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Negation in Moroccan Arabic: A semantico-pragmatic approach

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ملخص

يعتبر النفي (negation)، كظاهرة لسانية، نقطة تقاطع مجالات التركيب (santax)، والدلالة/ المنطق (samantics/ logic)، والتداوليات (pragmatics). وإذ ركزت معظم الدراسات وخصوصا تلك المتعلقة بالنفي في اللغة العربية المغربية، مثل (Benmamoun 1995,2006,2008) و (Ouhalla 1993a,b,1999,2002)، على الجانب التركيبي (syntactic) للنفي في محاولة لتفسيره بالاعتماد على البناء المفاهيمي للنظرية التوليدية، فإن مهمتنا في هذه المقالة ستكون تمهيدا لمحاولة تفسير بعض الظواهر المرتبطة بالنفي في اللغة العربية المغربية باعتماد مقاربة تدمج بين ما هو دلالي/ منطقي و ما هو تداولي. و تحقيقا لهذه الغاية، سوف نقترح فرضية عمل، وهي "فرضية النفي المنفصل" (SNH)، التي سنبرهن على كفايتها التفسيرية في تناول بعض الظواهر الناشئة عن تفاعل النفي مع الخصوصية (Specificity)، ونية المتحدث (Speaker's intention)، والافتراض المسبق (presupposition).

الكلمات المفتاحية: النفي، العوامل المنطقية (logical operators)، الخصوصية، القوة الخطابية (illocutionary force)، الافتراض المسبق.

Résumé

La négation est un phénomène qui est le point de convergence de la syntaxe, de la sémantique / logique et de la pragmatique. La plupart des études, du moins celles qui concernent l'arabe marocain (MA), Benmamoun (1995, 2006, 2008), Ouhalla (1993a, b, 1999, 2002) entre autres, se sont concentrées sur la facette syntaxique de la négation, essayant d'en rendre compte en termes de technologie syntaxique qui a été développée au fil des ans dans le paradigme génératif. Ce sera notre tâche dans cet article d'initier une tentative de rendre compte des différents phénomènes de négation en (MA) en utilisant une approche qui intègre la sémantique, la logique et la pragmatique. À cette fin, nous proposerons une hypothèse de travail, à savoir, «l'hypothèse de la négation scindée» (SNH) qui sera démontrée pour expliquer et rendre compte de manière adéquate certains des phénomènes émanant de l'interaction de la négation avec la spécificité, l'intention du locuteur et la présupposition.

Mots-clés: négation, opérateurs logiques, spécificité, force illocutoire, présupposition
Abstract

Negation is a phenomenon that is the point of convergence of syntax, semantics/logic, and pragmatics. Most studies, at least those concerned with Moroccan Arabic (MA)¹, Benmamoun (1995, 2006, 2008), Ouhalla (1993a,b, 1999, 2002) among others, have focused on the syntactic facet of negation, trying to account for it in terms of the syntactic technology that has been developed over the years within the generative paradigm. It will be our task in this article to initiate an attempt to account for the various phenomena of negation in (MA) using an approach that integrates semantics, logic and pragmatics. To this end, we will propose a working hypothesis, namely, “the split negation hypothesis” (SNH) that will be demonstrated to adequately explain and account for some of the phenomena emanating from the interaction of negation with specificity, speaker’s intention, and presupposition.

Keywords: negation, logical operators, specificity, illocutionary force, presupposition

1. Introduction

In this article, it will be our task to demonstrate that to adequately account for the phenomenon of negation we have to draw on conceptual tools, such as logical operator, predicate type, specificity, illocutionary force, and presupposition, that pertain to three scientific fields of study, viz, logic, semantics, and pragmatics. With this in mind, we will empirically prove that negation in (MA) is a half-semantic-half-logical phenomenon, and negative polarity items (NPIs) along with the negative enclitic “/not” should be considered logical operators that give a negative illocutionary force to a sentence where the semantic negative element “ma / not” is involved. We will call this view “the split negation hypothesis” (SNH). The latter will prove to be helpful to understand and account for three interesting phenomena pertaining to negation in (MA).

First, it will be demonstrated that (SNH) explains why sensitivity to predicate type or the (in)indefiniteness of the object arises when logical operators such as NPIs and “/not” are introduced. It will, in this respect, be demonstrated that specificity and negative illocutionary force are linked. Second, faced with the different readings of negative constructions which are based on the speaker's intention, (SNH) will be shown to be useful in deciding which reading is associated with negative illocutionary force.

