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Why is “not infrequent” not always “frequent”? Double negation in political discourse

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to view double negation in the light of its semantic and pragmatic meaning. While double negation in logic gives a positive value, in natural languages, besides having positive entailment, it can have a range of different implicatures and functions. Thus, depending on different discoursal factors, double negation can be used for different motives, e.g. the speaker is not sure whether a certain proposition is true or is sure that it is not true, to name just one. The analysis is carried out on the database consisting of the reports, interviews and articles of the High Representative and his associates in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period from 1995 to 2001.

Key words: discourse; division of pragmatic labour; double negation; implicature; presupposition.

1. Introduction

In this paper we are going to discuss the phenomenon of double negation as opposed to that of negative concord in language. In double negation every negative marker retains its semantic identity and thus in principle, but not always, cancels the other one out, whereas negative concord is a phenomenon where in one sentence there are two or more negations which do not cancel each other out but strengthen the meaning of negation. Negative concord has been present in English throughout its history but is limited to non-standard dialects in contemporary English. It is present in Slavic and Romance languages in their standard variants.

The examples below illustrate negative concord in non-standard English, and in standard Bosnian:

(1) *He <u>ain’t</u> got <u>no</u> money.*

(2) *<u>Nobody</u> <u>ain’t</u> gonna tell me what to do.*

(Baker 1970: 171)

(3)

<u>Niko</u>	*mi*	*<u>neće</u>*	*govoriti*	*šta*	*da*	*radim.*
nobody	I.DAT	will.not.3SG	tell.INF	what	that	do.1SG.PRES

'Nobody will tell me what to do.'

(4)

<u>Nikada</u>	*mi*	*<u>niko</u>*	*<u>nije</u>*	*rekao*	*da*	*je*	*to*	*tako*	*teško.*
never	I.DAT	nobody	be.not.3SG.PRES	tell.PART	that	be.3SG.PRES	it	so	difficult

'Nobody has ever told me that it was so difficult.'
(author's examples)

In the beginning of this discussion we can tentatively propose that double negation in natural languages conforms to the rule in logic that two negatives make an affirmative. The following examples from standard English and standard Bosnian illustrate this phenomenon:

(5) *It is <u>not unusual</u> to see more civilian airliners than military transport aircraft at Sarajevo airport.*
(Carl Bildt, article in *Financial Times*, 11 April 1997)

(5a) "It is usual to see more civilian airliners than military transport aircraft at Sarajevo airport."

(6)

… kao	*da*	*se*	*ne*	*dešava*	*apsolutno*	*<u>ništa</u>*	*<u>neobično</u>.*
like	that	itself	not	happen.3SG.PRES	absolutely	nothing	unusual

'...as if absolutely nothing unusual were happening.'
(*Dnevni avaz*, 8 September 2005)

(6a) "… as if something absolutely usual were happening."

It was as early as 1917 that Jespersen noted that „it seems to be a universal rule in all languages that two negatives make an affirmative, if both are special negatives attached to the same word; [...]," explaining that this happens when *not* is placed in front of a word with negative meaning or one containing a negative prefix (Jespersen, 1917: 63). However, he proceeds to emphasise that „the double negative always modifies the idea, for the result of the whole expression is somewhat different from the simple idea expressed positively" (Jespersen 1917: 63). So, according to Jespersen, the meaning of the double negative, say *not unhandsome*, is weaker than that of a positive word *handsome*. He gives a somewhat curious explanation for this phenomenon. He claims that there is a psychological reason for that, i.e. the detour through two mutually destroying negatives weakens the mental energy of the hearer and implies on the part of the speaker a certain hesitation absent from the blunt, outspoken *handsome* (Jespersen, 1917: 63).

We can see that as early as 1917 there were attempts to linguistically describe and explain the effect of double negation in actual language usage. Similar explanations are to be found in subsequent discussions on double negation, even in very recent ones. Pullum and Huddleston (2002) thus claim that *attractive* and *not unat-*

tractive have two different meanings. According to them, we can place the adjective *attractive* towards the positive end of a scale that has ugliness at the negative end, beauty at the positive end, and a range of indeterminate looks in the middle. The prefix –*un* reverses the orientation of the scale giving an adjective (*unattractive*) that denotes an appearance towards the lower end of the scale. The *not* in front of *unattractive* yields a negation of being towards the lower end of the scale, suggesting an appearance ranked towards the positive end. However, this is only a tentative interpretation of *not unattractive* since the middle of the range is not excluded, and this phrase is "too cautious to suggest that the user intended to indicate a high degree of beauty" (Pullum and Huddleston, 2002: 810).

Horn (1978) argues that double negation is indeed weaker than its positive equivalent, not because of the usurpation of the mental energy as Jespersen claims, but because of the fact that the cancelling out of two negatives results in the expression of the corresponding dual. This is illustrated with the example of *I don't deny*, which is weaker than *I assert*, because what it actually expresses is not "I assert" but "I suggest" (Horn, 1978: 164).

Seright claims that double negation is used because the speaker wants to leave himself "a way out". Namely, it is much easier to get out of a situation if you said *It is not unlikely* than *It is not likely* or *It is likely*. Bearing that in mind, the speaker describes something as *not unX* in the context in which it would not be correct, wise or political to describe that same thing as just *X* (Seright, 1966: 123-124).

