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BIPARTITE NEGATION IN TYNESIDE ENGLISH: NEGATIVE CONCORD OR DOUBLE NEGATION?

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THE PHENOMENON

Tyneside English (TE) has bipartite negation in tag questions:

(1) CB/848: They're not as big, the rides at the Hoppings, **aren't they not?**

SM/135: No.

(DECTE, 2010_SEL2019_007)

And in main clause questions:

(2) S0041: **Wasn't she not** with like Frank Butcher or something ridiculous?

S0084: She's Frank Butcher's daughter.

(Speaker from Doncaster, Spoken BNC-2014)



BACKGROUND: NEGATIVE CONCORD

In Standard English (StE), two negatives (supposedly!) cancel out and make a positive:

‘I **didn’t** do **nothing**! [How dare you! I tidied my room and fed the cat!]

← Both negatives are semantically interpretable, so they cancel out.

In many non-standard varieties, two negatives remain negative:

‘We **didn’t** see **no one**. [The streets were completely empty.]’

And in lots of other languages, with neg-words (*nothing, no one...*) or another negation marker:

Ur ughax (**sha**) lktaab

NEG I SG.bought NEG book

← Only one negative is semantically interpretable, and the other agrees (syntactically).

‘I didn’t buy the book.’ (Tamazight Berber, Zeijlstra 2004: 132)

BACKGROUND: INNER/OUTER NEGATION

Answering ‘yes’ to an English negative question can either answer affirmatively or confirm the negative antecedent.

- Generally argued to be due to the syntactic position of the negation or the semantic features of the polarity particles (Ladd 1981, Kramer & Rawlins 2009, Holmberg 2013, Roelofsen & Farkas 2015)

Outer negation

Q: Didn’t you give a talk at LAGB?

A: Yes, it went really well.

Inner Negation

Q: Did you (in the end) **not** give a talk at LAGB?

A: Yes, that’s right, I had to pull out.

Holmberg, Anders. 2013. The syntax of answers to polar questions in English and Swedish. *Lingua* 128, 31–50. doi:[10.1016/j.lingua.2012.10.018](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2012.10.018).

Kramer, R & K Rawlins. 2009. Polarity particles: an ellipsis account. *The Proceedings of the 39th Annual Meeting of the North East Linguistic Society*. Cornell University: GSLA.

Ladd, Bob. 1981. A First Look at the Semantics and Pragmatics of Negative Questions and Tag Questions. *Proceedings of Chicago Linguistics Society* 17, 164–171.

Roelofsen, Floris & Donka F. Farkas. 2015. Polarity particle responses as a window onto the interpretation of questions and assertions. *Language* 91(2), 359–414.

doi:[10.1353/lan.2015.0017](https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2015.0017).

WHAT WE'RE ASKING

The North East of England has higher rates of auxiliary-contraction (*we've not* etc. vs. negation contraction *we haven't*) than many other areas (Trudgill 1978; Anderwald 2002; Tagliamonte & Smith 2002).

- This blurs the inner/outer negation distinctions made on the basis of Standard British English (BrE).

TE also has negative concord (NC) with indefinites: *I didn't see **nobody*** (Childs 2017)

We ask: 'Double negation' in TE questions appears to have both 'inner' and 'outer' negation, contracted and uncontracted. How is it interpreted?

Anderwald, Lieselotte. 2002. *Negation in Non-Standard British English: Gaps, Regularizations and Asymmetries*. London: Routledge.

Childs, Claire. 2017. Integrating syntactic theory and variationist analysis: The structure of negative indefinites in regional dialects of British English. *Glossa*, Article 106, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.287>

Tagliamonte, Sali and Jennifer Smith. 2002. "Either it isn't or it's not": Neg/Aux contraction in British dialects. *English World-Wide* 23(2), 251-281.

Trudgill, Peter. 1978. *Sociolinguistic Patterns in British English*. Baltimore: University Park Press.