¹ Since (MA) varies from region to region, I will in this article draw on the variety that I am familiar with, namely the dialect spoken in the region of Marrakech.

Third, given the different patterns that negative constructions in (MA) map into, (SNH) will be proven to elucidate the fact that the only patterns securing a negative illocutionary force are the ones that do not involve a presupposition.

2. Patterns of negation in Moroccan Arabic¹

Negation constructions in (MA) come in different patterns as shown in (1).

(1) a $ma + X$

b $ma + X + \text{f}$

c $ma + \text{f}i + X$

d $NPI + ma + X$

In (1), “ma” is the equivalent of “not” in English. “X” can be either a verb or an adjective. “f(i)” is a negation enclitic. “NPI” is a negative polarity item like “hætta../ any..”. The paradigm in (2-5) provides examples for each of the patterns in (1).

(2) $ma \text{ } \text{f}\text{end-i} \text{ } \text{xat}\text{ər}$

not have-I mood “I am not in the mood”

(3) $ma \text{ } \text{ʒa-f} \text{ } \text{Omar} \text{ } \text{lbar}\text{əh}$

not came-neg Omar yesterday “Omar didn’t come yesterday”

(4) $\text{hadi} \text{ } \text{ma-f}i \text{ } \text{l-m}\text{ər}ra \text{ } \text{lluw}la$

this not-neg the- time the-first “ This is not the first time”

(5) $\text{hætta} \text{ } \text{wah}\text{əd} \text{ } \text{ma} \text{ } \text{x}dem \text{ } \text{l}j\text{oum} \text{ } \text{any one} \text{ } \text{not} \text{ } \text{work} \text{ } \text{today}$

“No one has worked today”

The pattern in (1a), exemplified by (2), though involving the negation marker “ma/not”, is used to express an intention other than negation. In other words, the illocutionary force of utterances having the pattern in (1a) is not necessarily that of negation as it may have various illocutionary forces depending on the context and the intention of the speaker, as we will discuss later in this article.

The pattern in (1b) exemplified by (3) is the common and unmarked way to express negation. I will call it the canonical pattern for negation constructions. This pattern involves two main elements “ma/not” and the

¹ For a detailed typology of negation across languages, See Östen (2010).

enclitic "ʃ / neg ". This may seem to be a case of double negation, but we will show later that the co-occurrence of the two elements is justified on semantic, logical, and pragmatic grounds.

As for the pattern in (1c), exemplified by (4), it is characterized by two features. First, the negative elements “ma/not” and “ʃi/neg” are not separated as is the case in the other patterns, but they are concatenated and, thus, form a single unit. Second, such formed unit immediately precedes the category that is intended to be the focus of negation. As it will be demonstrated later in this article this pattern is special in that it functions to negate a presupposition either expressed or nuanced.

The pattern in (1d), exemplified by (5), involves two negative elements, viz, NPI “ħætta../ any..” and “ma/not”. Such a pattern is characterized by the fact that it cannot tolerate other negative elements, like the negative enclitic “ʃi/neg”, as it will be demonstrated and accounted for later in this article. The fact that an NPI is involved makes the pattern have the pragmatic function to negate an expectation expressed or emanating from the context.

3. Negation and logical operators: The Split Negation Hypothesis

To start with, we can posit that negation is a half-semantic-half-logical phenomenon. Let us call this view “the Split Negation Hypothesis” (SNH). In (MA) the negation marker “ma” (not) is representing the semantic half, while negative polarity items (NPIs) together with the particle “ʃ(i)/neg” represent the logical half. For a sentence to be interpreted as involving negation, both elements should be present. In the rest of this section, we will empirically prove the viability of our hypothesis and demonstrate that it is perfectly in harmony with our view that considers negation as the intersection of syntax, logic, semantics, and pragmatics.

Just as (NPIs) and the particle “ʃ/neg” cannot occur without the negative marker “ma” as in (6), in certain contexts, as in (7), “ma” seems to require the presence of “ʃ/neg” and (NPI).

