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Syntactic and Semantic Variations in Negative Interrogatives: Contracted vs. Uncontracted Forms

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Abstract

This study investigates the forms and uses of negative interrogatives with auxiliary verb contractions in English, focusing on syntactic and semantic differences. Data was drawn from conversations in an English class at a university in Lhokseumawe, Indonesia, between a lecturer and students and students and students. The aim was to examine three types of negative interrogatives: Yes-No questions, negative rhetorical questions, and both marked (n't) and unmarked (not) forms. The research employs a descriptive method with a synchronic time frame, utilizing distributional analysis, including immediate constituent analysis and mark reading techniques, to categorize and analyze the data. The findings reveal that negative interrogatives involving auxiliary verbs exhibit positive and negative presuppositions, with adjectival negative interrogatives showing variations between contracted and uncontracted forms. Adverbial negative interrogatives were found across all three types, indicating their versatility in forming questions. The study highlights that the choice between 'not'

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and 'n't' affects the tone and emphasis of negative interrogatives, influencing the interpretation of responses. Contracted forms often carry a rhetorical or presumptive tone, while uncontracted forms are more formal and explicit. These variations show the importance of auxiliary verbs and negative markers in shaping the structure and meaning of negative interrogatives. This research contributes to the understanding of how negative interrogatives function in English, revealing the nuanced ways in which they impact communication and interpretation.

Keywords: Contraction, negative question, primary auxiliary.

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding interrogatives is crucial for exploring how languages manage negation and question formation. Negative interrogatives with auxiliary verbs are particularly noteworthy due to their complex relationship of syntactic and semantic features. The distinction between full forms like 'not' and contracted forms like 'n't' provides a valuable lens through which to examine these features. Such distinctions are essential for grasping how different languages structure negation and interrogative forms, which has significant implications for linguistic theory and language acquisition.

Studies on negative interrogatives with auxiliary verbs reveal sophisticated intricate patterns of acquisition and cross-linguistic differences. Interrogative verbs, especially in their negative forms, present unique morphological, syntactic, and semantic challenges, influencing how negation is processed and understood (Hagège, 2008). Cross-linguistic research highlights the complexity of negation, including the hierarchical positioning of negation, and the variation between internal and external negation (Thornton, 2020). These studies emphasize the diverse methods languages employ to express negation and formulate questions, reflecting the complexity of learning these linguistic features.

Research has examined various aspects of interrogatives and their responses, including syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Ginzburg and Sag (2001) explored the syntactic and contextual factors of interrogative constructions, while Espinal and Tubau (2019) analyzed fragment answers and response particles, focusing on syntactic structures and question-answer alignment. Raymond (2003) investigated the intersection of grammar and social organization in yes/no interrogatives, emphasizing the role of type-conforming responses in different contexts. However, there is limited research on the syntactic and semantic variations between full and contracted forms of negative interrogatives.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining both full and contracted negative interrogatives, such as 'not' and 'n't,' in various formal contexts. It investigates how these forms impact subject-verb and subject-auxiliary inversion, and how weak presuppositions in polar negative questions are affected by these variations. Additionally, the study explores the distinction between rhetorical and ordinary negative interrogatives, highlighting their differing interpretations and functions (Peters, 2008).

The research question guiding this study is: ‘How do different forms of negative interrogatives with auxiliary verb contractions affect the syntactic structure and semantic interpretation in English, particularly in terms of positive and negative presuppositions, rhetorical tone, and formality?’ By addressing these aspects, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the structure and semantics of negative interrogatives, contributing to a deeper understanding of their role in both verbal and non-verbal communication (Lincoln, 2000).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Interrogatives

Yes-no questions are a universal feature of natural languages, with cross-linguistic variations in their structure and answering patterns (Holmberg, 2014; Moskovsky & Libert, 2006). In English, yes-no questions typically involve subject-auxiliary inversion (Bylykbashi, 2023). The choice of answer (yes or no) to negative questions in English depends on the type of negation used in the question, with three distinct negations identified: n’t and two types of not (Holmberg, 2014). Both native and non-native English speakers show similarities in yes-no question production, such as preferring SVO word order and using intonation changes to indicate questions (Williams, 1990).

