

The many meanings of redundancy: multiple negation in Brazilian Portuguese and Mandarin Chinese

Giuseppe Varaschin giuseppe.varaschin@hu-berlin.de¹, Stephanie Rotter²

¹Department of German Studies and Linguistics, ²Department of English and American Studies,
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Introduction. Languages can be classified according to how they interpret multiple negation structures (MN) [1]: some obey the law of double negation (DN), yielding complex affirmative statements (DN languages, e.g. Mandarin Chinese (MC), [8]). Others require MN to express a single negation (SN) (strict negative concord (NC) languages). Some non-strict NC languages like Brazilian Portuguese (BP) [5] allow SN readings to be expressed by MNs as well as SN constructions involving minimizer negative-polarity items (e.g., DP-internal D inversion with NP+*algum*_D [3]). So MN is in a sense redundant. In DN and optional MN languages like BP, the availability of truth-conditionally equivalent alternatives differing in complexity (for positive and negative sentences, respectively) raises the possibility that speakers' choices for one carry social meaning (i.e. use-conditional content that signals the speaker's persona or relation to the addressee [6]). We report two studies that investigate which contextual configuration drives the choice between MN vs. SN/NN in BP and MC.

Method: Two rating studies (18 items each): one with 168 BP speakers and one with 168 MC speakers. A 2×3 design crossed INTERLOCUTOR RELATION (distant vs close [4]) and NEGATION (MN vs SN vs no negation/NN). Items were short dialogues (see (1)/(2)). Participants rated the (i) **interpretation** of (S3), (ii) **appropriateness**, and (iii) **social meaning** as speakers (*not at all - very annoyed/educated/formal/friendly/pedantic/respectful*) and relationship properties (*close*). We fitted separate ordinal models per question (Figure 1), with p-values from likelihood ratio tests.

Preliminary results. Exp-BP: (i) MN received lower interpretation ratings than NN ($p < 0.01$), with no effect for SN, suggesting the NC interpretation. (ii) MN is more appropriate in close than distant conditions ($p < 0.005$), and than SN ($p = 0.02$). (iii) MN was perceived as less annoyed ($p < 0.01$) and pedantic ($p < 0.003$), but as more friendly ($p = 0.02$) and respectful ($p = 0.009$) than SN. **Exp-MC.** (i) MN received lower interpretation ratings than NN ($p < 0.01$), but higher than SN ($\hat{\beta} = -1.8$, $\chi(1)^2 = 331.5$, $p = 0.01$), suggesting both interpretations are available. (ii) MN is less appropriate in close than distant conditions ($p < 0.02$), and than NN ($p < 0.01$) and SN ($p < 0.01$). (iii) MN is perceived as more annoyed than NN ($p < 0.01$), less educated (NN: $p < 0.01$; SN: $p < 0.01$) and respectful (NN: $p < 0.01$; SN: $p = 0.01$), and as more pedantic (NN: $p < 0.01$; SN: $p = 0.01$) than NN and SN. MN was rated as less formal ($p < 0.01$), friendly ($p < 0.01$), and close ($p < 0.01$) than NN.

Conclusion. Our findings show that (i) MN is semantically equivalent to SN in BP and differs from NN in MC. (ii) Across BP and MC, MN shows special use-conditions. (iii) MN received more positive attributes than SN for BP, and less positive ones than NN in MC. Since SN is more complex than MN in BP (due to movement of D) and MN is more complex than NN in MC, these results suggest that optional structural complexity correlates with 'marked' use-conditions [2, 7].

