

Don't get me wrong! Negation in argumentative writing by Swedish and British students and professional writers

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Abstract

Negation is a means by which writers take their readers into account, anticipate their expectations and what inferences they may make, and dismiss those which are in conflict with their own. This is a pilot study comparing negation in argumentative writing in English by Swedish advanced learners, British students and professional writers in the British broadsheet press. The findings suggest that Swedish advanced learners use negation to negate interpersonal meanings (i.e. interactional and attitudinal meanings) more frequently than British students, a tendency which can be attributed to a high degree of subjective involvement generally found in Swedish advanced learners' essays. In comparison to the professional writers, both categories of student writers use negation less frequently to negate meanings on the content level of their texts. This can be attributed to the difference in the tenor relations which professional and student writers have to their readers.

1. Introduction

According to Grice's cooperation principle, and the first maxim of quantity which states that communicators should "Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)" (Grice 1975:45), negative utterances are issued when speakers believe they have caused a proposition which is false to be presupposed by their addressee (Tottie 1982:101). Negations are thus typically used when the speaker or writer believes the corresponding affirmative can be plausibly inferred by the given context and may, for some reason, be in the mind of their addressees (Jordan 1998:710, Givón 2001:370, Miestamo 2005). This depends, of course, on the writers' assumptions concerning their readers' knowledge of the topic being dealt with in the text as well as their general background knowledge, which is, to a certain extent, culture-specific. The corresponding affirmative may, of course, have actually been expressed in the preceding discourse (as in e.g. *John isn't married* uttered in response to *John is married*), in which case the negation is, according to Tottie (1991:21-24), an explicit denial, in contrast to implicit denials which negate propositions which have to

be inferred from the context (as e.g. *John isn't married*, uttered in response to e.g. *John's wife is a teacher*, negates the implicit affirmative proposition *John is married*).¹

Seen from a Bakhtinian perspective (1986), and in the terminology of Appraisal theory developed by Martin (2000) and White (1998, 2003a and 2003b), Martin and White (2005), negation is thus typically dialogic, i.e. it “places one voice in relation to a potential opposing one. Two voices are implicated” (Martin and Rose 2003:49). A negative sentence such as *They have not sacked the minister*, for instance, implicates the existence of the directly opposing affirmative proposition *They have sacked the minister*. The producer of this negation is thus, as Pagano (1994:256) observes, “projecting a world in which what is denied is accepted, that is, in which there is an understanding that the producer and his/her readers accept the proposition being denied.”² This creates a dialogic relationship between two opposing positions, the negation itself and an affirmative proposition. By rejecting this affirmative proposition, the negation contracts the dialogic space in the discourse (White 2003b:261, Martin & White 2005:118). In Appraisal terms, then, negation is a linguistic resource for dialogic contraction, which is a

¹ Tottie's usage of the term implicit denial for the denial of a proposition which has not been explicitly formulated in the text has been criticised on the grounds that the term implicit denial may also be used for denials where the negation itself is implicit and there is no formal marker of negation (Pagano 1994:252). Pagano illustrates this with the exchange:

A: Has the garbage been emptied?

B: You know bloody well I've been out all day, how could I have emptied the garbage can?

For our purpose here, however, Tottie's distinction between implicit and explicit denial is useful as it refers to the intertextual vs. intratextual status of the dialogic relationship between the negation and its directly opposing affirmative proposition.

² Pagano (1994:256) illustrates this with the negation *The bride was not wearing a white dress*, which is accepted in a world where the alternative positive position, “that brides wear white dresses” can be assumed. According to Pagano, assumptions which are experientially linked in a certain context belong to an existential paradigm, i.e. a set of alternative positions which can be negated in the given culture-specific context.

subsystem of Engagement, i.e. the meanings speakers and writers express to ignore or acknowledge heteroglossic diversity and to negotiate a position for themselves within that diversity (Martin and White 200:97-135). Negations are used thus to contract the dialogic space of texts by denying their directly opposing affirmative propositions. Within the system of dialogic contraction, they are maximally contractive, i.e. they close down discussion by rejecting these alternative positions altogether (Martin and White 2005:118).

It has been found that negation occurs frequently in argumentative writing. In Martin and White's (2005:182) study of broadsheet media language, for instance, the frequency of negation was much higher in Comment, opinion and editorial page items than in news reporting. This is perhaps not surprising, considering that argumentation involves both establishing one's own standpoint and challenging and rejecting opposing viewpoints which one believes others may have concerning the issue in hand. Argumentation can therefore be expected to involve a great deal of dialogic contraction. As negation is both dialogic and contractive, i.e. it is "a resource for introducing the alternative positive position into the dialogue, and hence acknowledging it, so as to reject it." (Martin and White 2005:118), it is, then, as Martin and Rose (2003:49) have pointed out, "a feature of persuasive writing where contesting positions need to be addressed and set aside".

