

## NEGATION AS A PRAGMATIC TOOL FOR SUSPENSE: A LINGUISTIC STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLERS

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This article delves into the nuanced interplay between suspense and negation within narrative frameworks, employing a comprehensive analysis of literary theories and exemplar texts. It has been established that suspense, a pivotal narrative mechanism, is intricately woven with forms of negation to enhance reader anticipation and emotional involvement. The exploration encompasses a detailed examination of academic perspectives alongside practical examples to delineate the combined effects of suspense and negation in engrossing readers. The exploration includes a close linguistic and pragmatic analysis of three British psychological thrillers – “Behind Closed Doors” by B.A. Paris, “The Girl on the Train” by Paula Hawkins, and “Before I Go to Sleep” by S.J. Watson – to show how negation operates in real narrative environments. Notably, the investigation uncovers that negation – whether metalinguistic, implicit, or pragmatic withholding—significantly amplifies the suspense element, maintaining high engagement, particularly within thriller genres. The findings assess these narrative strategies’ cognitive and emotional resonances, underscoring their critical role in modern storytelling. The research offers enriched insights into their operational mechanisms by characterising the interdependencies of suspense and negation, contributing profoundly to narratology and literary analysis.

*Key words:* suspense, negation, suspenseful negation, types of negation, storytelling strategies, literary linguistics.

**Introduction.** Currently, there is a growing interest in the fields of literary studies and linguistics regarding the mechanisms that shape and amplify readers’ emotional resonance. One of the central factors influencing the depth of engagement with a text is suspense, which emerges through a gradual buildup of uncertainty and anticipation of resolution. However, an equally significant role in this process is played by negation – a multifaceted instrument ranging from deliberate withholding of information to subtle metatextual contradiction. It is precisely the interaction of suspense and negation that can be viewed as one of the key tools authors employ to foster a strong emotional engagement in their readership.

The issue of exploring negation in the context of creating suspense is timely for several reasons. First, contemporary literary discourse – particularly in thriller and psychological novel genres – increasingly relies on techniques of deferred resolution and linguistic ellipsis, both of which intensify emotional tension. Second, from a practical standpoint, examining negation strategies may help writers enhance a text’s interactivity and amplify readers’ cognitive and affective responses. Third, scholarly analysis of this phenomenon furthers our

understanding of the linguistic mechanisms underpinning the “reader-text” dynamic and allows us to expand the conceptual boundaries of narratology and literary linguistics.

**Previous Research in the Area.** Suspense is a narrative technique that creates a state of anticipation in a reader with the help of continuous uncertainty. With the help of such a technique, authors usually delay the outcome of an event or key moments in a story, thus engaging the reader’s emotions. Suspense is not just withholding the information but also manipulating the timing of events, thus keeping readers interested.

Several scholars have attempted to define the phenomenon of suspense. Carroll [6, p. 84] defines suspense as “an emotional state that arises when one is uncertain about an outcome that one cares about”. This definition focuses on the emotional response that suspense can produce. Vorderer and Knobloch [27, p. 63] agree that suspense is an emotion that appears due to anticipation of a crucial outcome; they believe that it is interconnected with the reader’s engagement with the story.

An influential scholar, Raphael Baroni, considers suspense as an effect which emerges when the audience anticipates a resolution; such anticipation is normally emotionally exhausting [1, p. 17–19]. The effect produced by suspense is central to keeping the audience engaged and is intertwined with the dynamics of narrative intrigue.

It is undeniable that suspense can evoke cognitive responses, as it is tightly connected to the brain’s predictive mechanisms and mechanisms of curiosity. The brain will try to process suspense, triggering anticipation, uncertainty and the desire to find and implement the solution. According to Schaeffer [24, p. 24–25], cognitive processes associated with suspense are often “saturated effectively”, meaning that it is both a mental and emotional experience. For the brain, suspense is the irritation that must be eliminated, and therefore it will continuously generate some ideas about the potential resolution based on its past knowledge and contextual clues.

