

Is Neg-Raising Really Necessary?

— A Case Study of Negation —

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Abstract

It will be shown in this paper that the negative parenthetical with *believe* doesn't involve Neg-raising in spite of the argument to the contrary presented in Kimball (1973) and that this will follow from a conclusion from those cases of negation examined here that Neg-raising is dubitable as a rule of English.

1. Under the factual assumption that there are two main types of belief... (a) *transparent* or *expressive belief* and (b) *opaque* or *reportive belief*⁽¹⁾... it seems possible to argue against the raising hypothesis advocated by recent linguists in their accounts of the paradox of negation observable in sentences like the following.

(1) I don't believe that Bill paid his taxes and Mary is quite sure of it.

Lindholm (1969) claims that Neg-raising is applicable to the complement sentences to *believe* in the sense of the *so*-type of *believe* and that the application of the rule in the first conjunct of (1) explains the semantically consistent interpretation of the structure replaced by the *it* in the second conjunct. (It will be suggested later that the grammaticality of (1) is explainable without making any appeal to Neg-raising.) He also argues that if the following negative sentence (3) is to be transformationally derived from (2), (3) should be four-ways ambiguous in view of the respective continuations conceivable for this raising interpretation.

(2) I believe that Lincoln was not a great man.

(3) I don't believe that Lincoln was a great man.

- a) Because that's what my teacher said and I always believe my teacher.
- b) Because I never believe what my teacher tells me.
- c) In fact, I feel quite strongly that he wasn't.
- d) I believe someone else.

I try re-examining the semantic problems raised by these examples by taking the continuations (a)~(d) also as providing the belief-contexts in which (2) or (3) can consistently be used.

Context (a) suggests that the complement in (2) is virtually a quotation or it represents a point of view put forward by someone other than the speaker. Thus the belief expressed in the complement is undoubtedly of type (b) and con-

sequently it is impossible to move the Neg out without disturbing the truth conditions of the proposition being asserted. This is one of the clearest cases where Neg-raising is inapplicable⁽²⁾. There are, of course, other tokens of (2) apart from this context: (2) can also be used in those contexts in which the speaker makes the same assertion as his own committed viewpoint. I refer to this type as *self-assertive belief*, distinguishing it from the *reportive* type above. In these cases Neg-raising is also inapplicable for the same semantic reason. Kimball (1972) defines the self-assertive type also as reportive belief.

Context (b) suggests that the complement in (2) represents the speaker's strong disbelief in what his teacher asserts. The belief expressed in this context is almost a self-expressive belief inclusive of the negation and closely resembles what Kimball defines as expressive belief; that is, the complement sentence is by itself an expression of the disbelief of the speaker ... an expression which doesn't carry a truth value with it. By this is not meant, however, that I take as indisputable his argument that Neg can be raised in contexts like this, nor do I accept the position of Hooper (1975) that Neg-raising is applicable in cases where *I believe* functions semantically almost vacuously. Rather I take a position that *I don't believe that-S* is different from *I believe that-not-S* in that the negation negates its complement proposition only potentially or serves to show the inherent negativity of the proposition⁽³⁾. This must be the case with (3) in this context. *I don't believe* may also have a sense much stronger depending on contexts, as argued by Cattell (1973), in which its complement propositions are not put forward as the speaker's own viewpoints.

Context (c) suggests that the speaker has a strong disposition toward the truth of the proposition being asserted in the complement in (2). The *In fact* in the specification of this context allows the interpretation that (2) may just as well be a report of the speaker's own assertion. The belief then will be of the self-assertive type. It carries a truth value, regardless of whether it is a belief which the speaker has put forward as his own or one which he has attributed to someone as in the case of context (a).

Context (d) may suggest the only case where (2) and (3) are paraphrases, allowing them to be related transformationally. The reason for this possibility is that both sentences can be used in this context to negate the asserted proposition. Hooper (1975) argues, however, that sentences like (2) involve errors in performance with respect to the position of Neg, suggesting that they are not fully grammatical. Bolinger (as quoted in R. Lakoff (1969)), on the other hand, seems to distinguish between (2) and (3). He observes that with sentences like (3) there is greater uncertainty in the speaker's mind about the negation of the complement. These observations are all relevant only to context (d), and it seems to follow that only in this context the speaker's attitude toward the negation of the complement is ambiguously strong or weak and that (2) and (3) are not mere alternatives.

2. The arguments above may sound inconclusive, but the contexts postulated

for the Neg-raising interpretation of (3) can all be taken as defying the application of Neg-raising. The only possibility still seems to remain in the case of beliefs of the self-assertive type. This point I will discuss below by way of making clear the semantic aspect of the negative parenthetical construction with *believe*. According to Kimball, parentheticals do not usually contain internal negation but the negative parenthetical is permissible with predicates like *believe* involving Neg-raising. Hooper (1975) argues that the negation in the parenthetical doesn't negate anything. I'll show below that these views of negation are semantically odd and that the occurrence of the negative parenthetical in a certain context presents another piece of evidence against Neg-raising.