This is a pilot study of how negation is used in argumentative writing in English by three categories of writers: Swedish advanced learners of English, native-speaker students writing in an educational setting and professional writers in the British press. For this purpose, I have examined two small samples (each a total of approx. 20,000 words) from the Swedish and native-speaker components of the *International Corpus of Learner English* project (ICLE, 2002, See Granger 1998a & b). The former (SWICLE) consists of argumentative essays written by Swedish students in their second year of university studies of English. The sample comprises the first 37 essays in the corpus, each consisting on average of 500 words. These essays are about topics such as immigration, equality, environmental issues, etc. The latter, the *Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays* (LOCNESS), consists of argumentative essays by American and British university students and some British A-level students. The sample comprises the first 38 essays in the corpus, which were all written by British students. These essays range from approx. 400

- 1200 words each, and they are about topics such as road and rail transport problems in the UK, fox hunting, boxing, etc. I have also collected a small sample of “Comment” or “Opinion” articles (23 articles, each consisting on average of 900 words, making a total of approx. 20,000 words), which I downloaded from the Internet versions of four British broadsheet newspapers *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, and *The Independent* during a period of six months from November 2003 to March in 2004.³ These articles were written by experienced writers: journalists, authors, and public figures, as well as regular columnists employed by the newspapers, and their purpose is to argue the case for a personal point of view on a controversial issue, such as immigration, gender equality, fees for university education, the drugs crisis, genetically modified crops, to mention just a few (See list of articles in Appendix). I will refer to this from now on as the COMMENT sample.

From these three samples I have collected all the instances of *not* (*n't*)-negation and *no*-negation, i.e. *no*-negation with the negative words: *no*, *never*, *neither*, *nor*, *nobody*, *no one*, *nothing*, *nowhere*, *none* (Johansson and Lysvåg 1986:239, Quirk *et al.* 1985:775-799, Tottie 1991:87 and 106),⁴ and examined how they are used and what kinds of meanings they are used to negate. The latter will be done from the Hallidayan perspective of language function, i.e. that language is used for three main metafunctions, to express experiential meanings (i.e. the propositional content), interpersonal meanings (i.e. interactional and attitudinal meanings) or textual meanings (i.e. meanings concerned with the writing process), respectively (Halliday 2004: 29-31).

³ I have used Comment articles rather than editorials in order to collect texts by as many different writers as possible.

⁴ I have not, however, included other types of negation, such as affixal negation by the prefixes *in-*, *un-*, *dis-* and *non-*, and the suffixes *-less* and *-out*, etc. (Tottie 1991:45-59), and inherent negation by lexical items with negative meaning though positive in form, such as *fail*, *seldom*, *hardly*, etc (Quirk *et al.* 1985:780).

2. Negation in SWICLE, LOCNESS and COMMENT

There are no striking differences in the numbers of negations in the three samples. In the SWICLE sample there are 245; in the LOCNESS sample there are 224; and in the COMMENT sample there are 288 (See Table 1).

Table 1. *Not-* and *no-*negations

	<i>Not-negation</i>		<i>No-negation</i>		Total No.
	No.	%	No.	%	
SWICLE	189	77.1	56	22.9	245
LOCNESS	156	69.6	68	30.4	224
COMMENT	218	75.7	70	24.3	288

About three quarters of these negations are *not*-negations (77.1% in SWICLE, 69.6% in LOCNESS, and 75.7% in COMMENT). Tottie, in her corpus study of negation (1991:139), found that *not*-negation was used more frequently in spoken language and *no*-negation more frequently in written language. Similarly Biber *et al* (1999:170) note that *not*-negation is much more frequent than *no*-negation in conversation. The higher proportions of *not-negation* in the SWICLE and COMMENT samples (77.1% and 75.7%, respectively) may reflect a tendency for these writers to use a somewhat more informal, conversational style in their argumentative writing.⁵

⁵ According to (Johansson and Lysvåg 1986:240, Biber *et al.* 1999:169, Downing and Locke 2006:23), *no* negation is often used to express judgements and that it may be more emphatic than *not* negation. This emphasis, is, according to Cheshire (1999:39), due to the fact that *no* negatives such as *no*, *nothing*, *never* etc are absolutes at ends of scalar implicatures of quantity and usuality, etc. As such, they invite the addressee to determine as wide a scope as possible for their content, thus creating an overstatement. They are, therefore, “a very effective intensifying device” which has “an important role in securing interpersonal involvement” (Cheshire 1999:39). It appears then that Swedish advanced learners may use this kind of negation slightly less often than the native speaker writers.

As would be expected in written texts such as these, most of the negations are what Tottie (1991:21-24) refers to as implicit denials, i.e. they are used to implicate and reject potential affirmative propositions which the writers believe can be plausibly inferred by their readers at this point of the text and in a certain culture-specific context. In (1) and (2), for example, the negations implicate the potential affirmative propositions, 'that pretty unromantic rights are to be sniffed at', and 'that the times which literature and art describe are merely fiction', respectively. These are propositions which can be inferred in culture-specific contexts where being 'unromantic' may be valued negatively, and where it is believed that literature and art may be regarded as 'merely fiction', respectively.

