

## SYNTACTIC COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF NEGATION: THE THEME OF IDENTITY IN A POSTCOLONIAL SOCIETY

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Negation is a pragmatic universal of human language that allows speakers to deny, contradict, or invert statements. Syntactically, negation can be realised in various ways, depending on the language and its grammatical rules. This article examines syntactic comparative constructions of negation, exploring different types, their functions, and their significance in linguistic theory. Negation is a multifaceted syntactic device in postcolonial literary discourse that shapes narrative structure, character development, and reader engagement. Its study offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between language and literature, highlighting the interplay between form, meaning, and interpretation. Analysing empirical material also allows us to assert that such constructions in expressing negation find their imprint in situations where the decisive moment is a special emotional mood between communicants.

*Key words:* post-colonial literature, negation, discourse, comparative construction, syntax, pragmatic universal.

**Introduction.** Negation plays a crucial syntactic role in the discourse of postcolonial literary texts, influencing the structure and the depth of interpretation of narratives at different levels of the narrative. Negation highlights contrasts in the narrative, creating a more vivid and engaging reading experience and forming and destroying expectations [4]. The use of negation can tell much about characters (protagonists and antagonists) and their perspectives and psychological state. For example, frequent negation can indicate pessimism or denial of a character, adding nuance to the character's personality and motivations. Negation can be a powerful tool in plot development, creating effects of suspense and tension. Authors can guide readers through a maze of possibilities by denying particular possibilities or outcomes and drawing them into the story.

In literary discourse, negation can serve pragmatic functions such as politeness, understatement, or irony. For example, a character may use negation to soften criticism or to imply something without stating it directly [9]. Cognitively, negation requires readers to process information differently. This often involves a two-step process: understanding an affirmative proposition and then denying it. This can slow down reading and force deeper immersion in the text.

Metalinguistic negation, which focuses on the form rather than on the statement's content, is used in literary texts to challenge or correct previous statements. It can complicate dialogue and narrative descriptions. Double negation, where two negations are used to create a positive statement, can be used to emphasise or convey nuanced meaning. This technique is common in many literary texts to add depth and sophistication to the narrative.

Understanding these distinctions is crucial for the meaningful interpretations of the literary work's intent. Combining an understanding of syntax, pragmatics, and discourse linguistics provides a complete understanding of negation in literary texts. Such an interdisciplinary approach, focusing on pragmatic hermeneutics, can reveal how negation shapes readers' perceptions and interpretations. Based on this approach, this article explores the role of syntactic comparative constructions of negation in English postcolonial novels.

**Previous Research in the Area.** The pragmatic-discourse approach to the study of negation in language, text, corpus, or discourse focuses on how negation functions in communication, considering context, speaker intentions, and listener interpretations. The key ideas related to the pragmatic and discourse analysis of syntactic negation patterns are reviewed in [7].

As known, the relevance of negative sentences often depends on the context. A grammatically correct and accurate sentence may seem strange if the context does not support its use. Listeners draw inferences based on the context and speaker's intentions. According to the principle of cooperation of Paul Herbert Grice (1913–1988), English analytical philosopher and founder of implicature theory [6], speakers are expected to be truthful, relevant, and informative. Negative sentences often require additional cognitive processing because they involve understanding of what is being denied or contradicted. The pragmatic-discourse approach to studying syntactic patterns of negation reveals the complexity and nuances of using and interpreting negation in communication. By considering the context, speaker intentions, and listener interpretations, we gain a deeper understanding of the pragmatic functioning of negation. Accordingly, such an approach, based on the linguocultural, linguopragmatic and discourse studies stages of revealing the context of literary postcolonialism, makes it possible to validly determine the correspondence and meaning of sentences with negation in the text space of the postcolonial novel.

Negation is a fundamental category of human language; it is a pragmatic universal (linguistic universals are features, patterns, structures, and trends common to all or most languages of the world, demonstrating the commonality of linguistic structure despite the diversity of human languages). Its syntactic models have been widely studied in various methodological frameworks [see, for example, 4, 7, 10]. Negation demonstrates significant cross-linguistic variability. For example, some languages use double negation for emphasis, while others use it to cancel negation. This variability challenges universal grammatical theories and emphasises the need for subtler syntactic models. The interaction between negation and other linguistic components, such as polarity sensitivity and context, is crucial. Negation can affect the truth conditions of a sentence and its pragmatic interpretation, making it a rich area for interdisciplinary research.