2. Theoretical background

In an attempt to analyze double negation in actual language usage, in particular in three different genres of political discourse – politicians' articles, interviews and reports – we shall start with Horn's account of double negation. Horn assimilates the weakening effect of double negation to what he calls the Division of Pragmatic Labour – the use of a longer, stylistically marked expression instead of a shorter one that demands less effort on the part of the speaker signalises that the speaker was not in a position to use a simpler version felicitously (Horn, 1991: 85). One of the most frequent uses of double negation is a rhetorical figure litotes. Horn as a neo-Gricean claims that with litotes we have in the beginning Grice's contrast between what is said and what is implicated. Horn's, or neo-Gricean, interpretation of Grice's conversational maxims, which is important for the explanation of his Division of Pragmatic Labour as the basis of the use of double negation, reads as follows: Maxim of quality is a basic and primary maxim of Grice's principle and is not liable to reduction like other maxims by Grice. Other maxims can be reduced to two fundamental principles that are equal to two basic forces – the force of unification, or speaker's economy, which is the need for simplifying or minimizing. This force, operating unchecked, would result in total homonymy or lexical versatility. The force that acts as an antithesis to the first one is the force of diversification, or hearer's economy. This force expands the inventory in order to ensure the existence of the vocabulary that consists of *m* different words with one distinct meaning for each word. The speaker's economy thus places an upper bound on the form of the message, while the hearer's economy places a lower bound on the informational content of the message. These are Q-principle and R-principle (Horn, 1989: 192). According to Horn, Q refers to the Maxim of QUANTITY (Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of exchange)) and R refers to the Maxim of RELATION (Be relevant). However, these two principles are not literal equivalents to Grice's maxims with the same name (Horn, 1989: 194).

The two principles are described by Horn as follows:

The Q-principle is hearer-oriented – make your contribution sufficient; speak as much as you can (given both QUALITY and R); it is a lower-bounding principle, inducing upper-bounding implicata. It collects Grice's QUANTITY1 maxim (make your contribution as informative as required) and MANNER1, 2 (avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity).[1]

The R-principle is speaker-oriented – make your contribution necessary; say no more than you must (given Q); it is an upper-bounding principle, inducing lower-bounding implicata. It collects Grice's RELATION maxim (be relevant), QUANTITY2 (do not make your contribution more informative than required) and MANNER3, 4 (be brief, be orderly) (Horn, 1989: 194).

The functional tension between these two fundamental pragmatic principles motivates and governs a wide range of linguistic phenomena, ranging from implicature and politeness strategies to the interpretation of pronouns and gaps, from lexical changes to indirect speech acts, from the pragmatic strengthening of apparent contradictory negation to the weakening effect of "logical" double negation (Horn, 1989: 194). These two principles are not in simple opposition, but interact together in the classical Hegelian manner in a dialectic process in which each inevitably appeals to and constrains the other (Horn, 1989: 195). The opposition between these two principles may result not simply in a maxim clash, but in a resolution of the conflict through the Division of Pragmatic Labour.

In the case of double negation, the Division of Pragmatic Labour functions in the following way: there is a correlation between the stylistic naturalness of a given form, its relative brevity and simplicity, and its use in stereotypic situations on the other hand. This reflects the operation of the R-principle. The corresponding periphrastic forms, stylistically less natural, longer and more complex, are restricted, via Q-based implicature, to those situations that are outside the stereotype, for which the unmarked expression could not have been used appropriately. Litotes,

[1] Maxim of QUALITY: Try to make your contribution one that is true. (Grice, 1975: 45).

and in particular "logical" double negation, where the two negations do not cancel out functionally or rhetorically, even when they do logically, illustrates the same balance (Horn, 1989: 304).

In her discussion on the pragmatic and functional similarity between negation and affirmation, Giora (2006) lists a rich array of discourse roles that negation has apart from the most obvious ones like explicit denying and rejecting. Our aim in this paper is to analyze what shades of meaning double negation expresses in the above mentioned genres of political discourse – articles, interviews and reports, following Horn's account of the pragmatic functions of double negation. Horn (1991) claims that we cannot establish a "paradigmatic" meaning od double negation. There, he further elaborates on double negation within the principle of the Division of Pragmatic Labour, offering a semantic-pragmatic-rhetorical list of motives for its use. As he argues, "when a simple positive is abjured, and a double negation substituted, there is always (given the Division of Labor principle) a sufficient reason for so doing, but it is not always the same reason." (Horn, 1991: 90).

The motives for the use of double negation are:

(a) Quality – the speaker is uncertain as to whether a certain proposition is truthful or is certain that it is not. Here we have the case of contrary negation that is caused epistemically and where the speaker has to violate brevity and informativeness because he is obliged to respect the truthfulness. For example, if the speaker is not certain whether another person is happy, the best he can say about him/her is *He/She is not unhappy*.

(b) Politeness – the speaker knows or has firm belief that a proposition is correct, but he is too polite, modest or cautious to mention it directly. This motive includes double negation that is used as a way out of an embarrassing situation. The speaker tries to avoid a direct expression of an act that can threaten the hearer's face. The contexts in which this double negation occurs are politics, religion and literary criticism.

(c) Irony – the speaker acts as if he were uncertain, modest or reluctant, even if this act has been assumed for the occasion. The ironic use of double negation depends on assumptions based on common knowledge.

(d) Impressiveness of the style – double negation violates brevity in order to avoid brevity and achieve elevated, impressive or expressive style. Double negation of this kind can result in stylistic elevation, or, on the negative side, proving one's own importance by means of faking or stylistic exaggerating.

(e) There is no equivalent positive expression, or there is no possibility to use a positive expression felicitously in the given context, e.g. *not undeserved, not unfounded, not unthinkable*.

(f) Parallelism of structures – the expression with double negation is juxtaposed to another expression that is affixally negated, e.g. *unexpected but not unwelcome, unlikely if not impossible*.

(g) Minimisation of time required for information processing – in the contexts of direct refuting or contradiction, where for example the speaker's double negation (*X is not unA*) is motivated by an earlier utterance *X is unA*. For example, *He is unhappy. No, he is not unhappy*.