- (1) The civil partnerships bill, announced in the Queen's speech on Wednesday, will give homosexual lovers who have registered their partnership some of the standard rights that married couples take for granted. They are pretty unromantic rights, but still, *not* to be sniffed at - things like a share of a partner's pension or the waiving of inheritance tax when one partner dies. (COMMENT *Unmarried Couples*)
- (2) If we compare that literature with the literature that is being written today we can see a pattern. We see the same kind of anxiety for the future and the criticism of what is right now. Literature and art often mirror society, and the times they describe are *not* merely fiction. (SWICLE - UG-0015.2)

There are, however, a small number of negations (8 instances each in the SWICLE and LOCNESS samples, respectively, and 5 instances in the COMMENT sample) which are explicit denials, i.e. they occur in response to affirmative positions which are expressed in the preceding discourse (Tottie 1991:21-24). These explicit denials set up an internal dialogue within the text itself, with one utterance acting to replace the other. According to Appraisal theory, they function within the system of intratextual Engagement, in contrast to implicit denials which negotiate positions outside the text and therefore function with the system of intertextual Engagement (White 1998:95). In (3) and (4) for instance, the affirmative propositions and their negations are juxtaposed as two directly opposing standpoints, in (3) by *or*-coordination and in (4) by *and*-coordination. As they are expressed in direct response to an assertion of their directly opposing affirmative position, these negations are also elliptical.

- (3) This hypocritical view is showed by so many that whether boxing should be banned or *not* will remain a controversial issue for the foreseeable future. (LOCNESS Boxing 4)
- (4) Hence, we get disconnected from our origin, and lose our sense for what is 'natural' for human beings, and what is *not*. (SWICLE-UG-0020.2)

In (5), on the other hand, the affirmative proposition and its negation form an exchange pair in which the negation is issued as a contradiction of the affirmative proposition.

- (5) a. In times of social change one would perhaps have thought that people should be too concerned about politics to have the time to contemplate on spiritual questions. However, this is *not* so. (SWICLE-UG-0012.2)
- b. All the evidence of boredom, disaffection and stress among children and teachers, of employers' dissatisfaction and of universities' unease, is dismissed with one simple argument: that what the government is doing is what works. Except that it *doesn't*. (COMMENT *Tests*)
- c. If we were to listen to Roy Hattersley, only telling people where they have to go to hospital will create equity. But it *hasn't*. (COMMENT *NHS*)

As Tottie (1991:23) has pointed out, explicit denials are typical of spoken discourse. By creating exchanges between two directly opposing positions and using ellipsis in the denials, the writers of (5) are imitating the interactive role reversal that takes place between the sender and addressee in face to face conversation, thereby creating an informal, "chatty" style in their written texts. Negated exchanges such as (5) are thus overtly dialogistic.

Some of the negations in the three samples combine with interrogative Mood to form rhetorical questions which expect the positive answer, *yes* (9 instances in the SWICLE sample, 5 instances in the COMMENT sample and one instance in the LOCNESS sample). In (6) and (7), for instance, the negated interrogatives invoke the directly opposing affirmative propositions 'it should be even more important' and 'that there is a danger', respectively.

- (6) I mean: it is very natural when you go to a country on vacation; that you try to conform to their rules and speak in their language. So; should it *not* be even

more important to follow these rules and speak this language when you know that you are going to stay in this country for a considerable amount of time in the future? (SWICLE-UG-0008.2)

- (7) A pragmatic faith that struggles with the big questions is far more appealing than one that claims to offer the big answers. But *isn't* there a danger of culling the benefits of spirituality without considering the attendant responsibilities? What does crystal healing or a quick prayer to an ill-defined god teach us about community or kindness? You can't turn belief on and off like a tap – it should weave itself through a whole life rather than be seized upon to plug the gaps. (COMMENT *Spiritualism*)

These rhetorical questions are a request for the reader to provide the directly opposing affirmative proposition, not to reject it. Negations with an affirmative assumption such as these function thus as strong proclamations of their directly opposing affirmative propositions (Halliday 2004:144). According to Hyland “the most manipulative rhetorical questions, however, offer no answers at all. They position their readers by presupposing their response as well; assuming they will go along with the writer and see the answer as obvious.” (Hyland 2002:551). In Appraisal terms, these rhetorical questions may therefore be regarded as concurrences, i.e. proclamations of generally shared knowledge and assumptions (Martin and White 2005:122). They are also explicitly dialogic in the sense that the writers enter into an imaginary conversation with their imaginary readers (Hyland 2002:551). The highest number of negations used as concurrences is found in the SWICLE sample. This is not surprising as it has been found earlier by Ädel (2006:133) in a comparison of metadiscourse in the SWICLE and LOCNESS corpora that Swedish advanced learners tend to overuse interrogative clauses, in particular as rhetorical questions.