Studies of syntactic negation patterns reveal human language's complexity and diversity [16]. While foundational theories such as Kim's [10] provide a starting point, contemporary

research opens up new dimensions and challenges. Understanding these patterns expands our knowledge of syntax and informs broader linguistic theories and applications.

**Methodology.** The methodology used in this research is based on general provisions of discourse theory and narratological, lexical, syntactic, and stylistic analyses embodied in a macro-philological paradigm, which integrates linguistics, discourse studies, narratology, literary studies, and corpus linguistics.

Quantitative analysis of the obtained language facts was carried out to clarify and establish trends of lexical actualisation, structural representation, and functional modulation of the object of study, that is, of syntactic comparative constructions of negations in English postcolonial novels as well as of the linguistic system of English literature in the Postcolonial Era..

**Results and Discussion.** The syntactic comparative constructions of negation in postcolonial novels are a vast field of analysis, reflecting the nuances with which writers navigate and criticise the colonial legacy. These constructions usually emphasise contrasts and distinguish differences between colonial and indigenous perspectives. Comparative negation involves comparing two entities or states of being, often to emphasise the superiority or inferiority of one over the other. These constructions usually include phrases such as “not as ... as”, “less ... than”, or “more ... than not”. They can be used to compare colonial and postcolonial realities directly, highlighting the shortcomings or characterising the failures of the established colonial systems. Ch. Achebe uses comparative negation in the novel “Things Fall Apart” to contrast traditional Igbo society with the imposed colonial order. For example, a sentence like “The new religion was not as compassionate as the old ways” highlights the perceived shortcomings of colonial religion compared to indigenous beliefs. In “Midnight Children”, S. Rushdie often uses comparative negation to criticise post-independence governance. A sentence like “The new leaders were no less corrupt than the colonizers” emphasizes the continuity of corruption and challenges the notion of a complete break with colonial rule. R. Arundati uses comparative negation to explore social hierarchies and injustice in “God of Small Things”. For instance, “The caste system was not less oppressive than colonial rule” draws a parallel between indigenous social structures and colonial oppression, criticising both.

The author-narrator’s application of comparative constructions allows for more apparent contrasts and distinctions between different aspects of identity: individual and collective. In postcolonial literary discourse, where the problem of identity is in a state of conflict between colonial heritage and contemporary realities, comparative constructions of negation are a productive tool for identifying and exploring these complex relationships. For example, expressions that are *not as free as* or *not as valued* indicate the inequality, oppression, or loss of cultural identity typical of the postcolonial experience. In such cases, synthetic comparative constructions of negation express a sense of inferiority or exclusion. The expressions *not as respected as* or *not as powerful as* highlight the absence of certain privileges or recognition that were or remain unavailable to postcolonial subjects. In this way it is revealed how colonial and postcolonial power structures continue to influence self-perception and social dynamics. The pragmatic orientation of syntactic comparative constructions not only establishes boundaries between different states or conditions but also

emphasises the struggle for the character to restore and preserve his own identity in the conditions of postcolonial domination.

The syntactic comparative construction *not as* with an absolute frequency 123 is prominent in the novels “No Longer At Ease” and “Things Fall Apart” by Chinua Achebe, “Efurū” by Flora Nwapa, and “The Last Friend” by Tahar Ben Jelloun (see Fig. 1).

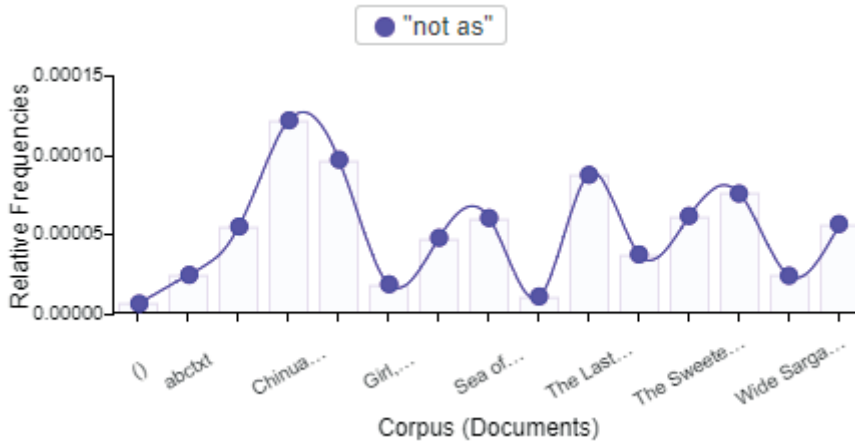


Fig. 1. Relative frequency of the syntactic comparative construction *not as* in the corpus.