(Horn, 1991: 90–91)

3. Data analysis

The data analysed in this paper consists of the reports of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in the period from 1995 to 2001, and interviews and articles by him and his associates in the same period.[2] The data consists of two subcorpora – the first one comprising the High Representative's reports, the second one consisting of the interviews and articles. The number of words in the first subcorpus is 187 926, and in the second one 182 655. As far as double negation is concerned, there are 55 instances of it in the reports, and 256 in interviews and articles. This huge difference in proportion can be explained by the fact that these two represent different genres, reports being more formal and institutionalised, while interviews and articles are less formal and not institutionalised. Although articles and interviews may be regarded as two different genres, we analysed them as belonging to the same subcorpus, primarily for the reason of their being part of media register. In that respect, it can be claimed that interviews are more interactive than articles in the sense that interlocutors have a chance to refute and deny each other's claims and propositions, even implicatures and presuppositions.

The focus of this paper is on double negation expressed by the use of explicit negators *not*/*no* and a negative affix, excluding implicit negation from the analysis. Only few examples from the reports (seven, to be exact) contain this classical case of the negator *not*/*no* and an affixally negated adjective. Most consist of other means of negation, like negation incorporated in the adverb *too*, inherently negative predicates like *doubt*, *surprised*, *avoid*, or preposition *without*, which is very frequent in both subcorpora.[3] In the articles and interviews there are also seven examples of so called classical double negation, the rest contain implicit negation.

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[2] The High Representatives in the said period were Carl Bildt (1995-1997), a Swedish diplomat, Carlos Westendorp (1997-1999), a Spanish diplomat, and Wolfgang Petritsch (1999-2002), an Austrian UN representative and diplomat.

[3] Negation in English can be explicit and implicit. In explicit negation, a negative marker *not* or some other overt negative device is used (*no, nothing, never, none, nowhere, nobody, no one, neither, nor*, negative affixes), alongside with adverbs that are negative in meaning but not in form (*barely, hardly, scarcely; rarely, seldom*), and quantifiers (*few, little*). The latter are called approximate negators by Pullum & Huddleston (2002) because they denote imprecise quantification, which is close to zero or approximate to zero in contrast to absolute negators

3.1. *Analysis of the data from the High Representative's reports*

The High Representative's reports analysed in this paper date from 1995 to 2001, i.e. the immediate post-war period in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and include 20 reports. They were downloaded from the OHR's official web site www.ohr.int for the purpose of analysis. Each report was read in detail and examples of double negation were excerpted manually. Each example is analysed taking into account context, both linguistic, or textual, and extralinguistic, or social and situational. Van Dijk (2001) divides contexts into global and local, global ones being defined by the social, political, cultural and historical structures in which a communicative event takes place, whereas local ones are defined as a form of a mental model of a communicative situation. He calls this form of a mental model a context model. Such conception of local context allows subjective interpretations of social situations and differences between language users in the same situation (van Dijk, 2001: 108).[4]

The analysed reports belong to institutional genre. Partington (2003: 30) defines institutional genre as talk between professionals and lay people, adding that this definition can be expanded so as to include talk between two or more professional groups with an audience consisting of lay persons. We can say that the High Representative's reports belong to communication between two professionals (the High Representative and the Secretary General of the UN), with an audience of lay persons and other professionals, i.e. all those people who can read these reports on the Internet.

This institutional genre of political reports belongs to written discourse. Written discourse is, according to van Dijk (2008), explicitly planned discourse, i.e. one that is more easily controlled than spoken discourse. In addition, written discourse is often public and therefore its writers may be held accountable for what they say. For this reason, power in written discourse may need to be enacted and formulat-

(*never*, *no*, etc.) and verbal negation expressed by *not*, which denote the zero point. (Pullum & Huddleston, 2002: 815–816). Implicit negation includes covertly negative lexical items that trigger entailments or implicatures involving negation of the subordinate clause (*avoid, fail, forget, lack; ban, hinder, prevent; deny, reject; doubt, be skeptical; amaze, shock, surprise; absurd, ridiculous*); downward entailing quantified NPs (e.g. *few of the bees, at most ten students*); prepositions *against, before, without*; adverb *only*; degree adverb *too*; comparative and superlative constructions; overt and covert conditionals (Pullum & Huddleston, 2002: 835-838).

[4] It seems that other linguists too share a similar notion of context. Note that Verscheuren (1999) also perceives context as a process, with its own limits, which in turn are not stable but negotiable by discourse participants (Verscheuren, 1999: 108–111). Furthermore, Fairclough argues that discourse participants interpret context partly based on the external signs (what has been previously said, physical features of a speech situation, characteristics of discourse participants) and partly based on their background knowledge, which Fairclough calls members' resources (Fairclough, 1989: 144).

ed in more indirect, veiled and formalised ways. Another factor that makes the exercise of power in written institutional discourse more indirect is the fact that writers of institutional texts are often not identical with public speakers. Written institutional discourse is, therefore, often a form of collective discourse, representing an institution, as is the power it enacts (van Dijk 2008: 54). Accordingly, we can say that the High Representative's discourse is impersonal and collective, it is the discourse of the international community, the most powerful institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the time.