The yes-/no questions in English are constructed by speaking with a rising intonation and inverting the auxiliary ‘be’ or ‘have’ before the subject (Barnes, 2006). Although there is a tendency toward rising intonation, falling patterns are also common (Hedberg et al., 2017). According to Hedberg et al. (2017), the context might influence the choice of intonation, with decreasing tones frequently denoting questions that are not sincere. Rising tones are preferred in alternating discourse, but falling intonation is more common in subsequent queries (Harris, 1971). Negative interrogatives can appear in both contracted and uncontracted forms, with only the contracted form appearing initially as part of the operator. Uncontracted negative interrogatives placed after the subject are more formal than their contracted counterparts. These findings suggest that intonation patterns in English yes-no questions are more complex and context-dependent than traditionally assumed.

Various scholars have provided definitions of sentences. A sentence is fundamentally a grammatical unit, and the role of syntax is to describe its structure and thus define it. In English, sentences typically comprise a subject noun phrase and a verb phrase that acts as its predicate or complement (Aliyeva, 2016). A sentence has both deep and surface structures. This is introduced by Noam Chomsky, where the idea of surface and deep structures in language makes a distinction between a sentence’s more abstract grammatical linkages (deep structure) and its syntactic representation (surface structure) (Halliday, 1966; Stanlaw, 2020). Moreover, Greenbaum and Nelson (2002) classified sentences into declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory types.

Saeed (2018) defines an interrogative sentence as a type of sentence used to request information or confirmation. An interrogative sentence has a complete meaning and typically consists of at least a subject and a predicate. This sentence has a specific structure that allows it to express a question. Accordingly, interrogative

sentences have been studied from various linguistic perspectives. From a syntactic perspective, these structures and features include subject-auxiliary inversion and wh-phrases (Ginzburg & Sag, 2001; Grebenyova, 2012). Yes-no questions and informational inquiries are examples of interrogatives that are semantically analyzed in terms of their meaning and the kinds of answers they elicit (Hudson, 1975; Lindawati, 2017). The pragmatic dimension investigates the range of speech acts and purposes that interrogatives can fulfill, extending beyond the act of requesting information (Lindawati, 2017).

2.2 Negative Interrogatives

Negative interrogatives (NIs) are complex sentences that mix questions with negation, showing the speaker's bias and expectations. They usually ask for confirmation of something positive, even when there is evidence against it (Larrivée & Mari, 2022). NIs reflect uncertainty and are used when the speaker's belief is challenged by evidence from another source (Larrivée & Mari, 2022). In essence, negative interrogatives are linguistic tools that reveal a speaker's underlying assumptions and doubts, often seeking affirmation in the face of contradictory evidence. They play a crucial role in conveying uncertainty and challenging opposing viewpoints.

The discussion of negative interrogatives involves syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic analysis to understand their usage in various contexts.

1. Syntactic aspects of negative interrogatives: negative interrogatives begin with the terms 'why' or 'how,' and then they negate the question, as in 'Why don't you...?' This approach changes the question into an expression of stance by allowing speakers to voice opinions rather than just seeking information (Levillain, 2015). The structure may vary depending on the language, but the core purpose is to convey a question that also includes a negation element.
2. Semantic aspects of negative interrogatives: Semantically, negative interrogatives are used to express doubt, pose rhetorical questions, or highlight disagreement with a concept (Han, 2002). For instance, the question 'Can't you come with us?' expresses doubt or hope that the person should be able to join.
3. Pragmatic aspects of negative interrogatives: From a pragmatic perspective, negative interrogatives serve to sway opinions or convey astonishment (Voronkina, 2020). For example, 'Isn't it obvious?' might suggest that something should be clear to the listener.