Baroni states that cognitive processes that are triggered by suspense are both conscious and unconscious [1, p. 24]. Some predictions the recipient tries to resolve on their own, but some happen by default; for instance, a person may employ the knowledge they gained from the stories they had read.

Suspense is typically associated with the narrative structure of stories, particularly in genres like mysteries, thrillers or dramas. According to Zillmann [29, p. 203], the fear of a negative outcome intensifies suspense, making it an excellent tool for creating tension and excitement in a story. This statement is supported by Brewer and Lichtenstein [3, p. 479–481], who are also convinced that the possibility of a negative outcome directly increases the emotional response from a recipient. Therefore, if suspense is accompanied by negation, it doubles the negative anticipation, making the story even more emotionally exciting.

Scholars Lehne and Koelsch [19, p. 7] recognize two types of suspense: suspense of outcome and form. The **suspense of outcome** is when the reader is aware of something that a character is not, but they are still unaware of what will happen next. The suspense of form is slightly different: it is when the recipient knows the outcome but is fully unaware of how it will happen or when. According to Cadera & Pintarić [4, p. 25], such suspense is particularly useful for historical narratives or stories that start with introducing a problem,

e.g. a crime. In such narratives the storyline starts with the end and then unfolds the events that led to such an outcome.

Hitchcock famously mentioned that if the public knows the bomb under the table, they are impatiently waiting to see the resolution. However, when the characters are unaware of it, and the public is unaware of what will happen to the heroes, they would be even more excited. Hitchcock thinks that in this way, an author can involve the public as active participants in the scene [25, p. 73].

Suspense is usually conveyed with the help of cliffhangers, foreshadowing and red herrings in the stories. Writers can keep the sense of unpredictability by controlling the flow of information and misinformation, and that is why suspense is crucial in creating stories [23, p. 232; 7, p. 178].

**Methodology.** In order to explore how different forms of negation contribute to the construction of suspense, this study employed a mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative analyses. First, a target corpus of contemporary thrillers and psychological narratives – each recognized for its vivid suspenseful elements – was studied. The research is based on three British psychological thrillers: “Behind Closed Doors” by B. A. Paris, “The Girl on the Train” by P. Hawkins, and “Before I Go to Sleep” by S. J. Watson. All examples of negation types were manually selected through close reading and contextual analysis. No computational tools were used in the data collection or analysis process. They were selected based on their relevance to the research topic (e.g., frequent use of delayed resolutions, cliffhangers, and negation strategies) and their widespread critical for reader recognition. The primary criterion was the presence of explicit or implicit instances of negation used to heighten suspense.

Following corpus compilation, the research proceeded in three phases. In the first phase, each text underwent a close reading to identify key patterns of negation (explicit negation, presupposition denial, and withholding). Passages containing these linguistic features were collected and annotated, ensuring that any context necessary for interpretation remained intact. In the second phase, the annotated data were systematized and coded. Finally, in the third phase, the selected instances underwent a comparative analysis to ascertain their effectiveness in maintaining or amplifying suspense.

**Results and Discussion.** The following section presents the main results of the research and their interpretation. Based on the analysis of three British psychological thrillers, this part highlights how various types of negation – pragmatic withholding, implicit negation, and presuppositional denial – contribute to the creation of suspense. Each subsection explores one aspect of the findings in detail, supported by examples and comparative tables.

**1. General Functions of Suspense in Narrative.** Suspense plays a crucial role in storytelling, as it engages a reader emotionally and triggers a sense of anticipation. A strategic use of suspense intensifies the recipient’s interest and involvement, making the story more dynamic and well-written. Suspense combined with negation is a powerful tool for keeping the reader engaged and entertained, as negation is crucial to withholding the storyline and denying the reader the information; they need to fill in the gaps and guess the resolution.

Suspense creates **emotional engagement and arousal**. According to Carroll [6, p. 84], suspense is highly emotional; the state of anticipation usually leads to either hope or fear or

a mixture of both. This emotional engagement is important; most writers aim to achieve it because it keeps the audience interested in the narrative and forces them to care about the outcome and fate of the characters.