The first example to be analysed is the following:

(7) *Intimidation and harassment are <u>not infrequent</u> on both sides of the IEBL, as well as within the Federation between its constituent ethnic groups. Also, given the large number of men who served in the armed forces, the lack of clarity on who is being sought for war crimes and the fact that both the Federation and Republika Srpska have been slow in passing amnesty legislation have had serious implications for freedom of movement.*
(Carl Bildt, OHR Report 01, 10 July 1996)

Given that this report relates to the period immediately after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina had finished, the number of cases of intimidation, harassment and retaliation, though present, was not in direct proportion to the atrocities committed during the war. The writer is well aware of that fact, and instead of using the positive word *frequent*, which would imply that he is certain of the fact that harassment and intimidation do happen frequently on the ground, he uses double negation. In Horn's terms, this example belongs to the motive of quality, i.e. the speaker/writer violates the principle of brevity and informativeness because he is obliged to respect the truthfulness. By using the longer expression, *not infrequent*, the writer avoids committing himself to saying something he knows is not true, or at least is not sure whether it is true or false.

The following example is similar to the previous one in that the double negative in it is motivated by what Horn terms quality:

(8) *Progress on the exhumation of mass graves also proceeded slowly. As a result of an agreement reached on September 4, the Parties undertook to exhume jointly several sites on a priority basis. Three of those sites have been completed. This is a <u>not inconsiderable</u> accomplishment. Unfortunately, however, political difficulties and severely constrained resources resulted in the incomplete collection of mortal remains on the surface of the ground at the two other sites which had been given the highest priority by the Parties.*
(Carl Bildt, OHR Report 04, 10 December 1996)

However, it also differs from the previous one in that the writer here gives his own value judgment, whereas in the previous example the frequency of the cases of intimidation and harassment can be established objectively. What we have in example (8) is the writer's subjective opinion about what can be termed a considerable accomplishment. If we take Pullum and Huddleston's concept of scale into consideration, we can say that on the positive end of the scale we have a considerable accomplishment, on the negative end an inconsiderable one, and the accomplishment that is termed *not inconsiderable* is placed somewhere in the middle, because the writer is too cautious to name this accomplishment *considerable*. He wants to save his own positive face by not wanting to be held accountable for asserting something that others might find inappropriate, which Horn calls the motive of politeness. However, there is yet another factor influencing the use of double negation that can be observed in this example. When mentioning the motive of minimization of time required for information processing, Horn explains that this motive can be noticed in direct refuting or contradiction where the speaker's double negation is motivated by an earlier utterance *X is unA*. Since this example comes from written discourse where there is no direct interaction between discourse participants, we can tentatively propose that in this case the writer refutes a commonly held opinion at that time that the completion of three exhumation sites is an inconsiderable accomplishment (*X is unA*). If we argue that a commonly held belief or opinion, which is not asserted but presupposed, can be analysed as a pragmatic presupposition, we can freely say that in this example we have a case of presupposition denial.[5]

The next three examples share the same expression, *not irreversible*, which seems to have become the High Representative's favourite catchphrase at the time:

(9) *There is no denying that the drift towards ethnic separation is continuing in Bosnia one year after the peace agreement was signed. The forces of ethnic separation are still stronger than the forces of ethnic reintegration. But the trend is <u>by no means irreversible</u>.*
(Carl Bildt, OHR Report 04, 10 December 1996)

(10) *The period under review was productive in many respects, primarily in the encouragement of normal life in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the establishment of peace and stability in the country. Substantial progress has been made in enhancing the climate of reconciliation and tolerance, ensuring freedom of movement, and minority returns. Positive results also include arrangements on a common passport, flag, license plates, currency, etc. The situation in the Republika Srpska was*

[5] On semantic, or logical, and pragmatic presupposition from different perspectives see Russel (1905), Givón (1978), van der Auwera (1979), Levinson (1983), Fairclough (1989), Horn (1997), Verscheuren (1999), Abbott (2000), Chilton and Schäffner (2002), to mention only a few. In this place, suffice it to say that the major difference between semantic and pragmatic presupposition lies in their different behavior when it comes to negation. Semantic presupposition is preserved under negation, as can be seen when we negate, say, a factive verb like *know*, which is a presupposition trigger. *We know that Martha is married* and *We don't know that Martha is married* both have the same presupposition – "Martha is married", the information that is implied rather than directly asserted. The presupposition remains intact even though we negated the verb in the main clause. On the other hand, pragmatic presupposition, defined as a commonly held opinion or belief, can be denied.

particularly much improved and the new Government there made a profound difference to our dealings with this entity. Thus, the programme of action approved at the Bonn Peace Implementation Conference of 9 and 10 December 1997 is working effectively - further embedding the peace settlement. However, the peace process <u>*has not yet become irreversible*</u> *and a number of critical problems remain: tension around Brcko, complications in implementing the results of municipal elections; strained relations between Bosniaks and Croats especially in Mostar and Central Bosnia, among other difficulties. I was using the powers given to me by the Bonn Conference in a moderate way in order to avoid "a dependency syndrome" which might discourage initiative and the taking of responsibility by the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities for the country's destiny.*
(Carlos Westendorp, OHR Report 09, 9 April 1998)

(11) *But almost all progress has required continued and intensive efforts from the international community and in several cases I have had to resort to making interim binding decisions in accordance with my authority under Annex 10 of the Peace Agreement. A crucial moment in the peace implementation process has now been reached. As we approach the end of the consolidation period, the progress made thus far, although substantial,* <u>*is still not irreversible*</u>*. Civilian peace implementation in BiH cannot yet proceed without continued international military support. Progress itself generates resistance from hardline nationalists, who see their power on the wane and their influence diminishing. The continued presence of SFOR remains vital to the preservation of the secure environment in which nation-building can take place. I welcome NATO's and the UN's decision to extend SFOR's mission. The situation in nearby Kosovo, meanwhile, gives additional cause for concern; naturally it is one which I and other agencies in theater are watching closely.*
(Carlos Westendorp, OHR Report 10, 14 July 1998)

Although the expression under discussion is the same in all three examples, with slight variation, the one in example (9) differs from those in examples (10) and (11) with respect to both the local and global context. As for the local context, *by no means irreversible* in example (9) refers to the trend of ethnic separation, i.e. it has positive implicature, which reads "The trend of ethnic separation can change into the trend of ethnic reintegration". The expressions *has not yet become irreversible* and *is still not irreversible* in examples (10) and (11) respectively, on the other hand, have negative implicatures, i.e. the peace process and progress in peace implementation have not been completed yet and can change into their negative counterparts. As for the global context, example (9) comes from one of the 1996 reports, when it was opportunistic to talk about positive trends that would stress the importance of the presence of the institutions of international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina right after the war. Examples (10) and (11) are from 1998 when it was vital to maintain the continued international military support by emphasizing the danger of further conflicts in the country.