(6) a* ħætta wahəd ʒa

Any one came

* “Anybody came”

b* omar ʒa-ʃ

omar came-neg

* “Omar not came”

(7) a Ali ma tlaqa mʃa Omar ? (question)

Ali not met with Omar
 “Didn’t Ali meet Omar?”
 b Ali ma tlaqa-ʃ mʃa Omar
 Ali not met-neg with Omar
 “Ali didn’t meet Omar”
 c Ali ma tlaqa mʃa hətta wahəd
 Ali not met with anybody
 “Ali didn’t meet anyone”

Notice that (7a) is easily understood as a question rather than a negative statement. It is only when the negative particle “ʃ/neg” and the (NPI) “hətta” are added, as in (7b) and (7c) respectively, that the negative interpretation obtains.

It becomes clear that the insertion of the logical negative markers “ʃ/neg” and NPI is due to purely interpretive reasons¹. In other words, the negative logical markers are means to indicate that the illocutionary force of the utterance is negation and not something else. This becomes even more evident when we consider the examples in (8) and (9).

(8) a ma ʃəfti Ali not saw-you Ali
 “Didn’t you see Ali”
 b ma ʃəfti-ʃ Ali not saw-you-neg Ali
 “you didn’t see Ali”
 (9) a ma ʔana bbak ma nta wəldi
 not I father-your not you son-my
 “I am not your father and you are not my son”
 b ma-ʃi ʔana bbak w ma-ʃi nta wəldi
 not-neg I father-your and not-neg you son-my
 “I am not your father and you are not my son”

In (8a) and (9a) we notice that the statements even if they involve what I call the semantic negation marker “ma”, their logical import is not necessarily negation. (8a) can be used to start a conversation about “Ali”; while (9a) is used to express the extreme anger of a father toward their son. On hearing (8a), the listener would not understand it to mean that he did not see “Ali”, as is the case in (8b), but rather he would readily interpret it as a

¹ See Ouhalla (2002) for an alternative view concerning the status of the enclitic “ʃ”. As for the negative polarity items in (MA), see Benmamoun (2006).

conversation starter about “Ali”. As for (9a), the listener would interpret it as a strategy for venting anger rather than carrying the information that denies fatherhood, as in (9b).

It can, thus, be asserted that the presence of the logical negation markers “/neg” and NPIs functions to secure a “negation” import for a statement, and hence clarify an interpretive ambiguity as to the illocutionary force to be associated with the statement in question.

3.1 Another evidence in favor of SNH

Consider the examples in (10) and (11)

(10) a jak ma dar ĩ ĥaʒa yes/no particle not did-he something
 “he did nothing, didn’t he?”

b jak ma dar ĥatta ĥaʒa yes/no particle not did-he anything
 “Isn’t it true that he didn’t do anything?”

(11) a jak ma mʃa Ali yes/no particle not left Ali
 “Ali didn’t leave, did he?”

b jak ma mʃa-ʃ Ali yes/no particle not left-neg Ali
 “Isn’t it true that Ali didn’t leave?”

In both (10) and (11) the semantic-negation marker “ma” is present, but its behavior in the “a” examples differs from that in the “b” ones. In (10a) and (11a) only “ma”, the semantic-negation marker, is involved; while in (10b) and (11b) both “ma” and the logical-negation makers “/neg” and the (NPI) “ĥatta” are present. The difference between the “a” examples and the “b” ones in (10) and (11), respectively, is the intention of the speaker. In (10a) and (11a), where only the marker “ma” is involved, the speaker is inquiring about a piece of information; while in (10b) and (11b), where “ma” together with logical-negation markers are involved, the speaker is making a negative statement and asking for confirmation.

Despite its occurrence in all the examples above, “ma/not” is interpreted as a negation element only in the “b” of (10) and (11), respectively. This leads us to state that “ma” is dependent on other elements like “/neg” and (NPIs) when it comes to negation. This in turn provides support to our hypothesis that in Moroccan Arabic negation is better understood as a split phenomenon, where different constituents, in this case “ma/not”, “/neg”, and (NPIs), contribute to the negative interpretation.

Two questions impose themselves at this stage of the analysis, namely, if “ma/not” cannot be interpreted as a negative element in (10a) and

(11a), respectively, then what is its function in both cases? And if “ma/not” needs other elements, like “f/neg” and NPIs, as in (10b) and (11b), respectively, to be interpreted as a negative element, then what is its exact status in both examples?