For example, in the question, 'Don't you like ice cream?', the analysis from the syntax aspect shows that this question begins with the negative form 'don't' (from 'do'), followed by the subject 'you' and the predicate 'like ice cream.' Moreover, from the semantics aspect, the question expresses doubt or surprise regarding someone's preference for ice cream. Finally, from the pragmatics aspect, it shows that it may be used to provoke a response or express astonishment at someone's indifference to something generally liked.

Another example is: 'Can't you do better than that?' From this example, the syntactic aspect shows that the question starts with 'can't' (the negative form of 'can'), followed by the subject 'you' and the predicate 'do better than that.' From the semantics aspect, this question conveys doubt or the expectation that the person should be able

to perform better than what has been shown. Finally, from the pragmatics aspect, it is used to challenge or encourage someone to improve their performance or results.

These examples demonstrate how negative interrogatives are effectively utilized in everyday language to influence communication and clarify the meaning behind questions or statements. A detailed analysis of their structure, meaning, and function contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which language operates in various communicative contexts, as discussed in linguistic studies such as those by Hudson (1975), Ginzburg and Sag (2001), Han (2002), Levillain (2015) and Voronkina (2020).

2.3 Syntactic and Semantic Forms

The study of syntactic forms delves into the rules and principles governing sentence structure, word order, and the organization of phrases and clauses to produce grammatically correct sentences. According to [Carnie \(2013\)](#), syntactic theory explores several key concepts:

- **Sentence structure:** This involves the principles that dictate how words and phrases are systematically arranged to form coherent and grammatically valid sentences. Sentence structure encompasses various syntactic rules that ensure proper grammatical construction.
- **Word order:** Different languages have distinct rules for word order, such as the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) pattern prevalent in English. Understanding these patterns is crucial for analyzing how different languages construct sentences and convey meaning.
- **Use of phrases and clauses:** Phrases are groups of words functioning as single units within a sentence, while clauses consist of a subject and predicate. The syntactic analysis examines how these elements are combined to form complex sentences, contributing to the overall meaning and grammaticality of language.

Semantic theory, on the other hand, focuses on the meaning of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences within various linguistic contexts. [Saeed \(2018\)](#) highlights several important aspects of semantic theory:

- **Word meaning:** Semantics investigates both the denotative (literal) and connotative (associative) meanings of words. This involves understanding how words convey specific meanings and how these meanings can vary depending on context.
- **Meaning of phrases and clauses:** The meaning of phrases and clauses often extends beyond the individual words they contain. Semantic analysis explores how these larger units of language combine to convey more complex meanings within sentences.
- **Sentence meaning:** Sentences represent the most intricate linguistic units in terms of meaning, as their overall interpretation may not always align with the sum of their constituent parts. Semantics examines how sentence meaning is constructed from the interaction of words, phrases, and clauses.

Hence, the study of syntax and semantics is essential for comprehending how language structures and conveys meaning. Syntactic theory addresses sentence construction, word order, and the organization of phrases and clauses ([Carnie, 2013](#)), while semantic theory focuses on the interpretation of meanings at various linguistic levels ([Saeed, 2018](#)). Together, these theories offer a comprehensive framework for

analyzing how linguistic elements work in tandem to facilitate coherent and meaningful communication across different languages.

2.4 Yes-No Interrogatives

Yes-no questions are a fundamental type of interrogative that elicits a binary response, typically ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (Rivera-Garrido et al., 2022). These questions are prevalent in various contexts, such as questionnaires and surveys, where precise and focused information is required. The formation of yes-no questions involves modifying declarative sentences through the use of auxiliary or modal verbs. According to Greenbaum and Nelson (2002), there are two primary formulas for constructing these questions:

- **Auxiliary Verb + Subject + Main Verb:**
This structure is used to create straightforward yes-no questions by placing an auxiliary verb at the beginning of the sentence. For example, ‘Do you like ice cream?’ This formula is typical for forming questions in English where the auxiliary verb ‘do’ precede the subject and main verb.
- **Modal Verb + Subject + Main Verb:**
This formula involves the use of modal verbs to frame yes-no questions. An example is ‘May I bring this apple?’ Here, the modal verb ‘may’ precede the subject and main verb, adding a level of politeness or permission to the question.

