

Intonation Idioms with Implicit Negation In Dialogue Discourse

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Abstract

The article considers the implicit language structures met in dialogue discourse that are characterized by emotionality and specific intonation and express negation without any formal signs of negation. We call them intonational idioms with implicit negation (IINs). The negative meaning appears due to the special intonation and could be easily understood by native language speakers in conversational speech. IINs tend to take an independent position in the dialogue discourse and have stability, invariability and modal proposition in most cases. They also have multiple meanings and multifunctionality that can change depending on the context. The results of the experiment showed that in spite of the fact that the meaning of IINs can be clear to native language speakers, it is difficult or impossible to understand by those who are not proficient in this language. The article may be of interest to specialists who develop the problems of linguistic pragmatics, communicative acts of implicitness.

Key Words and Phrases: Implicit Negation, Intonation Idioms, Dialogue Discourse, Intonation Idioms with Implicit Negation

1 Introduction

Negation is a category related to the interaction of both language and thinking; therefore, it is studied by several sciences: philosophy, logic, psychology and linguistics. Most researchers of negation (O. Espersen, L.R. Horn, V. Heinemann, etc.) consider negation as a mental conceptual category that finds expression in the language [1].

Negation can be expressed both in explicit and implicit ways, and it can be found at all language levels, since the negation category can use a wide range of means for expressing itself (lexical, morphological, syntactical, semantic and prosodic ones). This point of view is shared by O. Espersen (1958) and some other linguists [2].

The issue of our interest is implicit negation. While the explicit ways of expressing negation are studied in detail, implicit negation cannot be actualized by using grammatic means, so the ways of describing implicit negation does not have a systemic character and a clear linguistic basis [3].

According to E.V. Paducheva, a lot of researchers who study implicit negation mentioned that the negative meaning of these structures does not have a direct grammatical expression, but is conveyed by various linguistic means of the communicative context [4].

Beginning from the second half of the XX century researchers noted that “negation cannot always be expressed in a negative form, that is, it can be expressed in an implicit way. A discourse that does not have negative elements can nevertheless perform the communicative function of deviation. Such a discourse can be identical to negation” [5].

Many researchers of implicitness consider that it is important to study implicit negation using cognitive approach, because there is a close relationship between linguistic expression and the characteristics of human thinking.

Despite the fact that negation expressed indirectly/implicitly/indirectly is more difficult to detect, its use is reasonable when it is necessary to make a hint or express an ironic attitude to something or someone. This hidden (implicit) meaning is interpreted by the recipient depending on their linguistic competence and background knowledge. Implicit negation can be actualized at all levels of language using a set of different means (lexical, morphological and syntactic, semantic and prosodic) [3].

Earlier we have studied the phenomenon of implicit negation in a few articles in Tatar language and phraseology [6, 7], and in this paper we are going to study the phenomenon in the dialogue discourse in Russian and English.

Dialogue discourse is considered to be a special kind of text, because “the meaning of utterances is formed with the support of the common experience of the speakers, taking into account the gestures and facial expressions, as well as taking into consideration the context and situation. This allows many things not to be expressed verbally because of its sufficient clarity for the speakers” [8].

Another important thing about the dialogue discourse is that the emotionality of dialogic speech helps to achieve the pragmatic objectives of communication. It is emotional communication that comes first in dialogic discourse, in which there are statements with implicit negation [3].

While studying the phenomenon of implicit negation, we have paid attention to the special role of intonation, which can turn affirmative sentences into negative ones. Often sentences of this kind form stable structures with their characteristic intonation, carrying the meaning of negation, indignation or refusal. Such structures in Russian are called ‘intonation phraseological units’, which more or less corresponds to the terms ‘**intonation idioms**’ or ‘**negative idioms**’ in English, for instance, informal phrase: ‘*Keep your hair on*’ (which does not have any formal signs of negation) in English means ‘**Don’t worry**’ or *Don’t be upset*’ [9].

In the Russian language there are also a lot of idiomatic fixed phrases pronounced with certain intonation, having no formal evidence of negation but expressing negative meaning. Due to the fact that intonation plays the main role in the functioning such units in speech, hereinafter we will refer to these structures as ‘**intonation idioms with implicit negation**’ (or IIN for short).

Charles Bally in his book "French Stylistics" published in 1909 noted that the same phrases pronounced with different intonation can express completely different emotions,

unequal attitude of the speaker to this or that object, etc. He considered some examples demonstrating the role of intonation in transmitting the modal-emotional content of utterances. This is the case with rhetorical questions, in exclamatory phrases, as well as in some colloquial elliptical constructions, generated by emotional factors [10].