PREDICTIONS AND THEORIES

Our intuition: TE bipartite negation is interpreted like BrE outer negation, meaning it is (optional) negative concord (NC)

- In Zeijlstra's (2004) terms, the higher negation has [iNEG] and the lower [uNEG]

McDonald & Beal (1987) suggest that the TE bipartite tag *isn't it not* seeks confirmation of the negative:

- Positive anchors: *is it not* = information-seeking; *isn't it* = confirmation-seeking
- Negative anchors: *is it not* = information-seeking; *isn't it not* = confirmation-seeking

PREDICTIONS AND THEORIES

Predictions:

1. The respondents will replicate the literature judgements on interpretation of inner/outer negation (though Northern auxiliary contraction may complicate matters)
2. Doubled tags will behave as McDonald & Beal predict
3. Doubled negation in main clause questions will behave like outer negation (NC)

WHAT WE DID

Online acceptability judgements, 29 participants (majority from Tyneside; a few from broader North East)

Set 1: Inner/outer negation (12 sentences)

- *Did Saffiya not go on holiday?, Didn't Saffiya go on holiday?*

Set 2: Tag questions (16 sentences)

- *...is it, ...is it not, ...isn't it not*

Set 3: Main clause questions with bipartite negation (12 sentences)

- *Haven't they not got a car?*

Plus 6 filler affirmative questions, and 5 practice questions

EXAMPLE QUESTION 1: INNER/OUTER, DOUBLED

Ash and Zahra are talking about their colleague, Saffiya, who had planned to go on holiday this ^{*} week.

Ash: Did Saffiya not go on holiday?

Zahra: Yes.

What does Zahra believe?

- Saffiya went on holiday.
- Saffiya did not go on holiday.
- Both of the above options are possible.
- Don't know.

EXAMPLE QUESTION 2: TAGS

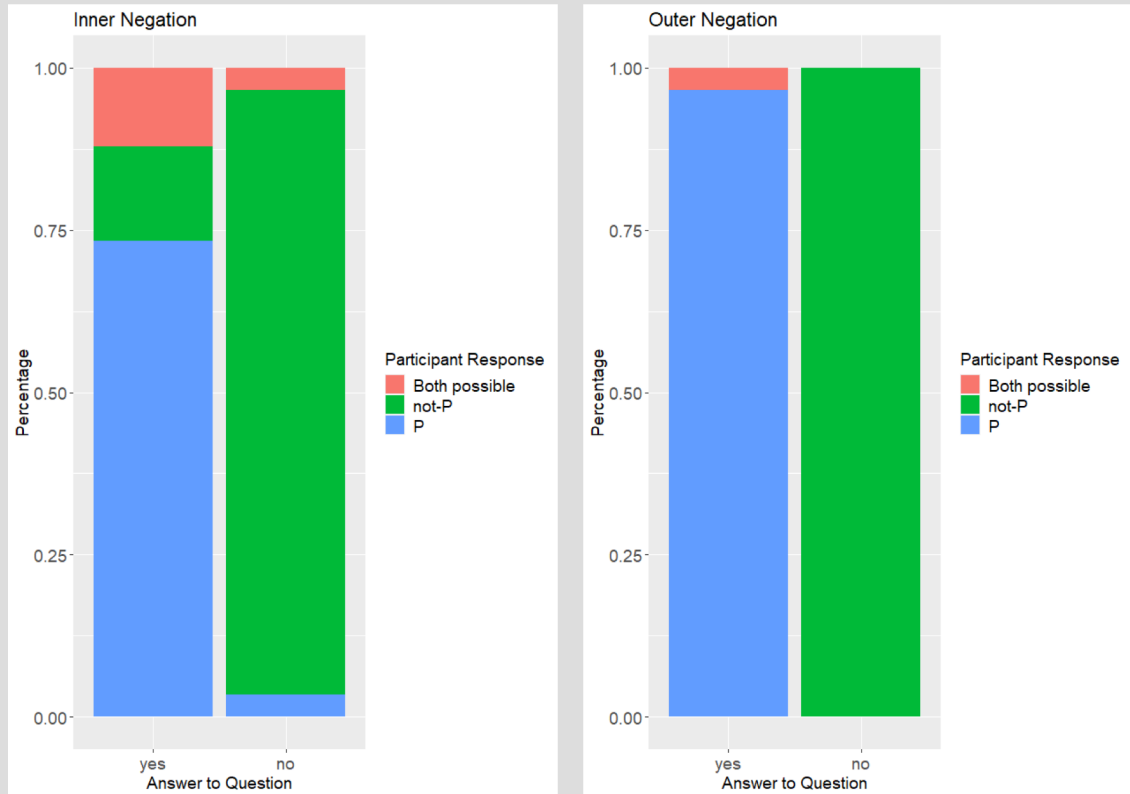
Ash and Zahra are at the Hoppings, and comparing the rides to the ones at another funfair they went to. *

Ash says: They're not as big as the others, aren't they not?