Zillmann [29, p. 74] goes even further, calling it a state of arousal. He introduces the excitation-transfer theory, in which the arousal produced by suspense does not disappear immediately; rather, it transfers to the emotional response created by the resolution of suspense. It does not depend on whether the resolution is positive or negative; they have the same transfer. It naturally leads to heightened feelings, usually satisfaction or dissatisfaction, depending on the outcome.

Suspense is important in **controlling the information flow**, delaying the story's key moments and resolution, keeping the recipient interested and involved, and maintaining their attention. Carroll [6, p. 78] is convinced that manipulating the timing of the events, particularly delaying them or increasing the probability of a negative event, is the key point to creating suspense. Such delays structure the story and force the recipient to expect a negative outcome even more; the more the resolution is delayed, the more fear they experience. Cadera & Pintarić [4, p. 27] go even further and call it the manipulation of expectations; they believe that authors use this technique to play with the audience and delay or subvert the expectations of their readers. By prolonging the uncertainty, they try to achieve the effect of heightened expectations and emotional feedback, keeping the audience engaged and hungry for more.

Umberto Eco's theory of an "open text" contributes to the overall understanding of how negation acts in a text. In the "Role of the Reader", he emphasizes the importance of an active reader participating in the narrative. In his opinion, suspense emerges because of the reader's interaction with ambiguity, incompleteness and what is left out; often, through negation, the author can create "narrative gaps" [10, p. 24], which tease the audience. These gaps are particularly good at making the reader question their assumptions without stopping, keeping them engaged throughout the storyline without any time to rest. Using negation for the author means prolonging the sense of anticipation for the reader and slightly "teasing" them.

One more crucial function of suspense is its ability to **intensify enjoyment**. Suspense is well-known for creating stress for a recipient. Still, it is only during the stage of development that a recipient normally experiences an intense emotional release after the resolution of suspense. Because recipients have been impatiently waiting for what will happen next, they feel deeply satisfied when they finally get the outcome. This combination of stress-enjoyment is quite unusual for most recipients and paradoxical. Our brain treats suspense as the irritation that needs to be eliminated, and when it is resolved in the end, it releases endorphins that create a feeling of satisfaction. Zillmann [29, p.74] notes that such enjoyment arises from combining cognitive and psychological processes. If suspense-induced arousal goes together with a positive outcome, it creates a euphoric state that intensifies the enjoyment of a recipient.

Zillmann also found out that the participants rated stories with more suspenseful episodes as more entertaining; it was interesting that it did not depend on whether the story had a resolved or unresolved ending. According to the study, the processes involved in decoding suspense bring pleasure, even if the outcome is negative [29, p. 75].

Sigmund Freud's studies on delayed gratification provide a psychological aspect to the research on suspense. In his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he argues that if an individual

is denied immediate satisfaction, the postponement of the resolution generates emotional tension and curiosity [11, p. 56]. Freud's theory underscores the importance of negation in creating tension and suspense.

Suspense involves not only an emotional response but a **cognitive** one as well. The reader is nudged to predict an outcome, triggering cognitive processes. Cadera and Pintaric [4, p. 23] prove that cognitive processes are triggered by the fear of the unknown and a potentially bad outcome; that is, according to their research, what makes the reader engaged even more. Lehne and Koelsch [19, p. 6] proved that intrinsic suspense is tied to our predictive capabilities. According to their study, it is natural for the brain to want to solve the mystery, so when it is unable to do so, suspense may lead to tension [19, p. 7].

Suspense can also help **build the character's disposition**. According to Comisky and Bryant [8, p. 46], the more positively the reader responds to the character, the more suspense they feel while worrying about their fate. Typically, readers experience intense suspense because they worry about the fate of their favourite characters. However, they are also curious about what will happen to antagonists, although it is a negative disposition. Carroll also agrees on this point [5, p. 84]; according to the research, the reader's emotional investment is higher towards the characters they support, but it is as high against those they do not support.

Another important function of suspense is its ability to **create ambiguity and uncertainty**. Ohler and Nieding [21, p. 136] state that suspense is at its peak when the reader is left thinking about the outcome, especially when there are two equally possible outcomes, and they must guess.