In sum, there are a number of features in the SWICLE sample, i.e. a slight preference of *not*-negation, usage of explicit denials and negative rhetorical questions, which suggest that the Swedish students' usage of negation may tend to often be explicitly dialogic and close to spoken language.

I will now go on to compare what kinds of meanings the negations in the corpus samples are used to negate.

3. Semantic functions

Texts may be seen as consisting of different levels of meaning, i.e. a propositional information content level, which refers to actions, events, states of affairs or objects in the world portrayed by the text, and a writer-reader level, where the writers interact with their readers by commenting on the writing process itself, explicitly guiding the reader through its structure and organisation or by expressing their opinions and beliefs concerning its informational content (vande Kopple 1985,1988, Crismore 1989 and Crismore *et al.* 1993). The meanings expressed on the writer-reader level of the text are referred to in some analyses by the umbrella term *metadiscourse*, i.e. “the self-reflective linguistic expressions referring to the evolving text, to the writer, and to the imagined readers of that text” (Hyland 2004:133). In Hallidayan terms (2004), however, a distinction is made between the meanings concerned with the writing process itself, i.e. the textual metafunction of language to construct a message by building up “sequences of discourse, organizing the discursive flow and creating cohesion and continuity as it moves along” (Halliday 2004:29) and the meanings concerned with opinions and beliefs concerning its informational content, i.e. the interpersonal metafunction, of language to enact “our personal and social relationships with other people around us” by organising it as an interactive event (Halliday 2004:29). The propositional information content level of the text, on the other hand, is concerned with the experiential metafunction of language, i.e. the use of language to construe human experience as configurations of processes, participants involved in these processes and any attendant circumstances. Seen from this perspective, then the dialogic space of a text may be regarded as consisting of two levels, the writer-reader level of the text, which is made up of interpersonal and textual meanings, and the content level, which is made up of experiential meanings.

In the following, then, I will examine how the writers of the three corpus samples use negation on these two levels of the text. For this purpose, I have classified the negations in the three samples according to whether they function on the writer-reader level of the text by negating textual meanings, i.e. meanings which are concerned with the structure and organisation of the text or with the ongoing communicative process itself, or by negating interpersonal meanings, i.e. attitudinal meanings

towards the propositional content of the text. The remaining negations in the samples have been counted as negations on the content level of the text. These include negations of whole propositions, such as (8a), participants such as (8b) and circumstances, such as (8c).

- (8) a. One should also keep in mind that Sweden is *not* an isolated island and that it has always thrived on foreign influences. (SWICLE-UG-0003.2)
- b. The problem with these schemes is that they are unpopular and beneficial to *nobody* in the short term. (LOCNESS Transport 08)
- c. The road network is *no* longer able to carry this traffic without hold-ups and traffic jams. (LOCNESS Transport 12)

The results of the classification (Table 2) show that the COMMENT sample has the highest number of negations on the content level of the texts (235 vs. 186 and 180 negations in the LOCNESS and SWICLE samples, respectively). The SWICLE sample, on the other hand, has the highest number of negations on the writer-reader level (65 vs. 53 and 38 negations in the COMMENT and LOCNESS samples, respectively), so that more than a quarter of the total number of *no*- and *not*-negations in this sample negate interpersonal or textual meanings. This high proportion of negations on the writer-reader level of SWICLE is, above all, due to a large number of interpersonal negations (45 negations). These are twice as many as in the other two samples (21 and 25 instances in the LOCNESS and COMMENT samples, respectively). There are, on the other hand, fewer textual negations in the LOCNESS and SWICLE samples (17 and 20 negations, respectively) than in COMMENT (28 negations).

Table 2. Semantic functions of negations

	Content Level	Writer-Reader Level		
		Interpersonal	Textual	Total
SWICLE	180	45	20	65
LOCNESS	186	21	17	38
COMMENT	235	25	28	53

These interpersonal and textual negations will be discussed separately in the following subsections:

3.1 Interpersonal Negations

Interpersonal negations are negations of attitudinal meanings towards the propositional content of the text, negating, for example, the extent to which its information is to be regarded as reliable, unusual, significant, etc. I have only included here negations which frame the proposition, i.e. the attitudinal meanings are expressed in loosely attached or distinct structural components, which (Biber *et al.* 1999:969) refer to as stance complement clause constructions,⁶ or stance adverbials. The attitudinal meanings negated in the three samples include modal meanings of probability and usability, as in (9) and (10), and obligation and inclination, etc. as in (11 and (12), and other evaluative meanings, such as surprise, or significance, etc. as in (13). By both implicating and rejecting attitudinal values such as these, these negations contract the dialogic space on the interpersonal level of the argumentation.