In addition to these basic structures, yes-no questions can be classified typologically based on various linguistic features such as phonological, grammatical, and lexical characteristics. This classification helps in understanding the different types of yes-no questions and their evolution over time. Aarts (1997) provides insights into how these questions can be analyzed across different languages and historical periods, revealing patterns in their usage and development.

Overall, the study of yes-no questions encompasses not only their formation and usage but also their broader typological classification. This understanding aids in identifying various types of questions and their historical progression, contributing to a comprehensive analysis of interrogative structures (Aarts, 1997; Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002; Rivera-Garrido et al., 2022).

3. METHODS

3.1 Sources of Data

This study employs a descriptive method to capture and detail the inherent characteristics, conditions, and phenomena of language (Barkat, 2022; Sonnad, 2002). The descriptive method is suited for providing a natural description of linguistic features and allows for a qualitative analysis of data. For this study, the source of data was from conversations in an English class at a university in Lhokseumawe, Indonesia, between a lecturer and students, and students and students. The class comprised 20 students who were divided into five groups. They were to start on a conversation on a topic given by the lecturer, that was to discuss the two novels, “Zoya” by Danielle Steel and “Bloodline” by Sidney Sheldon, which they had read beforehand. Each group

discussed for 15 minutes and their conversations were recorded. The recordings were further transcribed.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection is carried out using documentation techniques as outlined by Sugiyono (2015). Documentation involves gathering data from written sources. In this study, the data are extracted from the transcription of the group discussions by the students, focusing on instances of negative interrogatives. The process involves identifying and annotating relevant sentences and clauses within the transcriptions that illustrate the use of auxiliary verbs with negative markers. The collected data are systematically organized and categorized according to their syntactic and semantic features. The documentation process ensures that the data accurately reflects the usage of negative interrogatives within various contexts provided by the students in their discussion.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis integrates the construction of sentences and their meanings, using a distributional approach to examine linguistic elements within the language (Horbacauskiene, 2022). Distributional analysis involves categorizing words according to specific grammatical categories to understand their role in negative interrogatives. Key techniques employed in this study include:

- Paraphrasing: Rewriting sentences to explore different syntactic structures and their semantic implications.
- Reading Markers: Identifying and interpreting specific linguistic markers that indicate changes in meaning or structure.
- Inversion Techniques: Examining how the inversion of auxiliary verbs affects the formal and informal contexts of sentences.

These techniques help in identifying variations in auxiliary verbs and their impact on the syntactic and semantic properties of negative interrogatives. For instance, the inversion of auxiliary verbs with the negative marker 'n't' can shift a sentence from a formal positive bias to an informal context, as illustrated by examples like:

- 'Didn't he open his present early?' (formal in positive bias)
- 'Did he not open his present early?' (informal context with evident bias)

By analyzing these patterns, the study aims to uncover the nuances in the use of negative interrogatives and their implications for understanding syntactic and semantic structures.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Types of Auxiliary Verbs

The analysis of negative interrogatives reveals that the auxiliary verbs 'be,' 'have,' and 'do' are frequently employed with the negative marker 'not,' in both its full and contracted forms (n't). These auxiliary verbs play a critical role in the

construction of negative interrogative sentences, contributing to the grammatical and semantic structure of the questions.