References

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Figures

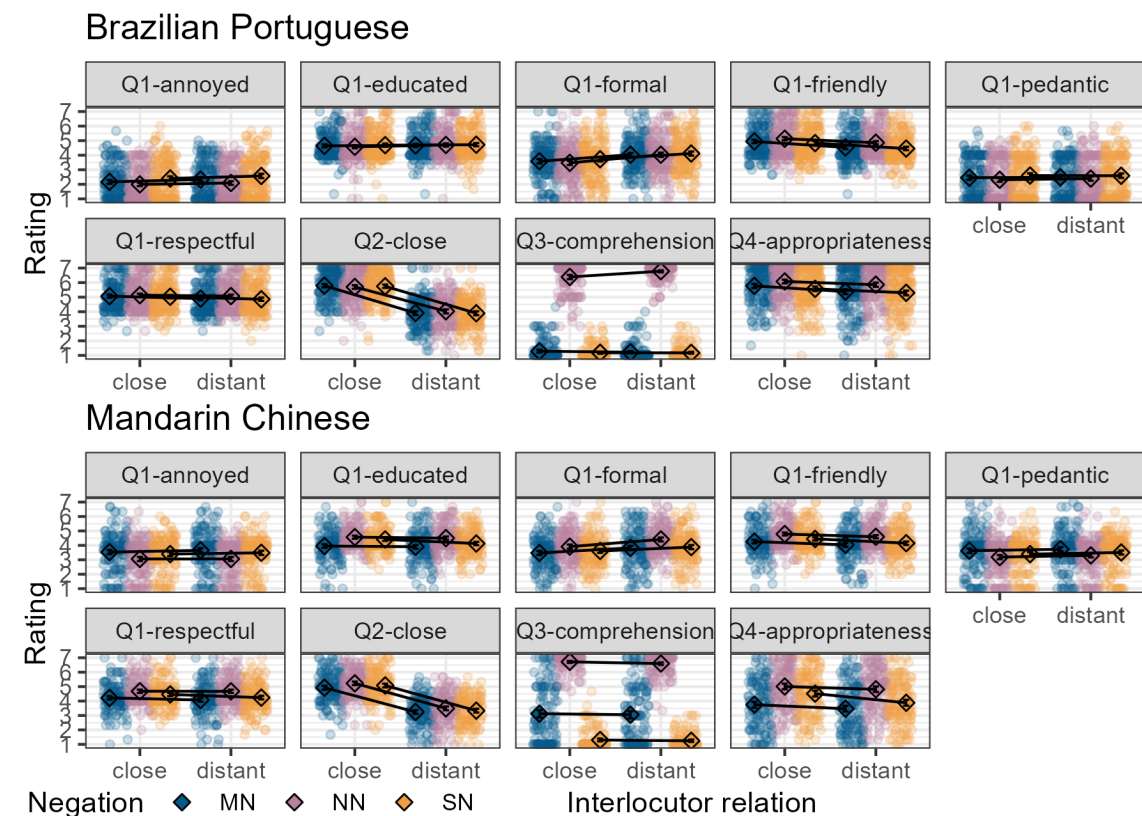


Figure 1: Overall means (diamonds) and by-subject means (transparent) per measurement.

Optional Supplemental Information

- (1) (S1) Uma mulher conversa com {o pastor_{distant} / o marido_{close}}:
A woman talks to the {pastor / husband}:
- (S2) Pastor / Marido: “Como você está se sentindo hoje?”
{Pastor / Husband}: How are you feeling today?
- (S3) Mulher: “Eu { não senti nenhuma piora.”_{MN} / não senti piora alguma.”_{SN} / senti uma piora.”_{NN}}
Woman: “I { didn’t feel no / didn’t feel any / felt a } worsening.”
- (Q3) A mulher sentiu alguma piora?
Did the woman feel any worsening?
- (2) (S1) 一个人和{雇主讲话_{distant} / 男友讲话_{close}} :
A person speaks to their {employer / boyfriend}:
- (S2) 雇主/ 男友: “你工作做得怎么样了? ”
{Employer / Boyfriend}: “How is your work going?”
- (S3) 答: “我目前{没有没遇到问题。”_{MN} /没遇到问题。”_{SN} / 遇到了问题。”_{NN} }
Answer: “I { didn’t not encounter / didn’t encounter / encountered } issues so far.”
- (Q3) 这个人目前遇到问题了吗?
Did the person encounter issues so far?