In these examples we can notice the interplay of Horn's motives for the use of the double negative. On the one hand, although there is an equivalent positive expression, *reversible*, in the lexicon, its use in these contexts would not be felicitous:

(9a) #*But the trend is certainly* *<u>reversible</u>*.

(10a) #*However, the peace process* *<u>has become reversible</u>*.

(11a) #[…] *the progress made thus far, although substantial,* *<u>is still reversible</u>*.

So, what we have partly at work here is what Horn calls the impossibility to use a positive expression felicitously in the given context.

On the other hand, we can notice the motive of quality in these examples as well, in particular in examples (10) and (11). Namely, to directly assert that the peace process and progress in peace implementation in the country can stop any moment and change in the reverse direction would represent a too strong assertion that could potentially compromise the writer's credibility. In this way, he does not commit himself to strongly asserting something that could easily prove wrong. Also, in example (9) the positive direct assertion would sound too optimistic, as if the writer could singlehandedly influence the trend in the positive direction. Here we can see the motive of being cautious, so as not to threaten one's own positive face if such a strong assertion proves wrong, which we could subsume under Horn's motive of politeness.

The next example illustrates the use of the double negative because there is no equivalent positive expression:

(12) *In its Declaration of 9 June 1998, the Ministerial Meeting of the Steering Board of the PIC noted with concern the lack of progress in arriving at a consensus on substantive issues of succession. It stated that these negotiations* *<u>cannot continue indefinitely</u>*. *It supported my recommendations for a pause in the negotiations until the end of September to be followed by a further negotiating session on the basis of the draft Framework Agreement of 13 November 1997, should appropriate conditions exist. After that session, the Steering Board will, if necessary, revisit the question including the option of referring key outstanding issues to arbitration. In addition, consideration may be given to pursuing steps to distribute relevant assets held abroad.*
(Carlos Westendorp, OHR Report 10, 14 July 1998)

To be more precise, there is a word *definitely* in the lexicon, but it is not a positive counterpart of *indefinitely* and these two words cannot be used in the same context, i.e. positive vs. negative. Furthermore, the choice of the double negative in this example is motivated by another factor as well. Namely, in it the High Representative quotes from the Declaration, another institutional document, in which, by definition, power cannot be expressed too directly. If it were expressed directly, the sentence would state that the negotiations be stopped immediately until later. Here we can see that besides the pragmatic considerations we have to take into account the type of discourse, in particular the type of genre, in order to explain the use of certain linguistic phenomena.

The final example from the reports is as follows:

(13) *Roughly 29,703 minority returns have been registered up until 31 August, 2000 according to UNHCR. This is over double the number of returns during the same period of 1999. In reality the number of returns is even greater than the registered figures show, as indicative of the growing number of people who are taking charge of their own destinies and refusing to wait any longer to return home. <u>Few</u> if <u>no</u> areas in BiH can now be deemed <u>inaccessible</u> due to security considerations and local police now play the key role in ensuring the security of minority returns. The strongest trend emerging in this period has been the establishment of tent settlements prior to repossession or reconstruction of property, for example Tjentiste, near Foca in South-Eastern RS, and while this is positive it is also a challenge as RRTF works with donors and local authorities to direct limited resources to these spontaneous returns. Some areas have seen a high level of tension, notably Kopaci near Srpsko Gorazde (South-Eastern RS) and Janja near Bijeljina (North-Eastern RS), both areas of Bosniac return to areas of current Serb majority, but these are limited and reflect unusually intransigent local positions within a larger pattern of progress.*
(Wolfgang Petritsch, OHR Report 17, 17 October 2000)

First, we must say that the underlined double negation contains a grammatical error. Since most officials acting as the High Representative are not native speakers of English, we can occasionally notice some features in their use of the language that deviate from the grammar of contemporary Standard English. This example should read "Few if <u>any</u> areas in BiH." For the purpose of analysis, we shall consider this example as correct. What differentiates this example from the previous ones is the fact that in it there is an approximate negator *few*, which has implicature "not zero."[6] The reason we included this example in the analysis is the fact that implicatures in general can be cancelled, and this is the case with the implicature "not zero" as well, which can be seen in this very example. The implicature

[6] The approximate negators comprise determiners (and fused determiner-heads) *few* and *little*, as well as adverbs *rarely*, *seldom*, *barely*, *hardly* and *scarcely*. Pullum & Huddleston call these non-verbal negators approximate negators because they denote imprecise quantification, which is approximate to zero, as opposed to the absolute negators or verbal negation, which denote zero. Even though approximate negators pass all Klima's (1964) syntactic tests for negativity (i.e. conjunction *either*, tag *not even*, question tags, and tag *neither*), they have a somewhat ambiguous status when it comes to the contrast positive-negative. For instance, the sentence *Ed rarely leaves the house* entails that Ed does not leave the house often, and in this sense the sentence has a negative meaning. On the other hand, the same sentence implicates that he sometimes does leave the house, and in that sense we can say that it has a positive meaning. This is why we say that approximate negators have implicature "not zero" (Pullum & Huddleston, 2002: 815-816).