In Russia in the 1960-s N. V. Witt writing about the zonal character of emotions in the text, mentioned some stable intonational structures that express specific emotional meanings of these zones [11].

One of the first researchers to speak about the role of intonation in fixing the phraseological nature of a phraseological unit was L. I. Roizenzon. The scholar says that, from the point of view of intonation, some Russian phrases are intonationally marked, while others are intonationally unmarked. The attention of the author is drawn to those phrases which differ from the free structure only by the presence of a special intonation [12].

The term 'intonation phraseological unit' was offered by a Russian linguist, Professor N.D.Svetozarova in 1991 [13]. This term seems to be the most successful in describing the emotional nature of this linguistic phenomenon. Intonation phraseological units most of the time are colloquial and used in dialogues, being intonationally marked. This makes them different from the similar word combinations which are not intonationally marked. For example: *Нужен он мне!* (*I need him*) pronounced with a special emotional tone means *I don't need him*. But if we say: *Он мне нужен*, it will mean: *I need him*.

We have to mention the works of researchers who studied this phenomenon on the material of Russian language. [14, 15, 16].

All these works emphasize the role of specific intonation in the pronunciation of negative idioms which changes the formal meaning of the utterance. For example, the phrase *Много ты понимаешь!* (literally: *You understand so much*) actually means: *You don't understand anything*. This meaning appears due to the special intonation and could be understood by native language speakers even without any context.

We should also mention that nowadays a lot of researchers in semantics in the West are interested in incorporating intonation in semantic theories of language. According to M. Swerts [17], speakers use intonation to cue certain aspects of meaning, and listeners may use these cues during the interpretation of the speaker's utterance. The case of negation phrases offers a good illustration of this.

The first objective of our study is to examine intonation idioms with implicit negation (IINs) in Russian and English, reveal their characteristics and classification and the ways of translating from one language into another.

The second objective is to do quantitative research to check understanding their hidden meaning by native Russian speakers and foreign students studying Russian language.

2 Methods

In accordance with the objectives of the study, our work also used descriptive, analytical, comparative methods and statistical methods, as well as methods of linguo-cognitive, semantic and textual analysis. We have also arranged an experiment to compare understanding negative idioms by native speakers and foreign students.

The work uses elements of comparative analysis when comparing the ways of expressing negation in English and Russian. The analytical method of the theory of speech acts is used in the study of negation in the text. In studying the implicit means of expressing negation, the method of transformational analysis is used.

To illustrate certain linguistic phenomena, we have used language examples from Russian and English language from fiction literature and dictionaries.

Some part of data was collected during the perception experiment when some statistical data were received.

The experiment involved two groups of participants, native speakers and language learners. The objective was to check the perception of implicit negation by these two groups. The detailed description of the experiment and the results are given in part 3.4.

3 Results

Intonation phraseological units (negative idioms) are a widespread phenomenon in all languages, representing one of the main means of conveying various emotional meanings in conversational speech.

We are going to start with the main characteristics and classification of negative idioms.

3.1. Main Characteristics of Intonation Idioms with Implicit Negation (IIN)

- 1) We agree with the researchers that **intonation** plays the utmost important role in forming the communicative meaning of IINs (intonation idioms with implicit negation). Many researchers talk about the peculiar intonation marking of IINs and believe that intonation is the main feature that distinguishes them from similar free word-combinations [18]. For example, *Держи карман шире!* in Russian (corresponds to English: *Don't hold your breath!*). We come to the conclusion that very often implicit negation can be revealed when it is translated into another language. The meaning is as follows: *Don't expect to get anything* (mockingly ironic refusal to give anything).
- 2) Another important features of IINs is **emotionality**. The IINs can express a wide range of emotions, from surprise to irony and mockery, e.g. *Еще чего! Как бы не так! Фу!* *It won't be the case!*
- 3) Some researchers underline the tendency of IINs **to take an independent position** in the dialogue discourse. As a rule, IINs represent separate utterances, which are often exclamations, e.g. *My leg! Как бы не так! Что за чепуха!*
- 4) According to A. Hoseini [15], these language units have **stability and invariability** in most cases, but some IINs can have variations, let us give an example from Russian: *Совсем спятил! / Совсем свихнулся! / Совсем с ума сошел!* (Translation: *You've lost your mind!*). The implicit negative meaning: *You cannot think reasonably.*
- 5) They have **modal proposition** and do not transmit any objective content [15]. An example: *Вот еще!* – *Surely not!* (English translation has an explicit negation).
- 6) The researchers of this phenomena also note about the **multiple meanings and multifunctionality** of IINs that can change depending on the context, e.g. *Keep your hair on!* (1) *Успокойтесь.* 2) *Не рвите на себе волосы.*)

3.2. Classification of Intonation Idioms with Implicit Negation (IIIN)

In works by Russian researchers we have found several classifications of this linguistic phenomenon. They can be found in Discussion section.