(9) Probability

- a. At some level, Sweden has probably always had immigrants, and judging by the situation of today it is not likely that the future is going to be much different. (SWICLE-UG-0001.2)
- b. I am not sure that we in all senses live in a more violent world than people did one hundred or one thousand years ago. (SWICLE-UG-0022.2)
- c. And I do not think that it is wrong to claim that those Swedes that celebrate traditions most are those living abroad. (SWICLE-UG-0005.2)⁷

⁶ I have included complement clauses that negate attitudes which frame nonfinite clauses (as in e.g. (11c)). On the other hand, negations of attitudinal meanings which are incorporated within the proposition itself, for instance those expressed by modal verbs, e.g. *The person in general may not be able to afford it* (SWICLE-UG-0028.2) have not been counted as interpersonal negations.

⁷ Negations of complement clauses such as (9c), are regarded as examples of transferred negation (or negative raising or *not-hopping*) i.e. when a negative in

128 *Jennifer Herriman*

- d. It cannot be denied by any boxer that boxing is dangerous and that each time he walks into the ring he is risking his life? (LOCNESS Boxing 11)
- e. Like most conservatives, I don't think that hunting should be banned. (COMMENT *Drugs*)
- f. It is simply not true that it is irreversible, in the sense that people could *not* be encouraged to behave otherwise by tax incentives and changes in the law. (COMMENT *IVF*)
- g. As I see it, to-day's young people and those of the next generation will not necessarily suffer from the prevailing state of high unemployment. (SWICLE-UG-0014.2)
- h. It is, no doubt, a fast way of commuting to and from destinations with little stress on the body, however traffic congestion is becoming a major concern in any city or town. (LOCNESS Transport 4)⁸
- i. The foxes are not really given a chance. (LOCNESS Foxhunting 2)

(10) Usuality

- a. Scientists speak about holes in the ozon layer and abnormal fluctuations in the weather, but it is not often that people encounter environmental destruction themselves.⁹ (SWICLE-UG-0006.2)

(11) Obligation

- a. It is not for outsiders to comment on the morality of the sport; (LOCNESS Boxing 6)

a higher clause is interpreted as a negation of the embedded clause (Miestamo 1999, Givón 2001:394, Downing and Locke 2006:26). This is possible with mental processes such as *think* which have midscalar values between certainty and obligation. Verbs which do not allow negative transport have weak or strong values on this scale (Horn 1989).

⁸ The literal meaning of *no doubt* is the absence of doubt. However, as this expression is used to emphasize one's commitment to the truth of one's statements, it infers, in fact, that there may be some reason for doubt. *No doubt* has therefore come to be used in many contexts to express some doubt or uncertainty rather than complete certainty (Simon-Vanderbergen 2007:30).

⁹ Students' spelling and grammar mistakes have not been corrected.

b. It is *not supposed* to feel good to go to jail, but I doubt that Swedish prisons have the scary effect on criminals they ought to have. (SWICLE-UG-0021.2)

c. There is *no need* to treat them like poor victims. (SWICLE-UG-0021.2)

(12) Inclination

a. On the other hand, I do *not at all approve* of forcing people to assimilate, by legal means or any other way of putting them under pressure. (SWICLE-UG-0007.2)

b. Well, mostly because I do *not like it* when people use terror as a way of getting their will through. (ICLE-SW-UG-0013.2)

(13) Other Evaluations

a. Non-prescription sleeping pills are hopeless and it comes as *no surprise* that the excitement of the prospective amputation triumphed over the tablets' sedative effects. (COMMENT *Cannibalism*)

b. It is therefore *not surprising* that the trend we see in the growing sales of such literature has its roots in this part of the world. (SWICLE-UG-0030.2)

c. Many times we act just as if there will be no tomorrow, as if it does *not matter* what dangerous waste our offspring will have to take care of. (SWICLE-UG-0032.2)

d. No wonder some women feel that caesareans equal failure. (COMMENT *Push*)

The distribution of negated attitudinal meanings is given in Table 3, where we find that in all three samples probability is the most usual negated attitudinal meaning.

Table 3. Interpersonal Negations

	SWICLE		LOCNESS		COMMENT	
	Obj.	Subj.	Obj.	Subj.	Obj.	Subj.
Probability	14	12	8	3	12	5
Usuality	1	-	-	-	-	-
Obligation	4	2	6	-	3	1
Inclination	2	5	-	2	-	2
Other	5	0	2	-	2	-
Total	26	19	16	5	17	8

Negated attitudes with *it* as the subject, such as *it is not likely*, *it is not supposed to*, *it is not surprising* in (9a), (11b) and (13b), respectively, make the attitudes expressed appear impersonal. On the other hand, 1st person negations of mental processes, such as *I am not sure*, *I don't think*, *I do not approve*, etc. as in (9b), (9e) and (12a) respectively, attribute the negated attitude overtly to the writers. These mark a subjective intrusion by the writers into the text in order to clarify their personal standpoint on the issue. The distribution of these objective and subjective interpersonal negations is also given in Table 3, where we find the highest number of subjective interpersonal negations in the SWICLE sample (19 negations vs. 8 and 5 in COMMENT and LOCNESS, respectively), in particular these are first person negations with the verb *think*, as in (9e) above.