How certain is Ash that these rides are not as big as the others?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very uncertain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very certain

RESULTS: INNER & OUTER NEGATION



Inner Negation e.g. ‘Did Saffiya not go on holiday?’

- ‘Yes’ answer mainly affirmative (P) – contrary to literature
- ‘No’ answer confirms negative (not-P)

Outer Negation e.g. ‘Didn’t Saffiya go on holiday?’

- ‘Yes’ answer = affirmative (P) – as predicted
- ‘No’ answer confirms negative (not-P)

RESULTS: NEGATIVE TAG QUESTIONS

	Estimate	St. Error	Z-value	P-value	Sig.
Model 1: Positive anchors only					
Tag Type					
ISN'T IT	0.841	0.383	2.197	0.028	*
ISN'T IT NOT	-0.183	0.318	-0.576	0.564	
Random: Participant			Standard Dev. 1.252		
Model 2: Negative anchors only					
Tag Type					
ISN'T IT	0.147	0.344	0.428	0.6684	
ISN'T IT NOT	0.598	0.298	2.007	0.0447	*
Random: Participant			Standard Dev. 0.698		

Ordinal regression, application value = IS IT NOT

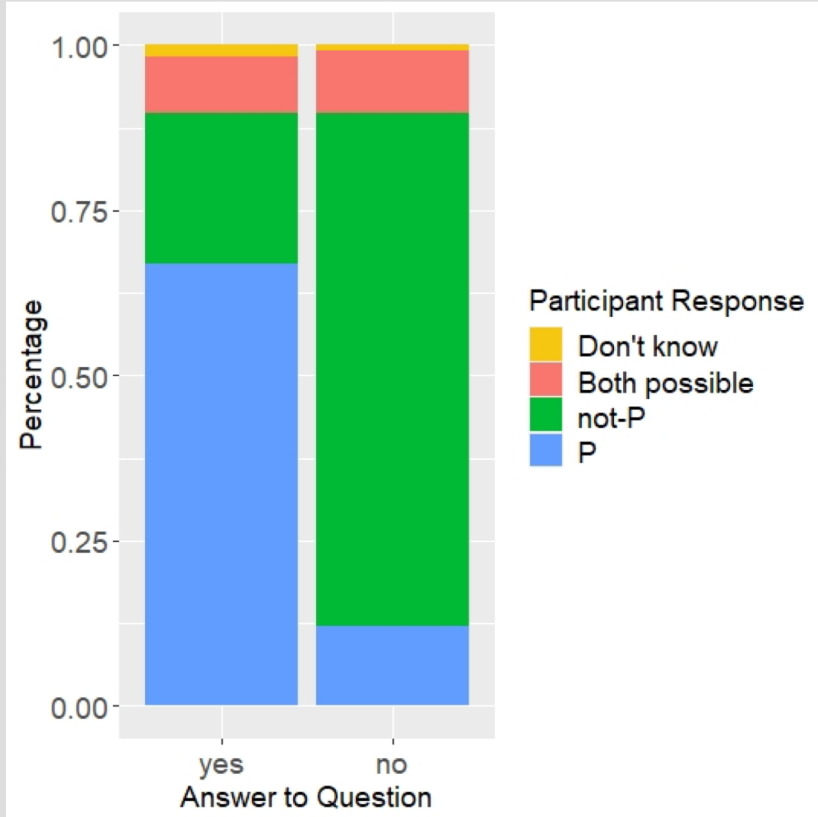
In order of certainty expressed (with positive anchors):

- ISN'T IT > IS IT NOT & ISN'T IT NOT

BUT:

- With negative anchors, ISN'T IT NOT expresses more certainty than IS IT NOT
 - With negative anchors, ISN'T IT and IS IT NOT are not statistically distinct from one another
- exactly as McDonald & Beal (1987) predicted!

RESULTS: DOUBLED NEGATIVE QUESTIONS



E.g. 'Wasn't she not with Frank?'