"not zero" of the determiner *few* here is that there are, after all, some areas that are inaccessible in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, this implicature has been cancelled by the following *if no* ("if any"), so that the expression has the meaning "No areas in BiH can be deemed inaccessible." We recognize Horn's motive of quality in this example. The insecurity as to the truthfulness about all areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina being accessible is strengthened by the use of an approximate negator. Even though the implicature "not zero" of that negator has been cancelled, the insecurity remains, and that is why the writer uses double negation instead of the positive counterpart "All areas in BiH are deemed accessible."

3.2. *Analysis of the data from the High Representative's interviews and articles*

Interviews and articles by the High Representative and his associates analysed in this paper were published in different regional and international newspapers and magazines in the period from 1995 to 2001, or broadcasted on television and radio in the same period. For the purpose of analysis, they were all downloaded from the OHR's web page www.ohr.int, where they were found in their original form if they are from newspapers and magazines, or in transcript if they were broadcasted on television or radio. Overall, the number of double negatives is much higher in this subcorpus than in the reports (256 vs. 55), but the number of explicit double negatives is the same in both subcorpora (seven).

The following examples illustrate the use of double negative because of the lack of the equivalent positive expression:

(14) *The conflict in Bosnia is hardly new, and history will most certainly not end with the departure of the Implementation Force at the end of the year. Increasingly, we see the different parties reassessing their positions in the light of their perceptions of what might happen in the longer perspective. Reintegration and reconciliation is most certainly still an option - one we must do everything we can to support. But there is also a danger of continued ethnic separation and partition.*

I am deeply worried by the tendencies in this direction in Bosnia. This could easily be seen as the continuation of a trend that has been apparent throughout this century. But it is a trend that, in the long run, can only bring further conflict to this entire region.

It is not for the international community to seek to rule and govern Bosnia, but <u>none</u> of us can be <u>indifferent</u> to the prospects for stability and peace in this important part of Europe.
(Carl Bildt, article in *Financial Times*, 3 April 1996)

(15) *I am <u>not</u> an <u>irrepressible</u> optimist, <u>nor</u> can I afford to be an <u>uncompromising</u> idealist. Bosnia, after all its savagery and sadness, has little room for either. Yet I have seen enough courage, decency and even wisdom here to believe that Bosnia can*

come through if it is given the chance. We on the outside, like the Bosnians themselves, must show this week that we can stay the course.
(Carl Bildt, article in *The Times*, 13 June 1996)

(16) *Q: The non-governmental organization Transparency International announces a study which will show that the International Community is not impeccable.*

A: We are very interested in this investigation. On the basis of thirty years of experience working with international organizations I can tell you that I was a part of making very difficult international compromises.
(interview with Donald Hays, *Dnevni avaz*, 18 August 2001)

(17) *Q: That belief in Dodik concerns return to the RS. Are you satisfied with the way that this process is going in the RS, and in the Federation?*

A: Let me say first of all that five years after the signing of the DPA the number of returns is far too low, and that is despite clear legal instruction and financial support to the local authorities. In the last 10 months I've removed almost 40 officials for their failure to comply with the requirements of the law I think that fact alone should answer your question.

The process is too slow, but not non-existent. There are returns now in almost every municipality, including those areas, for example in the Eastern Republika Srpska where a year ago progress seemed impossible.
(Interview with Wolfgang Petritsch, *Start*, 10 October 2000)

We can say that in neither of the above examples a positive expression could be used felicitously in the given context, because each positive equivalent has a completely different meaning from its negative equivalent (*different*, *repressible*, *compromising*, *peccable, existent*). Also, some of these positive equivalents are limited to certain registers (*repressible* to medicine), and some are completely obsolete (*peccable*). In addition, in each of the preceding examples of double negation we can observe other motives for its use. In example (14) there is, broadly speaking, parallelism of structures even though in the clause preceding the one with the double negative there is no affixally negated expression. However, we do have negation in that clause as well, i.e. *It is not for the international community to seek to rule and govern Bosnia, but none of us can be indifferent to the prospects for stability and peace in this important part of Europe*, and the use of double negation seems to be stylistically justified. Also, if the writer had used a positive expression here, say "[…] but we must/should care about the prospects for stability and peace in this important part of Europe", he might have been accused of expressing a too explicit interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At that time, serious political analysts wrote about Bosnia and Herzegovina being a de facto protectorate of the international community without having a de iure status of a protectorate.[7] Having this global context in

[7] Chandler (2000) argues: "The nature of Bosnia as an ongoing process of international cooperation explains why, even though the powers of Carlos Westendorp amount to an international protectorate, this can never be openly admitted. This may not be purely

mind, it is clear why the High Representative would want to be as cautious as possible in his statements. Although in this we can discern Horn's motive of politeness, this motive ought to be modified in order to accommodate all the subtleties of meaning of double negation.

In example (15) we also recognize the motive that involves parallelism of structures – the expression with double negation is juxtaposed to another expression that is affixally negated: *I am <u>not</u> an <u>irrepressible</u> optimist, <u>nor</u> can I afford to be an <u>uncompromising</u> idealist.* Furthermore, both affixally negated adjectives in the example function attributively, and the negator *not* and the negative correlative *nor* affect only the meaning of these adjectives, having thus a mitigating effect on the meaning of the nouns and implicating that the writer is both an optimist and idealist to a certain extent.