To answer the questions above, we can assume that “ma/not” is an element having quantificational force whose nature depends on other elements in the structure. So, in (10a) and (11a) “ma/not” contributes to the indefiniteness of the statements. This means that “ma/not” functions as an element having indefinite quantificational force. The latter is enhanced by the existence of the indefinite positive polarity item “ʃihaza /something” in (10a) or by the indefinite yes/no question marker “jak”, as in (10a) and (11a). As far as the status of “ma/not” in (10b) and (11b) is concerned, we can build on what we have just said and assume that “ma/not”, having a neutral quantificational force, gets a negative quantificational force thanks to the occurrence of negative quantifiers “hotta” and “f/neg” in (10b) and (11b), respectively.

In the light of the analysis above, it has become clear that the occurrence of “ma/not” is linked to the quantificational reading of the sentence. Meaning that the quantificational force of “ma/neg” depends on the kind of quantificational elements co-occurring with it in the same sentence¹. Hence, “ma/neg” can have either indefiniteness force, as in (10a) and (11a) where positive indefinite quantifiers are involved or have negative quantificational force as in (10b) and (11b) where negative quantifiers occur.

4. Negation, predicate type, and specificity

In this section, we will demonstrate that the interpretation of negative sentences is affected by semantic factors, namely predicate type and specificity. We will show how these two factors interact with our SNH to

¹ Concerning the licensing relation holding between the negative marker “ma” and the logical negation markers “f” and NPIs, we can assume that “ma” has unvalued features that should be valued during the derivation. Such a procedure should respect locality conditions (Chomsky 2013). These require that valuation should take place within the same phase (see Chomsky 2008). This means that “ma” and its valuer must be in the same phase for the features in question to be valued. This captures a generalization missed by previous accounts, see Ouhalla (2002) and Benmamoun (2006), namely that licensing reduces to feature valueing. This means that the relation holding between “ma” and its valuers, viz, “f” and NPIs, instead of conceiving it to be constrained by three different structural configurations, viz, C-command, Spec-head, and head –complement, is constrained by one uniform condition, namely licensing obtains within the same phase.

adequately account for cases involving negation represented by the following paradigm.

(12) a Ali bȚa bənt Ali loves a girl

“Ali loves a girl”

B Ali ma bȚa-f bənt Ali not love-neg a girl

“Ali does not love a girl”

(13) a gaŝ drari bȚaw bənt all boys love a girl

“All the boys love a girl”

b gaŝ drari ma bȚaw-f bənt all boys not love-neg a girl

“All the boys do not love a girl”

(14) a gaŝ drari ʒabu bisəklit all boys brought a bicycle

“All the boys brought a bicycle”

b gaŝ drari ma ʒabu-f * bisəklit / l-bisəklit all boys not brought-neg a bicycle / the bicycle

“All the boys didn’t bring a bicycle / the bicycle”

(15) a gaŝ drari qraw ktab all boys read a book

“All the boys read a book”

b gaŝ drari ma qraw-f * ktab / l-ktab / ʃi-ktab all boys not read-neg a book / the book / some book

“All the boys didn’t read a book / the book / a certain book”

c hətta dərri ma qra * ktab / l-ktab / ʃi-tab any boy not read a book / the book / some book

“Not any boy read a book / the book / some book”

(16) a nnas kamlin ʕəndhum təllaʒa people all have a refrigerator

“Everyone has a refrigerator”

b hətta waħəd ma ʕəndu !! təllaʒa / ttəllaʒa anyone not have a refrigerator / the refrigerator

“No one has a refrigerator / the refrigerator”

(17) a ma ʕəndi xaṭər / ʔonobil not have-I mood / a car

“I don’t have mood / a car”

b* ma ʕəndi-f xaṭər / ʔonobil not have-I-neg mood / a car

“I don’t have mood / a car”

c ma ʕəndi-ʃ l- xaʔər / ʔənobil not have-I-neg the mood / the car

“I don’t have the mood / the car”

(18) a kulʃi rəbħ ʔənobil everyone won a car

“everyone won a car”

b hətta waħəd ma rəbħ ʔənobil / !! ʔənobil anyone not won a car / the car

“No one won a car / the car”

c ddrari ma rəbħu-ʃ ʔənobil / * ʔənobil the boys not won-neg a car / the car

"The boys didn't win a car / the car"

From the paradigm (12-18), we notice that verbs become sensitive to (in) definiteness¹ once negation is involved. Certain negated verbs seem to require definite complements while others opt for indefinite ones. The interesting thing is that this sensitivity to (in) definiteness arises only when logical-negation markers “ʃ” and NPIs are present. How can this state of affairs be accounted for?