4.1.1 Auxiliary verbs and their functions

The verb 'be' is used in forming questions related to states or conditions. In negative interrogatives, it helps in questioning the existence or identity of the subject. For instance:

- 1a. 'Isn't she a lecturer?'
Auxiliary: 'is,' Negative Marker: 'n't'
- 1b. 'Is she not a lecturer?'
Auxiliary: 'is,' Negative Marker: 'not'

The auxiliary 'is' combined with 'n't' or 'not' helps in asking about the subject's role or status. The choice between 'n't' and 'not' can subtly affect the tone and emphasis of the question.

4.1.2 Auxiliary verb 'have'

The verb 'have' is used to form questions about possession or experiences. It is crucial in questioning the state of having or experiencing something. For instance:

- 2. 'Haven't you finished your report?'
Auxiliary: 'have,' Negative Marker: 'n't'

Here, 'have' is used to inquire about the completion of an action, and the contraction 'n't' may convey a more informal or conversational tone compared to the full 'not.'

4.1.3 Auxiliary verb 'do'

The verb 'do' is used to form questions about actions or processes. It serves to emphasize or query actions in a negative context. For instance:

- 3. 'Don't they know the answer?'
Auxiliary: 'do,' Negative Marker: 'n't'

The use of 'do' in negative interrogatives helps in asking about actions or knowledge, with 'n't' often introducing a degree of informal questioning.

In negative interrogatives, these auxiliary verbs must be followed by a subject and a verb phrase (VP) and must end with a question mark (?). The combination of the auxiliary verb with the negative marker, subject, and verb phrase ensures that the question is properly formed and that the intended negation is effectively communicated. The presence of these auxiliary verbs is essential for establishing the grammatical framework of the negative interrogative, facilitating the conveyance of negation within the interrogative context.

The choice between the full form 'not' and the contracted form 'n't' affects the tone and emphasis of the negative interrogative. While both forms are grammatically

correct, ‘n’t’ tends to be more conversational and informal, whereas ‘not’ provides a more formal tone. This distinction can influence how the question is perceived and interpreted by the listener.

4.2 Interrogative Types

In interrogative types, yes-no questions, both positive and negative, are categorized into formal types with original polar bias and informal types with context evidence polar bias. The negative marker ‘not’ is essential in defining the scope and meaning within a clause.

Interrogative questions are categorized based on their formality and the presence of a negative marker. Formal yes-no questions tend to follow strict grammatical rules and maintain an original polar bias, meaning they align with standard expectations for positive or negative responses. Informal questions may exhibit context evidence polar bias, relying on conversational context to interpret the meaning. The negative marker ‘not’ indicates the scope of negation and affects the interpretation of the response, whether it is positive or negative.

- 4a. ‘Weren’t you complaining?’
Structure: Prim-aux neg s v/comp

- 4b. ‘Were you complaining?’
Structure: Prim-aux s v/comp

In 4a, ‘Weren’t you complaining?’ uses the contracted negative form ‘weren’t’ which implies that the speaker is challenging or confirming a previous statement. The question has a rhetorical tone and might expect a positive response, indicating a presumption that the listener was indeed complaining. Meanwhile, 4b, ‘Were you complaining?’ is a straightforward yes-no question. The negative implication is more neutral, as it simply inquires about whether the listener was complaining or not, without the rhetorical challenge implied in Example 1a. This form can be used to confirm or clarify a situation with less emphasis on the presumption of the listener’s action.

- 5a. ‘Weren’t they feeling better?’
Structure: Prim-aux neg S VP

- 5b. ‘Were they not feeling better?’
Structure: Prim-aux neg S VP

In 3a, ‘Weren’t they feeling better?’ uses the contracted form ‘weren’t,’ which can suggest that the speaker assumes the listeners were indeed feeling better and is either questioning this assumption or expressing surprise at the contrary. Then in 3b, ‘Were they not feeling better?’ uses the full negative form ‘Were they not.’ This form makes the negation more explicit and is often used to confirm or clarify whether the listeners were indeed feeling better, with a slightly more formal tone compared to the contracted form.