In example (16) double negation is actually used by the journalist. The additional motive for its use here is the motive of politeness, i.e. not wanting to state directly that the International Community made serious mistakes. This example differs from the two previous examples in which we could recognize the motive of politeness (examples 8 and 9) in that double negation here is used as a strategy to mitigate the threat to the hearer's positive face. Also, we discern here the motive of refuting a presupposition that the International Community is in fact impeccable.

In example (17), in addition to the fact that the positive adjectival equivalent could not be used felicitously in the given context the use of double negation is further influenced by another motive – the speaker denies the existing presupposition that the process of refugee return is non-existent ("It is not non-existent").

In the following example we notice the motive of parallelism of structures, without having an affixally negated expression in the first clause:

(18) *Q: Are you satisfied with what has been done in BiH thus far?*

A: I have to say that I am <u>not</u> fully <u>satisfied</u>, but <u>not</u> completely <u>unsatisfied</u> either. (Interview with Wolfgang Petritsch, *Nezavisne novine*, 27 January 2001)

The notion of scale can be used here to explain the motivation of the use of double negation. On the positive end of the scale there is the adjective *satisfied*, whose meaning is intensified by *fully*, and on the negative end of the scale is *unsatisfied*, also intensified by *completely*, which is then negated. This example illustrates the fact that the logical cancelling out of two negatives does not yield a positive counterpart in real language use, but places the meaning of double negation somewhere in the middle of the scale.

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because there is some reluctance to appear colonial or, more importantly, a reluctance to take responsibility for what happens in Bosnia. Installing a formal protectorate would remove the relationship process whereby mechanisms of international community co-operation continually have to be re-energised as new issues arise that generate opportunities for united action" (Chandler, 2000: 189).

The following example is from an interview with the High Representative, but double negation occurs in the journalist's question:

(19) *Q: You recently stated that indicted war criminal Karadžić will be arrested within a month. The deadline seems to be expired and "pater familias" is still free and he has* ***not so insignificant*** *influence on the political situation.*
(Interview with Carlos Westendorp, *Dnevni avaz*, 30 April 1998)

In this example we recognize the motive of quality – the speaker is not certain as to whether the proposition that Karadžić has a significant influence on the political situation is truthful, and for this reason uses double negation to implicate that. Also, the speaker might want to deny the presupposition that Karadžić's influence on the political situation is insignificant.

The final example from this subcorpus illustrates the motive of quality:

(20) *A new gloom about the prospects of Bosnia seems to have descended on western capitals. Representatives of the three constituent peoples of the country constantly point out the failures of the other two to implement the peace agreement fully. Politicians used to the clear-cut policies of war have had difficulty adjusting to the more complex politics of peace.*

Yet things are moving forward. It is <u>not unusual</u> to see more civilian airliners than military transport aircraft at Sarajevo airport. The common institutions of the country, set up under the Dayton peace agreement, are meeting regularly without the help of outsiders.
(Carl Bildt, article in *Financial Times*, 11 April 1997)

The writer is not certain whether it is usual to see more civilian airliners than military transport at the Sarajevo airport, and therefore uses double negation, which certainly mitigates the meaning of *usual*.

4. Discussion

We have analysed the phenomenon of double negation in political discourse against the neo-Gricean theoretical background, in particular Horn's principle of the Division of Pragmatic Labour. According to this account, Grice's maxim of quality as a basic and primary maxim of his Conversation Principle is not liable to reduction, unlike other maxims, which can be reduced to two fundamental principles in language – speaker's economy (the force of unification) and hearer's economy (the force of diversification). Speaker's economy requires simplifying or minimizing, whereas hearer's economy expands the inventory of the lexicon in order to ensure one distinct meaning for each word. The opposition between these two principles may result not simply in a maxim clash, but in a resolution of the conflict through the Division of Pragmatic Labour. In the case of double negation this principle functions in the following way – there is a correlation between the relative brevity and simplicity of a positive expression and its use in stereotypic situations (the operation of R-principle). On the other hand, the corresponding periphrastic form, i.e. double negation, which is longer and more complex, is restricted to those situations that are outside the stereotype (the operation of Q-principle). In addition, even though logically, in double negation there is the cancelling of two negatives which gives the positive result, i.e. meaning, pragmatically, rarely is there a correspondence between double negation and its positive counterpart. Furthermore, Horn (1991: 90–91) lists seven possible motives for the use of double negation: quality – the speaker is uncertain as to whether a certain proposition is truthful or is certain that it is not; politeness – the speaker knows or has firm belief that a proposition is correct, but he is too polite, modest or cautious to mention it directly; irony – the speaker acts as if he were uncertain, modest or reluctant, even if this act has been assumed for the occasion; impressiveness of the style – double negation violates brevity in order to avoid brevity and achieve elevated, impressive or expressive style; there is no equivalent positive expression, or there is no possibility to use a positive expression felicitously in the given context; parallelism of structures – the expression with double negation is juxtaposed to another expression that is affixally negated; minimisation of time required for information processing – in the contexts of direct refuting or contradiction, where for example the speaker's double negation (X is not unA) is motivated by an earlier utterance X is unA.

Analysing the seven examples of explicit double negation in the first subcorpus we have found out that the major motive influencing the use of double negation is the motive of quality, i.e. the speaker or writer is not certain as to whether a certain proposition is truthful or is certain that it is not. This motive can be found in five out of seven examples. However, only in three examples is quality the predominant motive for the use of a double negative. In two of these five examples it is complemented by other motives as well.