The novels “No Longer At Ease” and “Things Fall Apart” reflect the characters’ struggle for self-determination and preservation of cultural identity. The negative construction explicates the conflicts between traditional values and new realities from colonial influence. In the novel “Efurū”, *not as* highlights the differences between traditional culture and modern changes, which allows the reader to understand how the colonial legacy affects the characters’ everyday lives and identities. In the novel “The Last Friend”, the comparative negative construction reflects the personal and collective traumas that arise from the lack of equality and justice. The expressions *not as loved as* or *not as respected* depict the depth of colonialism’s emotional and social impact.

The syntactic comparative construction *not so* has an absolute frequency of 135 and occurs most often in the novels “The Sweetest Dream”, “Things Fall Apart”, and “Wide Saragosso Sea”.

In “The Sweetest Dream”, Doris Lessing’s use of negation highlights the characters’ intentions and tensions: *‘Not so much a mother as a nurse,’ said Frances. ‘Yes, did you know, she is playing the Nurse – oh, wonderfully,’ said Sophie. ‘But now we’re going to have a real nurse in this house because I shall go on acting and of course Frances is acting too.’ ‘No, I don’t think I am prepared to take on a small baby,’ said Frances. ‘Of course not,’ said Sophie, but it was clear that she had in fact been hoping for just that [12, p. 346].* The phrase “Not so much a mother as a nurse” reframes the character’s role from caring to more clinical, indicating the need for professional care. Frances’s denial of responsibility with the words “No, I don’t think I’m ready to take on a little child” emphasises her unwillingness

to live up to certain expectations, which contrasts sharply with Sophie’s hopes. Sophie’s rejection of her desires with the words “Of course not” reveals the truth about her feelings, demonstrating the complexity of their interaction. The negation effectively deepens the exploration of conflicting roles, expectations, and unspoken desires in the characters’ relationship.

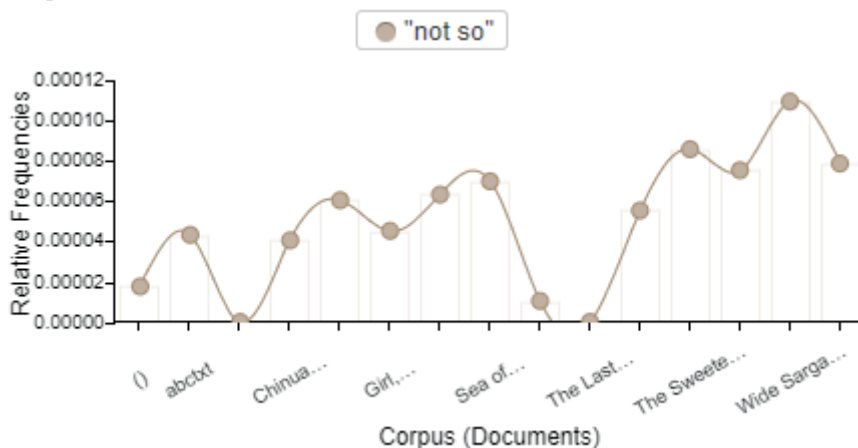


Fig. 2. Relative frequency of the syntactic comparative construction *not so* in the corpus.