Based on the functions of suspense, such as withholding and denying the information, creating ambiguity and uncertainty, and controlling the information flow by enclosing the information in portions, it should be said that negation plays a crucial role in creating suspense, as it deliberately creates gaps and uncertainty. When used strategically, negativity can withhold and contradict information, and suspense thrives on such elements. With the help of negation, the author can deny information and withhold it till the crucial moment, refusing to confirm some of the predictions made by the readers, forcing them to engage with the text even more.

**2. Case Study: How Negation Enhances Suspense.** Negation can heighten suspense in thrillers, especially because thrillers are the genre that thrives on uncertainty, anticipation, suspense, tension and withholding information. By using negation for strategic reasons in thrillers, authors can produce a captivating, engaging, thrilling and not boring piece that will not go unnoticed by the readers. Thrillers highly rely on what is revealed to the reader, what is withheld and what is left unsaid; this genre's main idea is to thrill the reader. Negation is particularly useful for this genre as the writers who employ negation strategically may control the flow of information, deceive and mislead the audience, scatter negation as red herrings in the story, slightly imply a future resolution, and, in this way, make the reader feel stuck between multiple possible truths. This section explores how different pragmatic strategies, such as withholding the information or presupposition denial, may enhance suspense in thrillers and how specific types of negation, such as metalinguistic, silent and conditional types, serve as good tools for suspenseful structure.

Suspenseful triggers are well studied; however, little research has been done on how specific grammatical constructions influence suspense. This area still needs some attention.

**2.1. Pragmatic Negation through Withholding in Suspense Creation.** This article has already mentioned withholding information as a strategy for creating suspense. According to pragmatics, it deliberately denies the reader the information needed to understand the utterance's meaning, which creates narrative gaps.

The definition of negation should first be provided to argue that withholding information is pragmatic negation. According to Horn [16, p. 1], negation is a logical operation reversing the proposition's truth value. However, negation usually extends beyond its formal structure in conversation and is developed into a pragmatic or communicative strategy. In communication, a speaker does not necessarily need "no" or "not" to negate things.

Grice's theory of communication and his maxims are crucial to understanding negation as a communicative act. Withholding information is nothing else but deliberately flouting the Maxim of Quality, according to which a speaker is to provide as much information as needed for the speaker to decode the meaning successfully. This deliberate communicative strategy may be categorized as pragmatic negation because it negates the amount of information the recipient is entitled to. Withholding information and making the audience aware of that is a pragmatic negation as it violates the rules of transparent and informative communication.

Marta Dynel looks at withholding from another perspective [9, p. 557]. Based on theories of Grice, she suggested that withholding is not a simple act of non-disclosure but somewhat intentional deception. She treats withholding as manipulation, which is used to the speaker's advantage and violates the hearer's needs. She also explored the ethical part of withholding, and according to her research, withholding is not moral in personal relationships, legal matters and negotiations.

Based on research by J. Verschueren, withholding information can be regarded as a form of negation in communicative interaction [26, p. 89]. He suggested that language functions as a tool in continuous linguistic intentional communication through deliberate linguistic choices by a speaker. This perfectly aligns with the idea that withholding is a pragmatic negation, as a speaker deliberately denies the listener enough information to decode the utterance fully.

According to Verschueren [26, p. 89], from a pragmatic standpoint, withholding is more than the omission of information; it is an active negation of expected discourse that, in turn, changes the ability of an addressee to perceive the message. Since addressees always expect enough information to grasp the meaning, it acts as a presupposition.

Therefore, in many cases, withholding acts as a powerful, pragmatic tool that manipulates the flow of information, and the writers may gradually use it to reveal as much information as needed.

The most popular mechanisms of pragmatic withholding for suspense are withholding the main key plot points and character motivation or background information.

Authors of British online psychological novels deliberately **withhold key points in narration** because it builds suspense. It was Alfred Hitchcock who first elaborated on the topic of suspense mechanisms. He famously distinguished between suspense and surprise, indicating that the audience must always know more than the characters but not enough to be surprised during the climax [25, 1984].