Compare the following sets of sentences.

- (4) a. I believe that John will come.
 b. I believe that John won't come.
 c. I don't believe that John will come.
- (5) a. John will come, I believe.
 *b. John will come, I don't believe.
 (?) c. John won't come, I believe.
 d. John won't come, I don't believe.

I assume that the *will* in each sentence above doesn't carry any modality. It is generally assumed that if (4 a) is to be related to (5 a) transformationally, that is, by Complement Preposing, the *I believe* must be interpreted in the parenthetical sense. The parenthetical sense, according to Urmson (1963), has the semantic function of indicating to the hearer the speaker's attitude toward the truth of the proposition asserted in the complement. Notice that the complements preposed in (5) are all *speaker assertions*⁽⁴⁾. Now a comparison between (4 c) and (5 b) shows that if Complement Preposing applies automatically to (4 c), it will yield the ungrammatical sentence, (5 b). This ungrammaticality may be explained by assuming, according to Cattell (1973), that complement sentences headed by *I don't believe* do not represent speaker assertions. Or alternatively, the ungrammaticality may be taken to suggest, according to Hooper (1975), that on the parenthetical interpretation of *I don't believe* the negation negates the only assertion in the complement and that (4 c) must not be related to (5 b) but rather to (5 c). Both linguists point out the different functional aspects of negation, so it is instructive to compare the theoretical implications of their views. In Cattell's view, (4 b) can qualify as the transformational source for (5 c), for the complement is the speaker assertion and the transformed sentence *must* be grammatical. While, in Hooper's view, (5 c) *must* be not fully grammatical, for he doesn't distinguish semantically between (4 b) and (4 c) and a naturalness condition must be imposed on (4 b) in order to prevent the not fully grammatical sentence (5 c) from being derived. It is odd semantically, however, to assume as in this analysis of (5 c) that the *I believe* can not function parenthetically ... this he seems to take as another reason for the ungrammaticality ... unless negated as in (5 d).

Now recall the examples (2) and (3) discussed above with respect to the

contexts (c) and (d). I suggested there that the complement in (2), a sentence like (4 b), should as well be taken in context (c) as a report of the speaker assertion, hence the inapplicability of Neg-raising to the complement. This means that (4 b) and (4 c) are not relatable as against Hooper's argument to the contrary. I also suggested that (3), a sentence like (4 c), should be regarded in context (d) as a report of the speaker assertion without involving the application of Neg-raising under the weaker interpretation of the belief in question. This means that the complement in (4 c), as in the case of (3), can be taken in a context like (d) as the speaker assertion, thus weakening Cattell's strong position.

The discussions given so far will point to the following generalization.

The complement in (4 b) has the semantic factor *speaker assertion* necessary for emphasis by Complement Preposing, thus qualifying as the transformational source for (5 c), but the complement in (4 c), when interpreted as speaker assertion, is too weak for the rule to apply to yield (5 c) ... the speaker holds a milder attitude toward the negation of the complement proposition. This difference in the *assertive attitude of the speaker* seems to be operative in his choice between (5 c) and (5 d). The complement in (4 c), though inherently negative, becomes so strong an assertion of the negative proposition when preposed that it cannot accord with the original weak attitude of the speaker. The occurrence of the extra negation in the parenthetical in (5 d) is due to this over-emphasis produced by Complement Preposing. From these observations I suggest that the negative parenthetical contrasts semantically with the non-negative parenthetical.

Notes

Note (1) Kimball's *expressive-reportive* distinction is concerned only with the first-person belief-sentences, so it seems that his distinction must be restated in terms of the more general *transparent-opaque* contrast which has the possibility of characterizing the beliefs of a non-first person in parallel with those of a first person. The belief discussed with respect to context (a), for example, is a genuine case of the *opaque* and *reportive* type. The correspondences indicated are intended only to suggest this possibility.

Note (2) Lindholm himself admits the difficulty of the Neg-raising interpretation of (3) in this context.

Note (3) Cattell may disregard this inherent negativity of the complement proposition, which he seems to ascribe to an overtone of implication carried by the whole belief-sentence. He argues that when the speaker *cites* a proposition and *asserts* that it is not true, he tends slightly toward a negative view of the proposition. However, observe the following.

(1) I can't believe that he'd take the exam until he's ready.

(2) I can't believe that he wouldn't take the exam until he's ready.

* (3) He'd take the exam until he's ready.

(3) is not grammatical unless negated as in the complement of (2). (1) and (2)

are both grammatical, and what is important is that these are not synonymous. These facts give enough evidence to show that the complement proposition of (1) is *inherently* negative. *I can't believe* cannot be used in the sense that its complements represent speaker assertions.

Note (4) Even in the case of a nonfirst-person belief sentence, the preposed complement contains the speaker assertion as is shown in the following.

? Peter is fat, John believes, but I don't believe ^{it.}_{so.}

References

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