- 6a. ‘Weren’t you wearing your shoes?’
Structure: Prim aux neg S VP

- 6b. 'Were you not wearing your shoes?'
Structure: Prim aux S neg VP

In 6a, 'Weren't you wearing your shoes?' implies a presumption that the listener was wearing their shoes and questions this assumption. It can convey surprise or challenge the listener's previous actions. In 6b, 'Were you not wearing your shoes?' explicitly asks about the absence of the action of wearing shoes, making the negative aspect of the question more pronounced. It could be used to clarify or confirm details more formally or emphatically.

These examples highlight the impact of different auxiliary verb forms and negative markers on the interpretation of yes-no questions. The contracted forms often carry a presumption or rhetorical challenge, while the full forms typically offer a more neutral and formal inquiry.

4.3 Rhetorical Negative Interrogatives

Rhetorical negative interrogatives are a unique form of questioning that utilizes auxiliary verbs combined with negative markers such as 'not' or its contracted form 'n't' to convey meanings beyond simple inquiry. These questions are often employed to challenge, emphasize, or provoke reflection rather than to elicit a direct response. The syntactic structure and the choice of negative markers play a significant role in shaping the interpretation of these questions, revealing how rhetorical intent influences their usage.

The syntactic behavior of rhetorical negative interrogatives demonstrates the subtle yet impactful ways in which auxiliary verbs and negative markers are arranged. For example, consider the following sentences:

- 7a. 'Weren't you complaining?'
Auxiliary Verb: 'were'
Negative Marker: 'n't'

- 7b. 'Were you not complaining?'
Auxiliary Verb: 'were'
Negative Marker: 'not'

In sentence 7a, the contracted form 'n't' after the auxiliary 'were' contributes to a more conversational and informal tone. This structure is often used to express incredulity or to emphasize the speaker's surprise or disbelief at the situation described. On the other hand, sentence 7b, which uses the full form 'not,' tends to convey a more formal or deliberate tone. This formulation might be employed in contexts where the speaker wishes to stress the importance of the point being made or to underline a more critical or confrontational stance.

The choice between 'not' and 'n't' in rhetorical negative interrogatives can significantly impact the question's interpretative layer. The use of 'n't' might suggest a more casual, immediate reaction, while 'not' could imply a more thoughtful or reflective approach. Additionally, the syntactic placement of the auxiliary verb and negative marker can signal different emotional or rhetorical nuances. For instance, 'Were you not complaining?' might be used to challenge the listener's recollection of events, implying that the speaker is almost certain of the complaint and is seeking confirmation of their memory or viewpoint.

Overall, rhetorical negative interrogatives are a powerful tool for expressing attitudes, making emphatic statements, or questioning one's assumptions. Their syntactic and semantic characteristics highlight the intricate ways in which language can be used to communicate complex intentions and emotions, reflecting the speaker's perspective and the context in which the question arises.

4.4 Semantic Differences and Polarity

Negative interrogatives with auxiliary verbs reveal semantic differences between original positive bias and context evidence bias. These distinctions significantly influence how responses are interpreted in both formal and informal contexts. The semantic structure of negative interrogatives can illustrate a distinction between original positive bias and context evidence bias. Original positive bias refers to the framing of the question to imply or expect a positive response. This type of bias often assumes a particular positive outcome or state as the norm, subtly steering the listener towards a specific expectation. On the other hand, context evidence bias relies on the conversational or situational context to shape the interpretation of the negative interrogative. This bias reflects how the context influences the understanding of whether the information aligns with or contradicts the evidence at hand.

- 8a. 'Weren't they feeling better?'
Auxiliary: 'were,' Negative Marker: 'n't'

In the interrogative 8a, 'Weren't they feeling better?', the auxiliary verb 'were' and the negative marker 'n't' frame the question in a way that presumes the listener should confirm a positive state. This construction can imply that the speaker expects or assumes that the subject was indeed feeling better, and the contraction 'n't' often conveys a more informal tone, potentially suggesting that the speaker is somewhat surprised or questioning why the expected positive condition did not occur.