In "Before I Go to Sleep", the author brilliantly uses the withholding technique. Christine, the protagonist, wakes up daily without her memories, so she must rely on her diary about her

past. The narrator skillfully manipulates the plot, giving only parts of necessary information about her that feel both irritating and exciting for the reader. The whole narrative structure of the book is a withholding device that keeps the reader constantly guessing about her motivations and the reliability of the other characters.

In “Behind the Closed Doors”, the reader is left guessing whether a seemingly perfect marriage is genuinely perfect. During the storyline, the reader can see some inconsistencies that make them wonder whether the ideal marriage is just a facade. The author slowly and interestingly unfolds the story, revealing chillier details about the marriage. The whole story would not have been possible without slow and strategic withholding techniques.

In the realm of psychological thrillers, a strategic **withholding of character's motivations** and concealment of their inner thoughts are inherent genre techniques. When authors opt for creating a “gap” between the reader and the character by hiding the inner thoughts and motivations of the latter, it forces readers to engage in hermeneutic activity because they will want to fill the “gap”, which, according to W. Iser is essential to reading process [17, p. 239].

Withholding characters' motivations invites readers to use their cognitive abilities, analyse, and predict. In this way, they engage with the text, sympathise with the characters, develop with them and, most importantly, feel excited. The readers are forced to speculate, decode and reconstruct the storyline, all due to suspenseful techniques; without them, readers would get bored from the first page .

A good example of withholding the character's motivations is *A Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins. Readers are first introduced to a girl who likes watching another family from a train; the girl and the family seem alien to the readers, who do not know anything about them. However, as the story unfolds, the information is gradually given to the recipient. It fills in all the blank places in the minds of a reader. More and more pieces are given later as the story unfolds. Readers are intrigued by this sentence; they start questioning Rachel's inner motivations and want to uncover why she indulges in such an unusual hobby. The example proves this: “The things I want to remember are not available to me when I try to recall them. Instead, I'm stuck with images that float to the surface against my will” [14, p.15]. The reader is invited to try to uncover the burdened past of the main character.

There are examples in the literature when suspenseful sentences foreshadow a character's motivations that will later be revealed. It is a suspenseful sentence within a suspenseful plot: “I have lost control over everything, even the places in my head. The things I want to remember are unavailable when I try to recall them. Instead, I'm stuck with images that float to the surface against my will. It's disorienting, like having someone else's thoughts. This morning is a blank in my mind, with vague impressions of the usual: the stale smell of the train carriage, the briefcase-laden commuters, the fleeting countryside scenes. But nothing substantial, nothing solid. It's all slipping away, even as I try to hold on to the threads” [14, p. 15]. This passage foreshadows her (the character's) future, but at the same time, it is suspenseful because it forces readers to think about what might have been the events from her life that were so traumatic that she had forgotten them. Suspense here is rendered through fragmented memories and a few flashbacks that more intrigue the reader than give any answers. She starts questioning her perception when she states that she lost control over her places in the head. Unreliable narration, in this case, adds more to the mystery and

curiosity developed in readers' minds. Such a passage is perfectly placed at the beginning of the storyline; it is a suspenseful sentence that introduces a suspenseful story. A writer must be skilled to keep the suspense and engage a reader throughout a story.

Therefore, withholding is central to creating suspense in literature since it intensifies the readers' engagement. Withholding, as a form of pragmatic negation, deliberately denies the information the reader needs to decode correctly. It enhances the engagement by keeping the reader in blissful anticipation and stimulates their cognitive abilities as they try to uncover the mystery.

In the three novels taken for analysis, a sufficient number of the cases of withholding were used for suspense reasons to create a table.