We offer the following simple classification of IIIN:

- 1) IIINs consisting of **one non-negative word** pronounced with specific intonation, e.g. *Ага! Конечно! Шцас!* (literally translated as 'right now' but actually means the refusal to do something). These IIIN are similar in meaning to English slang: *Fuff!*
- 2) IIINs that present a **stable speech pattern or phraseological unit**, also pronounced with specific intonation, e.g. *Вот еще! Очень нужно!* The English analogy is: *My leg!* (slang).
- 3) IIINs **expressed by sentences**, most of the time unchangeable and pronounced with specific intonation, e.g. *Когда на горе рак свистнет.* – The English analogy is: *When Hell freezes over.*

We should also keep in mind that sometimes IIIN can be changeable. In this case they can have some similar variations, for example: *Очень нужно! Очень мне нужно!* – The literal translation: *It is necessary for me*, but the real equivalent is: *It is the last thing I need!*

3.3. National Specifics of Intonation Idioms with Implicit Negation (IIIN)

Negative idioms have strong national specificities which means that only native speakers can understand and use them.

In fiction and folklore, negative idioms enclosed in affirmative sentences are often used to create a humorous effect. Let us consider a well-known anecdote in Russian. It will include some of our comments in brackets to provide better understanding:

“An Englishman, a Russian lady and an interpreter are traveling in the same compartment.

Englishman to interpreter: *My slippers are missing. Ask her if she took them.*

Interpreter: *The foreigner has lost his slippers. Madam, did you take them by any chance?*

Russian lady: ***I need them!*** [Here we have an intonation idiom *Нужны они мне!* which means ‘I don’t need them’ for the Russian speakers, but the interpreter does not take intonation in the account.]

Interpreter: *She says she really needs them.* [The translation is wrong because the interpreter misunderstands the lady.]

Englishman: *Then let her pay for them.*

Interpreter to the lady: *You must pay him for the slippers.*

Russian: ***Hello, I am your aunt!*** [a negative idiom used to express refusal: *Здравствуйте, я ваша тетья!*]

Interpreter: *She says she is your relative.* [Wrong translation].

Englishman: *Let her pay at least half.*

Interpreter: *Can you pay at least a half?*

Russian: ***Horseradish to him!*** [a negative idiom used instead of *F...k him!*]

Translator: *She agrees to pay, but only with vegetables.*

In this anecdote negative idiom and other kinds of idioms are used on purpose with the aim of creating a humorous effect. Knowledge and use of the negative idioms in speech

demonstrates high communicative competence of a foreign speaker in the language they are learning.

3.4. The Ways of Translating Intonation Idioms with Implicit Negation (IINs) from one language into another.

The previous point evidences about the importance of correct translation in the process of intercultural communication. We consider the four main ways of translating IINs from one language into another below.

- 1. Translating IIN using phraseology.** The best way is to find the complete equivalent in another language with the same implicit meaning, but in the majority of cases it is impossible. Then we should try to find an analogue with the same meaning, e.g: *That'll be the day.* – *Когда рак на горе свистнет.* Another example: *Your mother needs you like a mouse needs a hat rack.* – The Russian translation: *Ты своей маме нужен, как собаке пятая нога.* (The source: 'Requiem for a Dream', American drama).
- 2. Giving word-for-word translation** when it sounds natural in translation. For example: *Much you know about love!* *Много ты знаешь о любви!* (The implicit meaning: You don't know anything about love).
- 3. Using descriptive translation** to express the meaning of IIN. *Плевал я на тебя!* – *I don't care what you do!* The first phrase in Russian is an IIN, as for the translation, it describes the meaning, but in this example it loses implicit negation and also loses the intonation and expressiveness of the negative idiom *Плевал я на тебя!*
- 4. Losing implicit negation in translation.** Sometimes when translated into other languages implicit negation can be lost, i.e. become explicit, for example: *Так она тебя и ждём* (Intonation idiom with implicit negation). – *She would never wait for you.* (English translation with explicit negation).

3.5. The experiment with native speakers.

All researchers who have studied IINs note that most native speakers do well when it comes to understanding the hidden negative meaning of IINs. As for foreign students who study some language it is a problem to distinguish IINs from similar positive phrases. The following experiment confirms it.

The first part of the experiment. 50 short dialogues containing both IINs and normal phrases were recorded by 10 different Russian speakers. Apart from statements with implicit negation, there were statements with explicit information, sounding similar to statements with IINs.

