulated more complex presuppositional background consists of *non-informative* sentences. With such sentences the speaker introduces into a conversation a fact which is known to the hearer and which he knows the hearer knows; they both know that neither of them tends to believe in the corresponding affirmative. Like affirmative non-informative sentences, negative sentences of this type can be put to a lot of uses. They can function as put-downs, admonitions, expressions of the speaker's feelings, arguments in intellectual or political disputes, and so on. For example:

25. Pan nie jest tu szefem, panie Kowalski.

You are not the boss here, Mr Smith.

26. To nie jest przyjęcie towarzyskie, tylko poważna konferencja językoznawcza.

This isn't a party, this is a serious linguistic conference.

27. Strasznie dawno cię nie widziałam!

I haven't seen you for ages!

28. Że też nic się nigdy nie dzieje normalnie w tym instytucie!

Nothing is ever going on normally in this institute!

29. Wszyscy zgadzamy się, że faktywność nie jest cechą syntaktyczną czasowników. Czy z tego jednak wynika, że ...

We all agree that factivity is not a syntactic feature of verbs. Does it follow, however, that ...

3. To sum up, the above informal presentation shows that, in spite of differences on the syntactic level, negation in both Polish and English seems to have the same pragmatic characteristics. With the exception of non-informative sentences and those negating normative actions, negatives are typically uttered in a context where the corresponding affirmatives have

already been mentioned or where the speaker assumes, whether correctly or not, that the hearer believes they are true. This may well turn out to be a universal pragmatic feature of negation in natural language.

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