3.2 Textual Negations

The textual negations in the three samples could be divided into two main types: those concerned with the structure and organisation of the text and those which are concerned with the ongoing communicative process between the writer and reader. For convenience, I will refer to the former from now on as “conjunctive” negations and the latter as “illocutionary” negations.

“Conjunctive” negations function as cohesive, transitional devices which link new information or a new topic to what has already been expressed in the text. This is done by negating the exhaustiveness of the preceding information. In (14) and (15), for instance, the negative correlative coordination pairs *not only ...but (also)* add new information by negating the exhaustiveness of the first chunk of information. As Quirk *et al.* (1985:941) point out, the information following *not only* is presented as given, whereas the information following *but (also)* is given more emphasis suggesting that it is more surprising than what preceded.

- (14) It is said that the Olympic Games would not only bring work to the unemployed but also tourists that would spend a lot of money. (SWICLE-UG-0013.2)
- (15) Not only is there problems in traveling from A to B but the likelihood is that if B is any major city you will waste more time looking for somewhere to park there. (LOCNESS Transport 14)

Similarly the negations in (16) and (17), also add new information by negating the exhaustiveness, or “completeness” of the informational content previously presented, thereby preparing the reader for the next step in the argumentation. In (16), for instance, the negation of the exclusivity of one source of opinion (*Mary Steel is not alone...*) prefaces the addition of new information from a second source (*both the headmasters warned...*), and in (17) the negation of the “completeness” of the information given in the text (*But this is not the whole picture*) signals that there is more to follow.

- (16) It was Mary Steel, headmistress of St Mary and St Anne, a private school in Staffordshire which charges its boarders £16,899 a year, who set the cat among the pigeons at the GSA conference last week. ...
 'Everyone in society now only seems to be concerned with their own achievements and ambitions,' she declared. ...
 Mary Steel is *not* alone in her concern. Both the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers have recently warned that the culture of self-interest and self-gratification has invaded every family to a greater or lesser degree. (COMMENT *Community*)

- (17) The crucial claim for GM crops is that they are necessary. They can out-yeild traditional varieties, and can be made especially rich in protein and vitamins. The world's population is rising fast and without GM, the story has it, famine and increasing deficiency are inevitable. To oppose their development is to be effete to the point of wickedness.
 But this is *not* the whole picture. The world population stands at 6 billion, and the UN says it will reach 10 billion by 2050 - but then should level out. Present productivity could be doubled by improving traditional breeding and husbandry, so whatever the virtues of GMOs, necessity is not among them. (COMMENT *Genetics*)

In (18) – (19), on the other hand, the negations add new information by negating a causal conjunctive relation which is represented by the verb *mean*. These negations function thus as a cohesive and information-organising device which links a counterargument to earlier arguments.

- (18) Finally, the idea of animals being human in a “good” sense and humans being animals in a “bad” sense must be seen as an incidental theme in “Animal Farm”. This does *not* mean that it is a theme lacking in importance and urgency. (SWICLE-UG-0034.2)

132 *Jennifer Herriman*

- (19) You may think it right that gay sex was decriminalised, but that doesn't mean you would necessarily be encouraged to try it yourself, or assume it was good for you. (COMMENT *Drugs*)

“Illocutionary” negations, on the other hand, are concerned with the ongoing interactive communication between the writer and reader, i.e. they negate the writers’ own speech acts or the reader’s interpretation of them in order to clarify the writer’s intended meanings and correct possible alternative interpretations. In this respect, communication negations tend to be somewhat more overtly subjective than “cohesive” negations. In (20) and (21), for example the negated speech acts, *suggest* and *say*, reject propositions which the writers do not intend their readers to infer.

- (20) The question in reality is whether people should be able to choose to go somewhere else if their local hospital has a long waiting list and they can be treated elsewhere quicker in the NHS. Alongside the increases in capacity, most visibly seen with the introduction of 55,000 more nurses and 14,000 more doctors, we want to give the power to patients to help the whole NHS system navigate to excellence. I do not suggest choice is absolute, because we all know capacity is not infinite. (COMMENT *NHS*)

- (21) As religious orthodoxy fails to accommodate contemporary mores, there is a case to be made for encouraging a new spiritual dimension that offers moral structure without stricture. But is this it? There is minimal intellectual or moral rigour to “bespoke belief” that knits together the cosiest aspects of the systems on offer and ignores any broader inconsistencies. This is not to say that it’s lightweight not to be wrestling with cosmology. A pragmatic faith that struggles with the big questions is far more appealing than one that claims to offer the big answers. (COMMENT *Spiritualism*)

In (22), on the other hand, the negated act of interpretation by the reader, *get*, signals that the writer is aware of the risk that the reader may misinterpret his intended meanings and that he is therefore about to make adjustments to prevent them from being misinterpreted. This negation is in the imperative Mood. It is therefore explicitly dialogic, invoking the presence of the reader in the text. It illustrates clearly the writer’s awareness of heteroglossic diversity and the risk that the reader may infer other propositions than those intended.

