

## Social meaning of negative concord in American English

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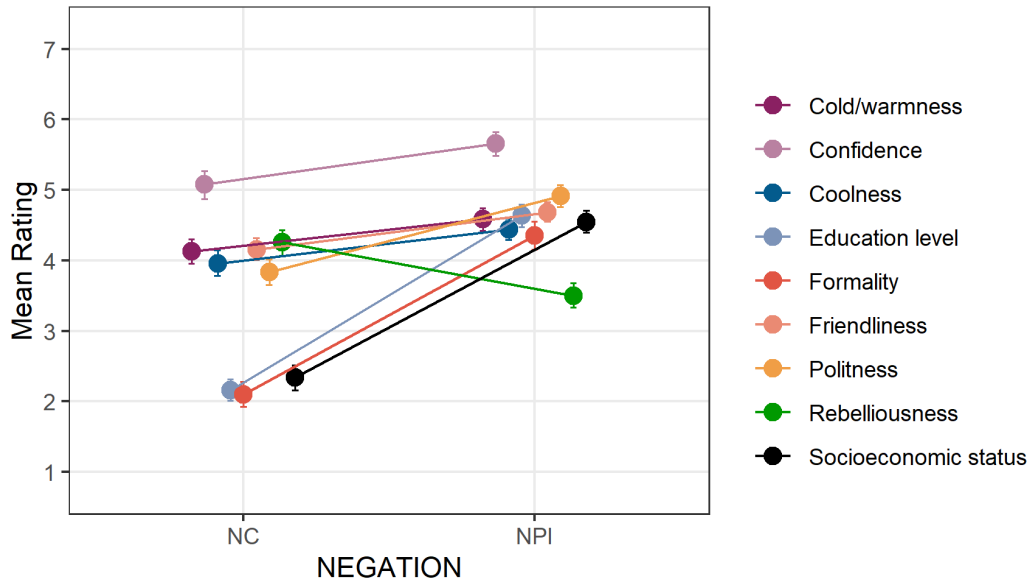
Negative concord (NC) refers to the phenomenon that the co-occurrence of multiple negations has the semantic meaning of one negation (*I didn't see nobody*). NC constructions in contemporary English are often taken as ungrammatical [2, 5], however, they appear in many non-standard varieties of English [8]. Sociolinguistic studies on the usage of NC found different patterns: while NC use is socially stratified in populations in Detroit and African American Vernacular English speaking adults and pre-adolescents, its use was shown to reflect in- and out-group dynamics in adolescents [4, 9, 3]. That is, NC does not only or always reflect **social categories** as in first and second wave sociolinguistics, but it can be used to establish a certain **persona** during a conversation, resulting in social meaning [1]. We are interested in the perceived social meaning of NC vs. its standard variant of negative polarity items (NPIs: *I didn't see anybody*), using a set of social meaning measures including those relating to 1) social background of the speaker: socioeconomic status and education; as well as 2) persona: politeness, formality, rebelliousness, coolness, friendliness, confidence, and warmth. Our hypotheses were the following: NC is associated with 1) lower (**H1**) socioeconomic status, (**H2**) education, (**H3**) formality, and 2) higher (**H4**) rebelliousness, (**H5**) coolness, (**H6**) friendliness, (**H7**) confidence, and (**H8**) warmth, but lower (**H9**) politeness in comparison to NPIs.

**Design.** Experiment 1 in American English (N=48, data collection ongoing) used a 1-factorial design with the factor NEGATION (NC vs. NPI). The 12 items and 29 fillers consisted of a consistent introduction sentence (S1) and the critical sentence (S2) (see (1)). Participants then rated nine qualities of the speaker on a 7-point Likert scale with labeled midpoint (undecided) and endpoints (high/low socioeconomic status, high/low education, in/formal, im/polite, obedient/rebellious, un/cool, cold/warm, un/friendly, un/confident).

- (1) (S1) Somebody says:  
(S2) "I didn't have {no/any issues} so far."

**Results.** We computed separate ordinal models for the ratings of Q1-Q9 (see Figure 1); p-values were obtained using log-likelihood ratio tests. The preliminary results confirmed **H1** to **H4** and **H9**: socioeconomic status ( $\hat{\beta}=3.55$ , LR(1)=51.95,  $p<0.001$ ), education ( $\hat{\beta}=6.31$ , LR(1)=43.16,  $p<0.001$ ), formality ( $\hat{\beta}=4.92$ , LR(1)=49.25,  $p<0.001$ ), coolness ( $\hat{\beta}=0.58$ , LR(1)=22.44,  $p<0.001$ ), friendliness ( $\hat{\beta}=0.65$ , LR(1)=30.71,  $p<0.001$ ), confidence ( $\hat{\beta}=0.65$ , LR(1)=26.78,  $p<0.001$ ), warmth ( $\hat{\beta}=0.57$ , LR(1)=24.42,  $p<0.001$ ), and politeness ( $\hat{\beta}=1.25$ , LR(1)=99.17,  $p<0.001$ ) are rated significantly lower for NC than for NPI. Rebelliousness is rated as significantly higher for NC than for NPI ( $\hat{\beta}=-1.73$ , LR(1)=17.98,  $p<0.001$ ).

**Conclusion.** The preliminary results showed that NC has a distinct social meaning differing from that of NPI constructions. Extending Experiment 1, we will conduct Experiment 2 manipulating a second factor of context (formal vs. informal) to tackle the social meaning of the NC vs. NPI alternation in different situational-functional settings [6, 7]. The results of both experiments will be presented at the workshop.



**Figure 1:** Mean and error bars of the ratings. The x-axis depicts the factor NEGATION with its levels negative concord (NC, left) and negative polarity items (NPI, right). The colors indicate the question.

### Selected references

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