In the passage from “Wide Saragosso Sea” by Jean Rhys, negation illustrates emotional distance, superstition, and change of atmosphere: *I began to cry. ‘Don’t look,’ said Aunt Cora. ‘Don’t look.’ She stooped and put her arms round me and hid my face, but I could feel that they were not as close as I thought. I heard someone say something about bad luck and remembered that it was very unlucky to kill a parrot, or even to see a parrot die. They began to go then, quickly, silently, and those that were left drew aside and watched us as we trailed across the grass. They were not laughing any more* [14, p. 41]. The narrator expresses a sense of isolation despite his physical proximity to Aunt Cora, emphasised by a phrase that indicates a sense of separation. Superstition is reflected in the notion that seeing a parrot die is bad luck, which creates a layer of foreboding. In addition, the transition from laughter to silence signifies a significant change in mood, a shift from a light-hearted atmosphere to a serious one. Overall, negation enhances the narrative by revealing emotional nuances, cultural beliefs, and the dynamics of the scene.

In this passage from Chinua Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart,” negation serves to emphasize the contrasts between current experiences and idealized scenarios: *On a moonlight night it would be different. The happy voices of children playing in open fields would then be heard. And perhaps those not so young would be playing in pairs in less open places, and old men and women would remember their youth. As the Ibo say: “When the moon is shining, the cripple becomes hungry for a walk.”* [2, p. 8]. The phrase “On a moonlit night it would be different” suggests a lack of joy in the present moment, while hypothetical phrases such as “then they would hear” and “they would play” emphasize a lack of joyful pursuits. Furthermore, the Ibo proverb “When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for

a walk” illustrates the transformative power of moonlight, suggesting that even those who are normally constrained feel inspired by its influence. Overall, the negation in this passage emphasizes the cultural significance of moonlit nights and their uplifting potential.

In the novel “Things Fall Apart”, the construction *not so* serves to compare traditional African society with European colonialists. For example, statements such as “Their customs were not so rigid as ours” emphasize differences in cultural practices that create misunderstandings and conflicts. The author-narrator uses *not so* to describe the process of cultural adaptation and integration. For example, “Their traditions were not so easily adapted to the new environment” emphasizes the difficulties that people face when adapting to new cultural conditions.

The syntactic construction *no...than* (16) is not characteristic of postcolonial discourse, but appears in the novels “At the Bottom of the River” and “Sea of Poppies”.

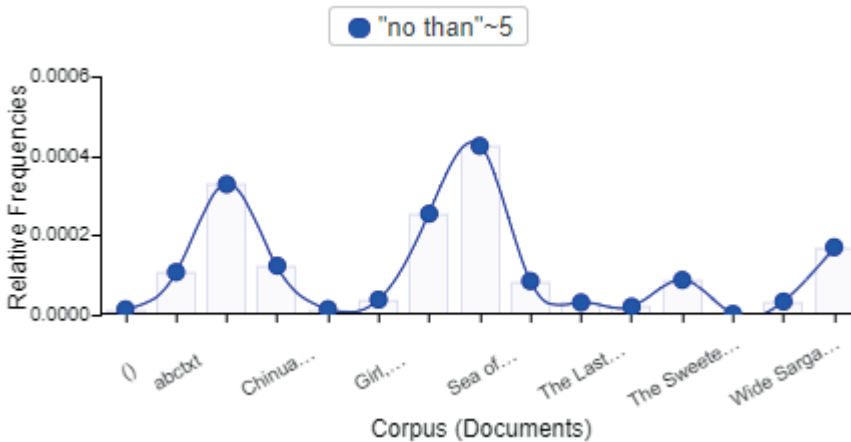


Fig. 3. Relative frequency of the syntactic comparative construction *no ... than* in the corpus.

In the novel “At the Bottom of the River”, *no ... than* is used to compare different aspects of cultural experience. In the novel “Sea of Poppies”, this construction allows depicting contrasts between colonial and local reality: *It was impossible to say no to them: if you refused they would leave their silver hidden in your house, or throw it through a window. It was no use telling the white magistrate that you hadn't accepted the money and your thumbprint was forged: he earned commissions on the opium and would never let you off. And, at the end of it, your earnings would come to no more than three-and-a-half sicca rupees, just about enough to pay off your advance* [5, p. 20]. In the above excerpt, the use of negation illustrates the powerlessness of the characters and the futility of their struggle in an oppressive environment. Phrases like “They couldn't say no” emphasize the lack of control, while “There was no point in talking to the white judge” underscores the ineffectiveness of seeking justice in the face of corruption. Furthermore, the statement “your earnings will not exceed three and a half rupees sikkha” underlines the insufficient reward for their work. Overall, the negation serves to vividly convey the themes of will, corruption, and inadequate compensation in the characters' plight.