- (22) We must target help on groups excluded from mainstream society, who often face the greatest deprivation. But there are also many children across Britain

living in close families and strong communities who suffer disadvantage and are denied opportunity. Don't get me wrong. Tackling social exclusion is a difficult and vital challenge. And impressive progress has been made - as we set out in the latest report published today by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU). But the unit's work on the causes of deprivation and the challenges ahead makes clear that we cannot simply promote a communitarian notion of inclusion. We have to tackle long-term inherited inequalities too. (COMMENT *Poverty*)

In (23) finally, the negation comments on the writer's choice of words, indicating that another formulation could also have been used.

- (23) But, then again, a certain degree of assimilation is unavoidable, not to say desirable since noone will take harm from seing the world from a new perspective. (SWICLE-UG-0007.2)

The distribution of the “conjunctive” and “illocutionary” types of textual negations is given in Table 4, where we find that “conjunctive” negations are more or less evenly distributed in the three samples (15 negations in SWICLE, 16 in LOCNESS and 18 in COMMENT), whereas there are more instances of “illocutionary” negations in the COMMENT sample (10 negations) than in the SWICLE sample (5 instances), and there is only one instance in the LOCNESS sample.

Table 4 Textual Negations

	SWICLE	LOCNESS	COMMENT
Conjunctive	15	16	18
Illocutionary	5	1	10
Total	20	17	28

In sum, then, there are some differences in the kinds of meanings negated in the SWICLE, LOCNESS and COMMENT samples. In the samples by both categories of student writers (SWICLE and LOCNESS), there are fewer negations on content level of the texts and there are also fewer textual negations of the “illocutionary” kind. If we compare the samples by the two groups of student writers (SWICLE and LOCNESS) with each other, we find similar numbers of negations on the content level of their texts. On the writer-reader level, however, there are more

interpersonal negations in the SWICLE sample than in the LOCNESS sample, in particular to negations of subjective interpersonal meanings and textual meanings of the “illocutionary” kind. It appears, then, that the usage of negation may be more subjective and involved in the SWICLE sample than in the LOCNESS sample.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As Miestamo (1999) pointed out, “Negation is not present in the physical world. It is a mental process for which the users of language are responsible”. It is, furthermore, a marked linguistic resource, which occurs much less frequently than affirmative sentences in discourse (Givón 2001:372), and this is reflected by the fact that negative sentences appear later in children’s speech than affirmative ones (Clark & Clark 1977:513). This “mental process”, then, sets up a dialogistic relationship with a directly opposing affirmative proposition which has either been stated earlier in the cotext or which the writer believes is inferrable from the context. By negating this proposition, the writer contracts the heteroglossic space in the text. This may be on the propositional information content level of the text or on the writer-reader level, where writers monitor the attitudinal orientation of the text, mark transitions between chunks of information by denying the exclusivity of the preceding information or the consequential relations between them, and clarify their intended meanings.

Negation is therefore a means for writers to take their readers into account, to anticipate their expectations and what inferences they may make and to dismiss those which are in conflict with their own, making sure their readers do not make incorrect interpretations. This is an important feature of argumentation, as, in order to be convincing, writers must not only develop a line of reasoning, but also assess their readers’ beliefs and opinions and reject any opposing views. Further, writers may liven up their argumentation by making explicit the dialogistic relationship between the two directly opposing positions (i.e. in explicit denials). In this way negation contributes to the engagement and involvement of the readers, and, at the same time, it makes sure they follow the writer’s line of reasoning.

The results of this pilot study of negation in argumentative writing in English by Swedish advanced learners, native speaker students and professional writers suggest that there may be differences in the way these writers use negation. First, the student writers (both native-speaker and Swedish) may use negation on the content level of the texts somewhat less frequently than the professional writers. They may also use fewer textual negations of the “illocutionary” kind, which monitor the ongoing communicative process with their readers. These differences can be attributed to the different tenor relations that professional writers and student writers have to their readers. The writers of the COMMENT sample are professionals writing not just to inform but also to entertain the general public with their opinions on controversial issues about which they often have some kind of experience or expert knowledge. This means, then, that they are able to reject opposing arguments concerning the content of their texts more often than the learner writers. Furthermore, as they are more confident in their own role as writers, they also monitor the ongoing communicative process with their readers, more frequently. The student writers, on the other hand, are writing about topics which have been selected by their teachers for the purpose of testing their language proficiency and writing skills. They may lack personal experience of the topic itself and feel insecure in their argumentation. They are consequently less able to reject opposing arguments concerning the content of their texts and less confident when it comes to using illocutionary negations to monitor the ongoing communication with their reader.