All dialogues were in Russian, but for the article we have made some examples of these dialogues in English:

- *Will you go on a date with me?*
 - **Keep dreaming!** [means that the second speaker does NOT accept the invitation].
- Compare with:
- *Are you going out tonight?*
 - **I keep dreaming** of watching this new movie, but maybe next week. [No implicit negation].

IIINs were representing the following semantic groups: denying somebody's actions; denying somebody's abilities; denying somebody's knowledge or competence; denying somebody's positive qualities; denying somebody's hopes or expectations etc.

Then the dialogues were played and also shown visually to 100 experiment participants who were native Russian speakers from different cities.

After listening to each dialogue the experiment participants had to answer the following questions: 1) Was it a positive sentence or a question? 2) Was it a negation?

As a result of the experiment, the correct recognition rate was 89%.

3.6. The experiment with Russian language learners.

The same short dialogues were offered to several groups of foreign students who studied Russian (50 people). The level of their Russian was from Pre-Intermediate to Upper-Intermediate. They had some difficulties in distinguishing between types of sentences. As a result, they recognized about 35% of all IIINs.

This fact demonstrates the linguistic peculiarity of IIINs in Russian. Apart from this, it shows that foreign students who study Russian must be specially taught the specific features of emotional intonations of the Russian language.

4 Discussion

Although we studied IIILs only in case of Russian and English languages, we suppose that IIINs exist in all languages as a compact and expressive means of transferring emotional negative statements.

There are different names for this phenomenon, for examples, in English they are called negative idioms and intonation idioms. In Russians researchers use such terms as intonation phraseological units, intonationally marked phraseological units, etc.

Such Russian researchers of this phenomenon as M.V.Arhipetzkaya [16], I.M.Loginova [18], Svetozarova [13] and A.Hoseiny [15] use the term **intonation phraseological units** which emphasizes the important role of intonation for this language phenomenon.

As for Kurnikova N.V. [14], she relates to these speech units as **intonationally marked phraseological units**.

V.Y.Melikyan [19] uses the term **syntactic phraseological units**. He describes them as grammatically indivisible, characterized by having modus proposition, indiscreetly expressing a certain non-conceptual semantic content, not reproducing structural schemes of a sentence and not being their regular realization, lexically impenetrable and non-extended, according to special rules correlating with other utterances in a text and fulfilling reactive, voluntative, emotionally-evaluative, aesthetic and informative functions.

In spite of using different terms, all researchers acknowledge, firstly, the importance of intonation for these speech units, their indivisibility and the, secondly, tendency of them to take an independent position in the dialogue discourse. Thirdly, they have the form of an utterance (syntactical level) but the meaning of them is equal to the one of interjections particles (lexical level) [19].

As for the classifications of negative idiomatic constructions, one of the early classifications of syntactic constructions with implicit negation in the Russian language was developed by T.A.Shutova [20]. She has distinguished 6 types of syntactic constructions with implicit negation in Russian: 1) constructions with question words, 2) constructions without question words, 3) constructions with conjunctions, 4,5) constructions with particles and interjections and 6) phraseological syntactic constructions.

We are especially interested in the two semantic groups which should be included into IIINs, in our opinion:

1) Rhetorical questions starting with question words but actually expressing negation, they are marked by special intonation which makes them different from normal questions. It is the biggest group from all language examples. For example: *Куда мне спешить? Where shall/should I hurry?* [meaning: ***I don't need to hurry***].

2) Intonation idioms including specific intonation, for example: *Strictly for the birds. – Bom уже лунa.* This idiom example is taken from the novel by J.Salinger 'The Catcher in the Rye'[21] and its translation into Russian [22].

As for our classification, it was described in section 3.2 of the article.

5 Conclusions

1. We share the opinion of negation researchers that it is important to study the use of implicit negative statements in speech in terms of a cognitive approach, since there is a close relationship between linguistic expression and the way of human thinking.

2. Implicit negation cannot be actualized by using grammatic means, so it can be actualized by using different means of communicative context.

3. Most researchers note that dialogic discourse especially characterized by emotional communication creates conditions for implicit negation.

4. Intonation plays a special role in dialogic discourse, changing the meaning of word combinations and turning positive sentences into negative ones.

5. Intonationally marked phraseological units with negative meaning (which is not expressed directly) have different names in different languages, but we offer to call them Intonational Idioms with Implicit Negation (IIINs).

6. IIINs have stability and invariability in most cases, possess specific intonation which makes them sound negative and tend to take an independent position in the dialogue discourse.

7. Experiment with native language speakers has shown that about 89% of IIINs were understood correctly, while the group of foreign students learning Russian has shown only about 35%. This fact evidences that studying intonation of a foreign language should be as important as studying vocabulary and grammar.

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