As a first step toward answering the foregoing question, we can make the observation that there may be a link between the sensitivity of negated verbs to indefinite complements and the negative reading of the sentence. Two possible explanations can be offered. Being a quantifier, the indefinite should take scope and the existence of negation markers just blocks such an option, leaving the quantifier unable to bind a variable and this gives rise to vacuous quantification. Alternatively, the co-occurrence of negated verbs and indefinite complements leads to counter-intuitive or illogical reading, which may not be allowed at LF interface.

This behavior on the part of negated verbs in MA can be elucidated only if we focus on the kind of verbs involved. In other words, some verbs tolerate only collective reading and others only the distributive, while the third category of verbs seems to tolerate both readings (see Diesing 1992). However, once negation is involved verbs become sensitive to the readings they normally associate with.

In addition to the two observations above, we can point out the fact that in negative constructions in (MA), NPIs and the negative enclitic

¹ See Diesing (1992) for Indefinites and Penka (2011; 2012) for negative indefinites

“/neg” are in complementary distribution with indefinite complements as the examples (14b, 15b, 15d, 17b) show. This of course cannot be explained in terms of licensing since the latter involves only “ma” and other negative elements in the construction and indefinites as such are not concerned with such a relationship. An explanation is therefore required.

We said earlier that both NPIs and the negative enclitic “/neg” represent the logical side in a negative construction. As such, they add to the specificity of the sentence since logically one cannot negate something not specific. This explains why the two negators cannot co-occur with indefinites. The latter being not specific cannot logically come under the scope of the logical-negation markers. Note however that “ma/not” can co-occur with indefinites as attested by (17a). This provides support for our claim that “ma/not” is a semantic-negation marker and as such it lacks logical negative import, which permits it to tolerate the existence of an indefinite in the same construction.

5. Negation and intention

We are left with cases (12b, 13b, 18b, 18c) where the negative elements “ma/not”, the enclitic “/neg”, and the NPI happen to tolerate an indefinite in the same construction. To account for such cases, we have to distinguish between three types of negative constructions, namely, contrast-intended negation, denial-intended negation, and factual/logical-intended negation. Such a distinction has as a basis the intention of the speaker.

Contrast-intended negation is used when the speaker wants to emphasize something. Such an emphasis is achieved by contrasting two things by means of negating one of them while implicitly affirming the other. Denial-intended negation is used when the speaker wants to show his reaction to something said or presupposed. In this case, negation is accompanied by a rising tone and stress falls on the intended element. Factual/logical-intended negation is used when the speaker makes a statement about a state of affairs that happens to be in the form “not A”. This type of negation is the one where there is a reference to truth conditions.

Returning to our cases above, we notice that (12b) and (13b) are instances of contrast-intended negation. The speaker wants to emphasize the fact that “Ali” wants a mature woman and he does so by negating the thing with which “a mature woman” is contrasted, namely, “a girl”. So “bənt”/girl in (12b) and (13b) is meant to represent a specific type of females rather than a non-specific female. By acquiring specificity in like manner, the complement “bənt/girl” can fall under the scope of the logical negation operator “/neg”, which explains why the two elements co-occur in the same construction.

In (18b) and (18c), we notice that the indefinite “*ṭonobil/a car*” co-occurs with the NPI “*ḥætta*” and the enclitic “*ǰ/neg*”, respectively. As far as (18b) is concerned, it represents the common manner to deny what is stated in constructions like (18a). The NPI “*ḥætta waḥəd /anyone*” is used to react to a statement or a presupposition involving the quantifier “*kulǰi/everyone*”. Since the two constructions are in a way related, they form a mini context. So in (18b) the complement “*ṭonobil/a car*” refers, in fact, to the car in (18a), and within this mini context it becomes specific. This acquired specificity on the part of the complement “*ṭonobil/a car*” makes it possible for the latter to fall under the scope of the logical negation marker “*ḥætta..*”, which accounts for the co-existence of the two elements in the same sentence.

