

NEGATION IN ENGLISH AND MALTESE:  
Common Rules and Typological Differences<sup>1</sup>

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The purpose of this paper is to compare the major means of expressing negation in standard English and Maltese. The syntactic patterns involved are: a. verbal negation (Jackendoff 1969), which correlates with negation of the predicate in the semantic formula *Arg<sub>1</sub>. Pred. Arg<sub>2</sub>* (Leech 1974); b. subject and/or object negation (with or without co-occurring verbal negation), which correlates with complete negation (Stoyanova 1985). The goal being to work out the rules connecting the syntactic and semantic structures under study, these will be handled in terms of semantico-syntactic correspondences rather than in morphological terms.

The first important methodological distinction to be made is between the content and form of negation, i.e. between the semantic operator *NEG* and its exponent *neg*. The application of *NEG* signifies absence by means of presence (Rotman 1987). It indicates that the semantic information conveyed by any entity *A* in its scope is zero, or *NEG* predicates zero of *A* (Grozdanova in press). The fact that *NEG* is assumed to be language universal, to retain its meaning across languages, makes various language-specific patterns comparable. Its meaning is expected to be conveyed systematically and consistently by *neg(s)* in contrast to the affirmative counterpart. Which suggests that in spite of their morphological differences languages can be given a kind of unified account. As pointed out in Miller (1985, p. 212), "when the same facts obtain in different languages or where the same syntactic situation is brought about in different languages" these facts "are not to be regarded as accidental but as systematic and indicative of semantic structure".

Before discussing the affirmative-negative opposition in English and Maltese, we have to make another crucial distinction between two classes of sentences with more than one *neg*-form: a. sentences with more than one application of *NEG* (1(a) and 1(b) below); b. those with one application of *NEG*, which is expressed by more than one negative form (2(b) below). The latter case does not exist in Standard English (2(a)) but is the rule in Maltese (2(b)). English employs one negative form only (e.g. *nobody*).

1. (a) I *can't* ever *not* answer the telephone.  
(b) *Lanqas* biss nista' *ma* nwiegibx it-telefon.
2. (a) Peter did *not* see anybody.  
Peter saw *nobody*.  
(b) Pietru *ma* ra'l *hadd*. (Peter not saw obj-marker nobody.)

It is sufficient to remove one of the negative exponents from the two groups of sentences above and compare the results to see the crucial difference between them:

3. (a) I *can't* ever answer the telephone.  
(b) *Lanqas* biss nista' nwiegib it-telefon.

iniquitates nostras, attritus est propter scelera nostras. = Aghraf o bniedem (ighait hauna bi dmuh fghaineihh S. Bern) Aghraf, u icconosci, o bniedem chem hhuma hhsiena, chem huma gravi, chem huma enormi, u detestabili il piaghi ta ruh h tighrech, dnuvietech cioè, chem huma orribili, la darba chien hem bzon illi icun bda il mot impiagat, u midrub l'istes G.C. signur taghna, la darba chien hem bzon li hua ihhalli hhaitu fost tant duluri, u turmenti G.C. bniedem Alla, Unigenitu tal missier etern, il Verb Divin incarnat, issignur tas-sema, u lard, insomma = Agnosce o homo quam gravia sunt vulnera, pro quibus necesse est Dominum Christum vulnerali = Adorat Red. tighi, imsallab, mudrub, u mejet ghalia, issa jena tabilhhak kighed naghraf chem huma detestabili dnuvieti la darba chienu il hhtiha funesta tal meut crudelissima. tighrech, nobghodhom ghal dakstant, nituahhaschom, nindem minhom. Imma inti o Signur li hhfirt btant hhniena u tieba lil hud li salbuch, deh ahfer lili ucol, pietà Signur hniena, misericordia. Jena naf ben tajeb il irgait sallabtek tant chem il darba dnibt, musc bis reghisitech, u hkkartech. Ma inzic iziet po' Alla tighi, ma inzic iziet noffendich, anzi millum il koddjem iena irrit immut mighec, irrid immut ghaddigna, ghal passioni tighi, ghal dach collu li meusc piacic tighrech.

Imma inti o Signur illi tispirali dina isceuka, atini grazia o Signur illi incomplu bl'opera dach illi inuieggedech illu bil cliem, jena nitolboch di il grazia ghal meriti tal passioni tighrech, ta iddem presiosissimu. li ciarciart ghalia, ghal meriti flahharnett tal Crocifissioni tighrech, atini grazia li inhhobboch millu il koddjem fil hhaia tighi colha, biesc icolli isciorti nigi giurnata ingaudi il fort tal meut harscia tighrech. Amen.

