

## How Might Metalinguistic Negation Work?

In his 1985 article in *Language* and in Chapter 6 of his *A Natural History of Negation* (1989), Larry Horn proposes a pragmatic analysis of what he calls metalinguistic negation. Horn argues that negation in cases like (4) is not a truth-functional statement about the proposition expressed by (1); rather it is a way of objecting to the way in which a previous utterance is put. Horn proposed this analysis as a means of resolving the question of how to account for the fact that a sentence such as (1), which is normally said to presuppose the truth of (3), can be negated in at least two different ways, an unmarked *internal* (sometimes referred to as simple or scalar) interpretation, such as (2), which also is said to presuppose the truth of (3), and a marked negative form, often called an *external* negation, brought out in examples like (4).<sup>1</sup>

- (1) The king of France is bald.
- (2) The king of France is not bald.
- (3) There is a king of France.
- (4) The king of France is not ~bald—(because) there ~is no king of France.<sup>2</sup>

Horn also noted that metalinguistic negation seems to be involved in a number of other not-obviously truth-conditional uses of negation, like the following:

- (5) Chris didn't ~manage to solve the problem—it was ~easy for him.
- (6) ~Some men aren't chauvinists—~all/no men are chauvinists.
- (7) I didn't manage to trap two ~mongeese—I managed to trap two ~mongooses.
- (8) He didn't call the ~[pólis]—he called the ~[pəlis].  
(The contrast is between a socially marked stress-initial pronunciation and the standard stress-final pronunciation.)
- (9) Ben Ward is not a ~black Police Commissioner but a ~Police Commissioner who is black.
- (10) Piano student plays passage in manner  $\mu$ . Teacher: It's not ~[plays passage in manner  $\mu$ ]. It's ~[plays same passage in manner  $\mu'$ ]. (Horn (1989: 563, fn. 14, attributed to Barbara Abbott.)

Horn characterizes metalinguistic negation constructions as (1989:375) “occur[ing] naturally only as responses to utterances by other speakers earlier in the same discourse contexts, or as mid-course corrections after earlier utterances by the same speakers.” They have the opposite of the expected polarity properties, illustrated by (11)–(13).

- (11) Chris didn't solve ~some of the problems—he solved ~none/most/all of them.
- (12) \*Chris didn't solve ~any of the problems—he solved ~none/most/all of them.

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1. See (Lieberman and Sag, 1974) for discussion of the ~ intonation contour.

2. Horn did not include the second contradiction contour, although it seems clear that one is called for.

- (13) The Sox haven't ~already clinched the pennant—they have to win the next game.

The negation in metalinguistic negation does not incorporate with negative prefixes; you get an unambiguously metalinguistic interpretation of the unprefix versions of examples such as (14) and (15):

- (14) The king of France is ~{not happy/#unhappy}—there ~isn't any king of France.

- (15) The queen of England is ~{not happy/#unhappy}—she's ~ecstatic.

In my paper I set up a model of Horn's metalinguistic negation using a contextual incremental framework based on the work of Stalnaker. Stalnaker (1978) argued that the discourse processing of assertion involved a two-stage incrementation of the common ground of a conversation; the first (utterance) incrementation describes the act of assertion, and the second incrementation the acceptance or rejection of the assertion.

It is clear, from looking at correction and clarification data like (16)-(18), that speakers and addressees modify and negotiate over exactly what incrementation of the common ground to make in this initial incrementation.

- (16) Announcer: And now Van Cliburn playing Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto Number One in B-flat Minor . . . *I beg your pardon*, that should be *Fee Blat Minor!!!*
- (17) A: What kind of Scope does your mom use?  
B: What kind of ~soap?  
A: No, ~mouthwash; what kind of ~Scope?  
B: Oh, the ~regular kind.
- (18) Medical student: I have one question, Doctor Frankenstein . . .  
Dr. Frankenstein: That's ~Frahnkensteen.  
Medical student: I beg your pardon?  
Dr. Frankenstein: My ~name, it's pronounced ~Frahnkensteen.  
(Wilder and Brooks (1974))

Given Horn's description of its discourse function, it seems clear that metalinguistic negation is involved in a similar negotiation over utterance incrementation, while simple negation typically involves Stalnaker's second stage incrementation. In metalinguistic negation, the initial speaker offers an utterance (*UI*), which its addressee, the metalinguistic negation speaker echoes and rejects, and offers a reason for the rejection or a substitute version of the initial utterance, *UI'*. After sketching out this model of metalinguistic negation, I explore its ramifications for Horn's claims.

Horn (1985) "Metalinguistic Negation and Pragmatic Ambiguity," *Language*, 61, 121-174.

Horn (1989) *A Natural History of Negation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Stalnaker (1974), "Pragmatic Presuppositions" In Milton Munitz & Peter Unger (Eds.) *Semantics and Philosophy*. New York University Press.

Stalnaker (1978), "Assertion" In Peter Cole (Editor) *Syntax and Semantics, Volume 9: Pragmatics*, pages 315-322. New York: Academic Press.

Stalnaker (2002), "Common Ground" *Linguistics & Philosophy*, 25(5-6): 701-721.