Concerning (18c), The co-occurrence of the indefinite “*ṭonobil /a car*” with the logical negation marker “*ǰ*” resembles the case in (12b). This means that (18c) is an instance of contrast-intended negation. The speaker may want to emphasize that “*ḍrari/ the boys*” won a means of transport other than “*ṭonobil/a car*”. So the speaker negates “*ṭonobil/ a car*” as the means of transport against which motorbikes and bicycles could be contrasted. In (18c), therefore, “*ṭonobil/a car*” is meant to represent a specific means of transportation rather than a non-specific car. Such specificity on the part of “*ṭonobil/ a car*” enables it to come under the scope of the logical negation marker “*ǰ/neg*”, hence accounting for the co-occurrence of the two elements in the same construction.

6. Negation and presupposition: dependent / independent reading

In this section, I will account for the pattern “*ma + ǰi + X*” that I have mentioned earlier in this article. I will show that this pattern is best appreciated if we draw on the pragmatic notion of “presupposition” and show that such a pattern is more like the contrast-intended negation than the pure logical-intended negation. Let’s consider the following paradigm

- (19) a *had ddar ǰdida*
 this house new
 “*This house is new*”
- b *had ddar ma-ǰi ǰdida*
 this house not-neg new
 “*This house is not new*”
- c *had ddar ma ǰdida-ǰ*
 this house not new-neg

“This house is not new”

(20) a Ali ma-ʃi ʃra ʔonobil

Ali not-neg bought a car

“Ali didn’t buy a car”

b Ali ma-ʃi ʔonobil lli ʃra

Ali not-neg a car that bought-he

“It isn’t a car that Ali bought”

c Ali ma ʃra-ʃ ʔonobil

Ali not bought-he-neg a car

“Ali didn’t buy a car”

To account for negation in (19) and (20) a distinction should be made between dependent negative reading and independent negative one.

By “dependent negative reading” we mean that interpretation of the negative statement depends on something said before or a presupposition understated. By “independent negative reading” we mean that the interpretation of the negative statement does not relate to something previously said or a presupposition understated.

Another way to appreciate the distinction above is to understand the statements that have dependent negative reading as incomplete and their interpretation depends on another statement that should be added by the speaker. Statements that have independent negative reading, on the other hand, do not need any added statement and can thus be interpreted on their own.

The examples in (19b), (20a), and (20b) are instances of a dependent negative reading. This is because their interpretation cannot be appreciated unless a statement is added. (19b) can be understood as an introduction to something to be added afterwards, like “kima qulti/as you said” or “raha rawʃa/ it is fantastic”. The same can be said about (20a) and (20b) whose interpretation is related to to-be-added statements “rah kra-ha/ he rented it” and “rah ʃra kamijo/ he bought a truck”, respectively.

As far as (19c) and (20c) are concerned, they are instances of independent negative reading since both examples do not rely on the to-be-added statement to be interpreted. (19c) is readily understood to be an evaluation of the house in question. Likewise, (20c) is understood to be a piece of information about “Ali”.

One last observation is in order here. The examples in (19b), (20a), and (20b) involve clefting and the use of "ma-*fi*/not-neg". Given what we have said about the examples above, we conclude that "clefting+ ma-*fi*" makes the statement have a dependent negative reading. On the other hand, in (19c) and (20c) there is the canonical negation structure "ma + X + *ɟ*", and no clefting is involved. Bearing in mind what we said earlier about the two examples, we can conclude that the structure "ma + X + *ɟ*" guarantees an independent negative reading to a statement.

Conclusion

In this article, we have tried to empirically prove three claims about negation in (MA). First, that negation in (MA) is best conceived of as a half-semantic-half-logical phenomenon, which translates in our SNH according to which NPIs and the enclitic "*ɟ*/neg" are considered logical operators that ensure a negative illocutionary force. Second, that cases involving sensitivity to predicate type and the specificity of the object are linked to the negative illocutionary force which obtains only when logical operators such as NPIs and "*ɟ*/neg" are involved, in accordance with SNH. Third, that the concept of "presupposition" is crucial in treating cases of negation having the pattern like in (1c), which helps us conclude that only patterns (1b) and (1d), where logical operators are involved, secure a negative illocutionary force, in perfect harmony with our SNH.

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