

## Metalinguistic negation vs. descriptive negation Among their kin and foes

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Negative expressions not only have their core function of (western) classical negation as a truth-value reverser turning  $p$  (true) to  $\sim p$  (false) but also have various pragmatic functions including metalinguistic negation (MN). The  $\sim\sim p$  ‘double negation’ (不是不下雨) by its law is equivalent to the positive  $p$  but in actual use it has a weaker concessive meaning, implying denial of a higher scalar alternative in Contrastive Topic function. Irony and sarcasm occur with no overt negative expressions. Negative polarity items such as *anyone* or 谁也 requires descriptive negation (DN) as its kin.

MN is used to oppose (as in Horn 1989) or rectify a previous assertion with the speaker’s responsive inner Alternative Question QUD with Contrastive Focus. Consider. A: “Mary likes him.” B: [Does she **like** him or **love** him?] “She does **not like** him; she **loves** him.” The two clauses cannot be connected by the concessive. Pero/Aber ‘but’ (similar to 不过/但是) except by the corrective *Sino/Sondern* ‘but’ (not available in English and French; similar to 而是) (Anscombe and Ducrot 1977).

MN is more marked than DN, as shown by my phonetic and ERP experiments. The MN-licensed degree modifier ‘A LITTLE’ in (A): She is NOT A LITTLE upset. (She is VERY upset.), as opposed to (B): She is NOT a little upset. (She is not upset at all, quite composed.) (Bolinger’s 1972 data) forms an intonation pattern of doubly rising peaks on NOT and A LITTLE in A in contrast with the NPI-like minimizer ‘a little’ licensed by DN in (B), which forms the !Hdownstep preceded by a single peak on NOT high H\*. An MN-licensed stressed degree modifier *POTHONG* ‘commonly’ in Korean requires external/long-form negation, but not short-form negation, which is typically for DN. If it occurs with short-form negation, it is a mismatch and becomes ill-formed. In my ERP experiments, the mismatched ill-formed strings generated the N400 (rather than P600), implying its meaning-related anomaly.

The Chinese and Japanese counterparts of *POTHONG* ‘commonly’ in Korean are exactly *yiBANde* and *fuTSUU*, as in (1) and (2) for Chinese (and for Japanese in parallel).

- (1) a. 她\*(不是)一般的漂亮。  
Ta \*(*bushi*) *yiBANde* piaoliang.  
‘She is *not* COMMONLY beautiful.’  $\sim$  > She is very beautiful.  
b. \*Ta bu *yiBANde* piaoliang.
- (2) a. 他不是个一般的人。  
Ta *bushi* ge *yiBANde* ren  
‘He is *not* a COMMON person.’  $\sim$  > He is an extraordinary person. [The negatively marked copula forms a special *clefting* construction very favorable for MN in general in Kor, Chn, and Jpn]  
b. 他只是个一般(的)人。  
Ta zhi shi ge yiban(de) ren  
‘He is just an ordinary person.’

Such metalinguistic denial of commonality is common among the three East Asian languages.

The terms 'common' or 'general' are comparative in scarcity value. If  $d_s$  is the echoic standard degree of the predicate, its metalinguistically negated utterance generates its silent (or overt) positive proposition with a higher degree  $d > d_s$  of the same predicate. English has no counterpart, except the stressed MN-licensed below the middle degree modifier 'A LITTLE'/'A BIT.' Stress/Intonation is a factor distinguishing MN from DN.