Second, the Swedish advanced learners’ usage of negation, in comparison to the native-speaker students, appears to be more overtly dialogic, i.e. their sample contains more explicit denials in dialogic exchanges, which increase the rhetorical force of their argumentation by creating an internal dialogue between two opposing standpoints, and there are also more concurrences, i.e. negations in rhetorical questions to underline affirmative propositions. The Swedish advanced learners’ sample also contains a much higher number of negations of interpersonal meanings, a tendency which can be attributed to a high degree of subjective involvement generally found in advanced learners’ essays (Wiberg 2000). These results suggest, then, that the Swedish advanced learners usage of negation may be somewhat more emphatic, involved, and closer to spoken language than the native students’.

Earlier comparisons of Swedish advanced learners' argumentative essays with essays written by British and American native speaker students have found a similar tendency for Swedish advanced learners' to overuse a number of linguistic features which increase their investment in what they are saying. Ringbom (1998), Petch-Tyson (1998), Aijmer (2001) Herriman (2007) have found, for instance, that Swedish advanced learners overuse first person references with mental verbs such as *think* and *feel*, etc. First person references such as these are often used in a deliberative sense by writers who wish to make proclamations of themselves as opinionholders (Simon-Vanderbergen 2000, Aijmer 2001, and Herriman 2007). Similarly, Boström-Aronsson (2005:97) has found that Swedish students overuse of *it*-clefts, which typically have a contrastive, emphasizing function (Herriman 2005). Within Appraisal terminology, features such as these, which increase the force of the writer's position, may be regarded as resources for the subcategory of dialogic contraction which is referred to as 'pronouncement' (Martin & White 2005:127). The overuse of these linguistic resources suggests, then, that Swedish advanced learners, perhaps because of their lack of experience and their insecurity as writers or because of a lack of genre awareness, tend to overuse dialogistically contractive linguistic resources, and as a result their writing has a tendency towards hyperbolic expression. Although the samples studied in this pilot study are too small to draw any definite conclusions, it appears, then, that the negation of interpersonal meanings may be another dialogistically contractive device which is overused by Swedish advanced learners and which may contribute to some of the 'non-native soundedness' in their writing.

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APPENDIX: ‘COMMENT’ Articles

- Amiel, Barbara ‘No matter how you cut it up, eating people is simply wrong’ *The Telegraph* 08.12.03 (*Cannibalism*¹⁰)
- Bell, Emily ‘Too realistic to push’ *The Guardian* 26.03.04 (*Push*)
- Benn, Melissa ‘Jobs for boys’ *The Guardian* 04.01.05 (*Jobs*)

¹⁰ Keyword for source of examples

- Booth, Cherie, 'Beating the batterers' *The Guardian* 09.12.03 (*Batterers*)
- Brooks, Libby 'Spiritual tourism' *The Guardian* 08.12.03 (*Spiritualism*)
- Chancellor, Alexander 'A date to forget' *The Guardian* 22.11.03 (*Online Dating*)
- Collins, Tim 'Why top-up fees must be killed off' *The Independent* (*Top-up Fees*)
- Cooper, Yvette 'Left out or left behind' *The Guardian* 22.03.04 (*Poverty*)
- Dalrymple, Theodore 'The fact that there are single mothers doesn't make it right.' *The Telegraph* 22.01.04 (*IVF*)
- Goodhart, David 'Close the door before it's too late.' *The Guardian* 19.02.04 (*Migration*)
- Heller, Lucy 'Fair selection can be found beyond Belief' *The Guardian* 19.01.04 (*Selection*)
- Hilton, Isabel 'Just poppycock' *The Guardian* 04.12.03 (*Columbia*)
- Hutton, Will 'Death of community spirit' *The Observer* 16.11.03 (*Community*)
- Kennedy, Helena 'Take no comfort in this warm blanket of security' *The Guardian* 15.03.04 (*Security*)
- Parsons, Robert 'Revolution haunts the land of monsters and poets' *The Guardian* 24.11.03 (*Georgia*)
- Preston, Peter 'Out of the shadows of Beckham' *The Guardian* 24.11.03 (*Rugby*)
- Redwood, John 'How much more of a bashing does the motorist have to take?' *The Telegraph* 28.11.03 (*Cars*)
- Reid, John 'It's Labour's rebels who block choice.' *The Guardian* 19.11.03 (*NHS*)
- Richard, Alison 'In peril from the £24m black hole' *The Guardian* 13.01.04 (*University Funds*)
- Robinson, Stephen 'Solving the drug crisis' *The Telegraph* 23.01.04 (*Drugs*)
- Russell, Jenni 'Give kids a break' *The Guardian* 17.12.03 (*Tests*)
- Tudge, Colin 'Bad for the poor and bad for science' *The Guardian* 20.02.04 (*Genetics*)
- Walter, Natasha 'Unmarried heterosexual couples are now third class citizens' *The Guardian* 28.11.03 (*Unmarried Couples*)