- 8b. 'Were they not feeling better?'
Auxiliary: 'were,' Negative Marker: 'not'

The interrogative in 8b, 'Were they not feeling better?', which uses the full negative marker 'not', positions the question in a more formal or neutral context. This form emphasizes whether the listener acknowledges or confirms the information based on the surrounding context. The use of 'not' may lead to a more deliberate and formal tone, indicating that the speaker is seeking confirmation or clarification based on evidence or situational factors rather than presuming a positive outcome.

The choice between 'n't' and 'not' can impact how the listener perceives the intent of the question and the nature of the expected response. The contraction 'n't' tends to introduce a conversational and somewhat informal tone, which can affect the emotional or psychological reception of the question. Conversely, 'not' contributes to a more formal or assertive tone, which may encourage a more thoughtful or evidence-based response. Although both forms are grammatically correct, they serve different communicative purposes and affect the dynamics of interaction. Hence, the semantic differences between original positive bias and context evidence bias in negative interrogatives highlight how variations in auxiliary verb constructions and negative markers influence interpretation and response expectations. This understanding is

crucial for analyzing the communicative impact of negative interrogatives across different contexts.

4.5 Example Analysis

In analyzing negative interrogatives, the data reveals significant syntactic and semantic variations that arise from different combinations of auxiliary verbs and negative markers. These variations illustrate how polarity changes can impact both the interpretation of questions and the expected responses.

4.5.1 Syntactic and semantic variations

This section starts with the presentation of example 9a.

9. ‘Weren’t you complaining?’ versus ‘Were you not complaining?’

The contracted form from 9 is ‘Weren’t you complaining?’ In syntactic structure, it uses the auxiliary verb ‘were’ with the contracted negative marker ‘n’t’. This form is typically more informal and conversational. In semantic implication, it often implies a presumption of prior knowledge or expectation that the action was occurring. The tone can convey surprise or a challenge to the listener’s previous statement or behavior.

The full form in 9, ‘Were you not complaining?’ shows that the syntactic structure uses the same auxiliary verb ‘were’ but with the full negative marker ‘not’. This construction is generally more formal. The semantic implication of this examples is that the use of ‘not’ can add a layer of emphasis or formality to the question. It may be perceived as more neutral or probing, aiming to clarify or confirm the status of the action without the conversational nuance present in the contracted form. These differences reflect variations in formality and the speaker’s assumptions about the response. The choice between contracted and full forms affects how the question is framed and how it is likely to be received by the listener.

10. ‘Aren’t you eating dinner?’ versus ‘Are you not eating dinner?’

The syntactic structure of the contracted form of 10, ‘Aren’t you eating dinner?’ employs the auxiliary verb ‘are’ with the contracted negative marker ‘n’t’. This form is also more informal and used in everyday conversation. Its semantic implication may suggest a more immediate or conversational tone, potentially reflecting an assumption that the listener is engaged in the action being questioned. It can imply a degree of surprise or expectation about the listener’s current activity.

The syntactic structure of the full form in (10), ‘Are you not eating dinner?’ uses the auxiliary verb ‘are’ with the full negative marker ‘not’. This form is typically more formal and might be used in more deliberate or formal questioning contexts. The semantic implication is that the use of ‘not’ can indicate a clearer, more neutral inquiry into the listener’s actions. It often carries a tone of seeking clarification or confirmation, possibly without the conversational or implied expectation present in the contracted form.

The data in (9) and (10) underline the impact of auxiliary verbs and negative markers on the nature of questions and responses. Contracted forms like ‘n’t’ tend to be associated with informal, conversational contexts and may suggest different

conversational assumptions or expectations compared to the full forms. Full forms like ‘not’ often convey formality and a more neutral stance, affecting how the question is perceived and how the respondent is likely to engage with it.

5. DISCUSSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of negative interrogatives involving auxiliary verbs and their contracted forms, drawing from transcriptions of discussions conducted by students in an English class. The findings reveal significant insights into the syntactic and semantic variations of these interrogatives, contributing to the broader understanding of negation in English.

The study’s results align with previous research on the syntactic structures of negative interrogatives. The use of auxiliary verbs ‘be,’ ‘have,’ and ‘do’ in negative interrogatives, whether in contracted (n’t) or uncontracted (not) forms, is consistent with the patterns identified by [Ginzburg and Sag \(2001\)](#), who explored the syntactic behavior of interrogative constructions. The findings of this study affirm their observation that auxiliary verbs play a crucial role in shaping the grammatical structure of questions involving negation. Additionally, the observed variations in tone and emphasis between contracted and uncontracted forms are supported by the work of [Barnes \(2006\)](#), who noted that contracted forms often introduce a more informal tone compared to their uncontracted counterparts.

The analysis of yes-no questions in this study, categorized into formal and informal types based on the presence of negative markers, builds on [Holmberg’s \(2014\)](#) work on cross-linguistic variations in question structures. The formal types adhering to strict grammatical rules and the informal types exhibiting context-dependent interpretations reflect Holmberg’s findings that question forms can vary based on their contextual usage. This distinction also resonates with [Hedberg et al.’s \(2017\)](#) discussion on the influence of intonation patterns on question interpretation, highlighting that the choice between contracted and uncontracted forms can affect the perceived sincerity or formality of the question.

The study’s examination of rhetorical negative interrogatives echoes [Peters’ \(2008\)](#) research on the distinction between rhetorical and ordinary questions. [Peters \(2008\)](#) highlighted how rhetorical questions often imply a presumption or challenge rather than seeking a straightforward answer. Our findings, particularly the use of auxiliary verbs and negative markers in rhetorical contexts, confirm this perspective by demonstrating how different forms can shift the meaning and implication of the question, aligning with [Levillain’s \(2015\)](#) assertion that rhetorical questions often convey a stance or opinion rather than mere information-seeking.

The semantic differences observed between original positive bias and context evidence bias in negative interrogatives reflect insights from [Larrivée and Mari \(2022\)](#), who discussed how negative interrogatives can reveal the speaker’s underlying assumptions and doubts. Our study’s findings that the choice between ‘not’ and ‘n’t’ influences the interpretation of responses further substantiate Larrivée and Mari’s analysis, showing that the semantic load of negative markers can affect how questions are perceived and answered.

Moreover, the impact of polarity shifts on response interpretation aligns with the observations of [Han \(2002\)](#), who explored how semantic variations in negative

interrogatives can convey different levels of doubt or expectation. Our analysis of examples such as ‘Weren’t they feeling better?’ versus ‘Were they not feeling better?’ illustrates how these shifts in polarity can influence the listener’s response, supporting Han’s (2002) view on the role of semantic meaning in question interpretation.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has provided a detailed analysis of negative interrogatives involving auxiliary verbs and their contracted forms, revealing significant syntactic and semantic variations. The research has shown how auxiliary verbs and negative markers influence the structure, tone, and interpretation of questions. The findings align with previous research, highlighting the role of negative interrogatives in shaping communication dynamics and reflecting underlying assumptions. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how different forms of negative interrogatives function in English, offering valuable insights into their impact on meaning and response interpretation.

Despite the insights gained, this study has limitations, including the reliance on restricted conversations among students in an English class, which may not fully represent everyday conversational language. Future research could benefit from incorporating a broader range of dialogues and varied genres, to examine how negative interrogatives function across different contexts. Additionally, expanding the scope to include other languages and comparative analyses could provide a more comprehensive understanding of cross-linguistic variations in negative interrogatives. Exploring the influence of additional factors such as speaker intention and listener perception could further enhance our grasp of how these constructs operate in communication.

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