## T. IX, MEDITAZIONI PER LI ESERCIZI

ALTRO PROEMIO P. L'ISTESSA PROD. RETROSCRITTA IN S.  
DOM. QUADRAGESIMA

"Ductus est Iesus in deserto a Spiritu, ut tentaretur a diabolo" (Evang)

Hhargiu appena tali chelmiet min fommi ta l'odiern Sacrosant Ev:, malli già nisthailcom tintleu bil ghageb, u tipku scantati schhin tifmu illi l'iben unigenitu tal Missier Etern, l'Onnipotent Alla, il Verb Divin, chellu issostini l'assalti tal ispiрту ribelli; schhin tifmu, illi l'istes'Innocenza, l'istess tieba chelha tcun cumbattuta mil cap tal hhsunia Luciferu; schhin tifmu illi l'impeccabili per essenza chellu icun sollicitat biesc iaka fi dnub; schhin tifmu insomma illi sidna G.C., Sultan tal gloria chellu icun ittentat mi demoniu princep ta dlamiel infernali: = ductus est Iesus etc. Ghanctom ragiu iya tistaghgibu, u li ma chenic tobbligana nemnuhh il fidi, ghandtco ragiu chiecu tiddubitau min hhedana il fat orribili flistessu zmien li hua terribili: = mens refugit credere (istkarru ucol S. Gregoriu) et humane hoc audire aures expavescent. = Imma la darba tant hu hekk tabilhhakk hedana il fatt chem hua veru l'Evangelu inhhalla da parti ghageb, u naghmlu sci considerazioni iziet validi. Iddemoniu ittanta li Gesù Xtu, u ittanta lilna ucol, u iaghamel idmir tighu collu biesc igiarrafna fi dnub, u iech fihh Alla iahhares ninsabu iorbotna, u incatnana tant chem ista biesc dejem nipkghu midimbin, appuntu ghasc iobghot l'innocenza, iobghot il gmiel supranaturali ta ruh h taghna meta tcun in grazia t'Alla, u igibha pphalu.



On the basis of the data above we can outline the following basic syntactic patterns:

14. Subject + *neg*-Verb<sup>2</sup> + object – English, Maltese;
15. (a) Subject + *neg*-Verb + *any*-object – English,  $\phi$ ;  
(b) Subject + Verb + *neg*-object – English,  $\phi$ ;  
(c) Subject + *neg*-Verb + *neg*-object –  $\phi$ , Maltese;  
(d) *Neg*-subject + *neg*-Verb + object –  $\phi$ , Maltese;  
(e) *Neg*-subject + Verb + object – English,  $\phi$ .

Naturally, more complex cases as those related to ditransitive verbs, locative or temporal modifiers, etc. will need further elaboration. What we hope to have shown above is the fact that the systematic expression of negation in English and Maltese, and by logical extension in other languages, depends on two kinds of negation – predicate and complete. Verbal negation as an expression of the former can reasonably be expected to follow the same common rule, with a negative verb form (14) in a systematic opposition to a positive counterpart. Complete negation, on the other hand, is expressed by different types of rules. One such rule combines negative prowords (or zero-words) with negative verb forms, as in Maltese (15(c) and 15(d)). Another rule reduces the negative forms to one (15(a), (b) and (e)). It can be either a negative verb in correlation with a special word like *any* (15(a)) or a positive verb related to a negative object (15(b)) or subject (15(e)). Subject negation follows an obligatory *neg*-incorporation rule.

To summarize, in expressing predicate negation English and Maltese employ a common rule of inserting a negative exponent into the verb phrase. In the case of complete negation, however, they diverge significantly. The number of exponents in Maltese corresponds to the number of applications of *NEG*. In Standard English that number is reduced to one. So, in case of predicate/verbal negation there is symmetry between the corresponding semantic and syntactic constructions, whereas complete negation correlates with two types of syntactic patterns – a symmetric polynegative one and a highly grammaticalized, reduced mononegative one. This accounts for the points of similarity and difference between English and Maltese in the field of negation and allows one to evaluate the extent of convergence and divergence between them.

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2 The actual form and place of *neg* within the phrase is beyond the scope of this paper.