In Amitav Ghosh's "Sea of Poppies", negation is used to express Mr. Doughty's contempt and to emphasise the absurdity he sees in the behaviour of others: *Mr Doughty snorted contemptuously. 'These days it takes no more than an acre or two for a Baboo to style himself a More-Roger. And the way this one jaws on, you'd think he's the Padshaw of Persia. Wait till you hear the barnshoot bucking in English – like a bandar reading aloud from The Times. 'He chuckled gleefully, twirling the knob of his cane. 'Now that'll be something else to look forward to this evening, apart from the chitchky – a spot of bandar-baiting.'* [5, p. 33]. Key examples include his derogatory remarks about the ease of achieving status, his mocking of inflated self-importance and of someone's attempts to speak English, comparing it to a monkey reading a newspaper. Doughty's expectation of ridicule further illustrates his contempt for and pleasure in demeaning others. Overall, negation serves to deepen the portrayal of his character and the social dynamics of ridicule in the narrative.

In Jamaica Kincaid's passage from "At the Bottom of the River," the use of negation serves to illustrate themes of decay, transformation, and the passage of time: *An old treasure rudely broken. See how the amber color fades from its rim. Now it is the home of something dark and moist. An ant walking on a sheet of tin laid bare to the sun – crumbles. But what is an ant? Secreting, secreting; always secreting. The skin of an orange – removed as if it had been a decorous and much-valued belt. A frog, beaded and creased, moldy and throbbing – no more than a single leap in a single day* [11, p. 13]. Phrases such as "old treasure, roughly broken" and "amber fading from its edge" emphasise the loss of former glory, while expressions such as "no more than a single leap in a single day" emphasise the frog's diminished vitality. In addition, the rhetorical question "But what is an ant?" along with the repeated phrase "always secreting" reflect on the insignificance of the ant's existence in contrast to its continuous actions. Overall, negation deepens the imagery and evokes a contemplative mood about the impermanence and cyclicity of life.

**Conclusions.** To sum up, comparative negation in postcolonial novels often emphasises contrasts between different eras, cultures, or ideologies. This can highlight the complexity of postcolonial identity and the continuing impact of colonialism. By using comparative negation, postcolonial writers can subvert colonial narratives that portray indigenous cultures as inferior. These constructions allow authors to critique colonial ideologies and assert the value of indigenous traditions. Comparative negation can also highlight the continuity of specific issues, such as corruption or oppression, from the colonial period to the postcolonial era. This highlights the challenges of achieving true independence and social justice.

Overall, the syntactic comparative negation constructions in postcolonial novels are potent tools for critique and reflection. They allow authors to make subtle comparisons that challenge colonial ideologies and highlight the complexity of postcolonial identities. By examining these constructions, readers can better understand the thematic issues and stylistic choices of postcolonial literature.

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## СИНТАКСИЧНІ ПОРІВНЯЛЬНІ КОНСТРУКЦІЇ ЗАПЕРЕЧЕННЯ: ТЕМА ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ У ПОСТКОЛОНІАЛЬНОМУ СУСПІЛЬСТВІ

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Заперечення – це прагматична універсалія людської мови, яка дає змогу мовцям заперечувати, суперечити або інвертувати твердження. Синтаксично заперечення може бути реалізоване різними способами, залежно від мови та її граматичних правил. У цій статті розглянуто синтаксичні порівняльні конструкції заперечення, їхні різні типи, функції та значення в лінгвістичній теорії. Заперечення – це багатогранний синтаксичний прийом в англійському постколоніальному літературному дискурсі, який формує структуру наративу, розвиток персонажів та залучення читача. Його аналіз дає цінні уявлення про складну взаємодію між мовою та літературою, підкреслюючи взаємодію між формою, значенням та інтерпретацією. Аналіз емпіричного матеріалу також дає змогу стверджувати, що такі конструкції у вираженні заперечення знаходять свій відбиток у ситуаціях, де вирішальним моментом є особливий емоційний настрій між комунікантами.

*Ключові слова:* постколоніальна література, заперечення, дискурс, порівняльна конструкція, синтаксис, прагматична універсалія.