3 x GLMMs in R each with a different application value (P, not-P, both possible), Yes/No as a fixed factor and Participant as a random effect – 'don't know' excluded

- Affirmative interpretation (P) more likely with 'yes' answer ($p < .001$)
- Negative interpretation (not-P) more likely with 'no' answer ($p < .001$)
- No significant effect of 'yes' vs. 'no' on the 'both possible' interpretation ($p = 0.76$)

TE BIPARTITE NEGATION EXPLAINED

TE bipartite negation questions were interpreted such that ‘yes’ confirms P, as predicted if they are NC and equivalent to outer negation.

Tubau (2016): NC variation in BrEng dialects = due to differences in the features associated with NEG and D heads:

- the NEG head may express semantic or syntactic [iNEG] negation
- D may host neg-words with either [iNEG] or [uNEG] feature

Thus Standard BrE is DN, but many dialects are NC, including TE: *I didn't call nobody*

We extend Tubau's analysis of neg-words to the negative adverb *not* in TE.

TE BIPARTITE NEGATION EXPLAINED

Following Zeijlstra (2004):

- *n't* is a head X^0 (of NegP), and has [iNEG]
- *not* is a vP-adjoined XP, and in TE (contra Zeijlstra), may also have [uNEG]

Is it not: *not* carries [iNEG]

Isn't it: *isn't* carries [iNEG]

Isn't it not: *isn't* carries [iNEG] and *not* carries [uNEG] which is feature checked by *n't* (NC)
[_{NegP}[_{Neg} *n't*_[iNEG] ... [*not*_[uNEG]]]]

TE BIPARTITE NEGATION EXPLAINED

But TE also patterns with our respondents' interpretations of inner negation, also mostly confirming P but with the possibility of confirming not-P.

Holmberg (2013) accounts for this variability with inner negation, arguing that 'yes' confirms not-P if *not* is low (VP-adjoined), and confirms P if *not* is 'middle' negation, taking sentential scope.

- An adverb forces low interpretation:
 - Did you deliberately not dress up?
 - Yes (that's right, I deliberately didn't dress up)/*No, I didn't want to look like I'd tried too hard.

TE BIPARTITE NEGATION EXPLAINED

The lower negative element *not* in our bipartite structures is Holmberg's middle negation

- Negative operator/*n't* [iNEG] + middle negation [uNEG] = NC ('yes'=P).

It normally enters into a NC Agree relation, but it may be interpreted as a low negative adverbial

- Negative operator/*n't* [iNEG] + low negation [iNEG] = DN ('yes'=not-P)

'Northern' *is it not* also involves this middle negation rather than the lower *not* (which is of course still available for DN readings if required, in all varieties).

Is it possible to have both middle and lower negation in one clause?

- *Didn't you not NOT dress up, though?* → NC and DN (=Isn't it the case that you did not dress up')

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

- The StE inner/outer negation distinction is less clearcut in TE
 - ‘Yes’ answer to a question with inner negation = affirmative, contrary to predictions
- TE has a distinctive tag ISN’T IT NOT – an example of NC – alongside ISN’T IT and IS IT NOT
 - While ISN’T IT seeks confirmation of a positive, ISN’T IT NOT seeks confirmation of a negative
- Doubled negation questions pattern like NC and StE outer negation
- The variation is consistent with an account in which *not* can vary in its feature specification in TE (cf. Tubau 2016 re: neg-words in British English dialects)

LACK OF NC IN NEGATIVE STATEMENTS

LACK OF NC IN NEGATIVE STATEMENTS

If *not* can have [uNEG], this implies we should get NC generally in the variety, but *I can't/cannot not see them* is DN even in TE.

- The Scots Syntactic Atlas has *I cannae no see them*, but it's at best rated 3 'I might use this, it's a bit unnatural'.

Possible reasons for this:

- Many TE speakers have free variation between *Isn't it* and *Is it not* structures. Perhaps it's simply that in questions, the relevant segment is phonologically identical (*Is(n't) **it** not*) and so more likely to allow the doubling up required for Jespersen's Cycle, whereas in statements, it's not (*It's not/It isn't*).
- In negative statements, the polarity of the clause is valued (negatively), whereas in questions it is unvalued. Perhaps the negative operator is able to value the polarity in questions, but in statements there are two negatively-valued elements, leading to DN.