In four examples we noticed that the motive for using double negation is the lack of an equivalent positive expression, or to be more precise, the impossibility to use the positive expression felicitously in the given context (here we take into account the fact that in three examples out of five the motive of quality is the predominant one). Nevertheless, in these examples as well there are other motives in addition to the predominant one. The additional motives that could be discerned in these examples are the motives of politeness, presupposition denial and the type of discourse. The type of discourse is not mentioned in Horn's list of motives, but it is clearly one of the driving forces for the use of double negation in political discourse. We mentioned earlier that reports belong to written institutional discourse in which indirectness is the norm, and it is therefore quite natural to use double negation in this discourse since double negation is a form of indirectness in communication. Presupposition denial is not on Horn's list either, but we can place this motive under the heading "minimisation of time required for information processing". Namely, according to Horn, this motive is used in the contexts of direct refuting or contradiction, where for example the speaker's double negation (X is not unA) is motivated by an earlier utterance X is unA. We claim that the speaker's or writer's double negation can be motivated not only by an earlier utterance X is unA, but also by a presupposition X is unA, if we define pragmatic presupposition as a commonly held opinion or belief that has not been stated.

The analysis of the seven examples from interviews and articles reveals that the most frequent motive for using double negation in this subcorpus is the fact that in the given context the equivalent positive expression could not be used felicitously. This motive has been found in four examples out of seven. The motive of quality was recognized as the one influencing the use of double negation in two examples, and parallelism of structures in one example. In the four examples in which the speaker/writer could not use the positive equivalent expression felicitously, we discerned other motives as well – parallelism of structures, politeness and presupposition denial. In the example in which the main motive was parallelism of structures, we noticed that there was an additional motive too – the writer/speaker does not want to use either the positive expression ("satisfied") or a negative expression ("unsatisfied"), and he therefore opts for the double negative, "not unsatisfied", which best expresses his state of mind. In one of the two examples in which the motive of quality is the dominant one, we can also notice the motive of presupposition denial.

In neither of the examples in the corpus could we find the motive of irony and that of the impressiveness of style. There is a plausible explanation for the lack of these motives in the subcorpus of reports – the institutional genre shuns the use of irony because it is apt to be misunderstood if the interlocutors do not share the same background knowledge, beliefs and the sense of humour, which is highly unlikely in this type of discourse. The impressiveness of style is not to be expected in institutional genre either, which despite its need for indirectness does not aspire to be elevated in style. This explanation, however, does not hold for the genres of interview and article, in which both irony and impressiveness of style can be used. The explanation for the lack of these motives in the second subcorpus perhaps lies in the fact that neither of the writers or interviewees analysed is a professional journalist. Also, the use of irony and impressiveness of style greatly depends on personal characteristics of each individual.

From the discussion above we can see that barely is there an example in either subcorpus in which there is no interplay of motives for the use of double negation. Using Horn's principle of the Division of Pragmatic Labour and his list of motives as the theoretical background for our analysis, we have found out that the list of motives does explain the use of double negatives in language, but only to a certain extent. Namely, we would need to extend and modify the list in order to account for a vast array of meanings associated with the use of double negation. One of the motives that clearly emerged in the course of analysis as an important factor is the one of presupposition denial. Apart from being in a position to refute or contradict direct assertions by using double negation so as to minimize time required for information processing, speakers/writers regularly find themselves in speech situations in which they need to deny or refute a presupposition. We suggest that this motive be added to the list of motives compiled by Horn. Another motive that needs to be taken into consideration is the type of discourse. As institutional discourse favours indirectness over directness, this can influence the use of double negation as an instance of indirectness in language.

Also, we have to take into account the fact that double negation often has a different meaning than its positive equivalent. This fact was recognized in linguistics as early as the beginning of the 20th century by Jespersen, and has been reiterated in linguistic literature ever since. If a positive expression covers the meaning on the positive end of the scale, and a negative expression that on its negative end, negation of the negative expression can cover the meaning at any point in-between. Thus if a speaker/writer wants to express neither a positive nor a negative meaning, they have double negation at their disposal.

In addition to expanding the list of motives, we would need to modify the motive of politeness so as to include other aspects of politeness. Namely, Horn's motive of politeness covers only the use of double negation as a strategy to avoid threatening the hearer's face. In our analysis of the present corpus, apart from one example that fits Horn's explanation of the politeness motive, we have found two instances of using double negation as a strategy to save one's own, i.e. the writer's, positive face for fear of being held accountable for directly asserting something that might prove wrong or something that others might find inappropriate. In all cases, positive face is at stake, either the writer's/speaker's or hearer's/reader's. Based on this, we conclude that in this type of discourse it is positive face that is more threatened than negative face.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have analysed the use of double negation in the corpus of political discourse consisting of two subcorpora – the reports of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Secretary General of the UN and articles and interviews by the High Representative and his associates. The analysis was carried out using Horn's principle of the Division of Pragmatic Labour and his list of motives for the use of double negatives in language. While the list of motives proved to be a good basis for the analysis, our results show that the list needs to be extended and modified in order to explain the use of double negation in political discourse – the motives of presupposition denial, the type of discourse and the concept of scale need to be added to the list, and the motive of politeness needs to be modified so as to accommodate aspects of politeness other than saving the hearer's positive face.

What emerged as a distinctive characteristic of the use of double negation in political discourse is the fact that in most of the analysed cases there were more than one motive responsible for the speaker's/writer's (probably subconscious) choice of the longer expression instead of the shorter positive one. The two major motives in the subcorpus of the reports are the motive of quality and the lack of the equivalent positive expression. These are however complemented by additional motives that we recognized as the ones that should be added to the list. The reports belong to institutional discourse, which by definition requires the use of indirect rather than direct language and in which the speaker/writer is cautious not to say something of whose truthfulness they are not certain. In the subcorpus of interviews and articles the most frequent motive is the impossibility to use a positive equivalent felicitously in the given context, then the motive of quality and the parallelism of structures. We can observe the blending of motives in this subcorpus as well.

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Corpus

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