Table 1  
Withholding for Suspense in Three Novels

Clarification	“Behind Closed Doors”	“The Girl on the Train”	“Before I Go to Sleep”
Overt gaps in the narrative that prolong uncertainty (e.g. broad hints at secrets or events left incomplete)	8	10	6
Sudden scene breaks, or chapter cuts that omit crucial details (e.g. abrupt endings to chapters)	7	9	6
Internal monologues or flashbacks suggest a secret but omit the final revelation. (e.g. characters evasion)	6	7	6
Characters refusing to disclose needed explanations until a later point (e.g. direct questions left unanswered)	7	6	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>25</b>

In “Behind Closed Doors”, the author usually creates suspense by keeping the protagonist from revealing facts about her husband until the end of a scene. “What exactly happened before that dinner party?” repeatedly arises while reading.

Omissions in “The Girl on the Train” are different, as they are usually triggered by its structure, such as memory lapses, multiple narrations or different timelines. They all give the impression that something is happening, but readers feel they are just one step away from realising the issue.

“Before I Go to Sleep” is another perspective, as the protagonist loses memory, resulting in suspense. Each day, she writes about her revelations, which she cannot recall the next day. Critical moments for understanding her story arise only at the end, finally answering all the questions.

This statistic provides valuable insight into how the author uses withholding as a suspense trigger and how much they rely on this technique throughout the novel.

The function of withholding is not just omitting information but gradually “releasing” the information as the story unfolds. It requires skill from the writer to decide how much information will be given at a particular stage.

Ultimately, withholding proved helpful in turning passive reading into active and engaging. It triggers a continuous hermeneutic activity from a reader and is crucial for their sustained interest.

**2.2. Implicit Negation in Suspense Creation.** Implicit negation is another type of negation that significantly contributes to suspense creation. Unlike explicit negation, which relies on negative markers like “not”, “no”, etc., implicit negation requires the reader to infer the hint for absence or denial with the help of context. The following example – “I love you. That’s all that’s important” [28, p. 196] – clearly shows that the person implicitly says that all the other things are not necessary; there is him, his love, and these are the only things that matter. In this way, he denies anything else that this woman may consider worthy of being important, but he does not say, “Other things are *not* important”.

Implicit negation operates through various linguistic mechanisms, such as flouting the Grecian maxim of quantity [12, 1975], presupposition failure and conversational implicature. Implicit negation usually requires the recipient to utilise their cognitive skills and background knowledge, be attentive, understand layers of complex communication, etc. This interaction is not less active than the one with the withholding technique, and it means it feels as interesting and engaging.

According to Herman [15, p.10], narrative complexity can be enhanced by what is left unsaid and merely implied. He believes it significantly contributes to the readers’ engagement and interest. Implicit negation is a type of negation that suggests but does not directly state something, and thus it corresponds to his idea of what enhances the narrative.

The proof that withholding is a part of pragmatic negation has already been provided, but is it part of implicit negation as it is sometimes treated? It cannot be denied that they may sometimes intersect, yet they are fundamentally different in their implications and how they are used in communication.

Implicit negation refers to the cases when the harmful component is not used; it simply implies and works on a subtle level. Depending on context, it relies on language to convey a more nuanced meaning.

Withholding, on the other hand, omits the crucial information for the most effective decoding; rather than implying anything, it simply does not state enough. Dynel [9, p. 557] treats withholding as a form of deception that is triggered by initiating a false belief on purpose. She differentiated withholding from simple non-disclosure because of its deceptive intents.

The overlap between implicit negation and withholding is possible when the first one is used for manipulative reasons. In the example – “The movie was OK” – the implicit negation may mislead the audience into believing that the person liked the movie, but, in reality, such sentences are said out of politeness. This example looks like withholding as implicit negation in this sentence violates the Maxim of Quantity because it leaves out important information, which results in failed decoding.

However, according to Grubin [13, p. 107], the question of manipulation is highly cultural. What is considered manipulative and deceitful in one culture may be treated as a polite omission in another. Therefore, it all varies based on cultural expectation and their idea of sincerity and directness.

Thus, even though withholding may be a part of implicit negation in particular cases, they differ in function. Implicit negation operates in the paradigm of what is spoken, whereas withholding is in the field of unspoken and omitted.

The following example from psychological thrillers vividly illustrates how implicit negation contributes to suspense creation: “She’s particularly intrigued by the *seemingly* perfect couple she watches through the window” [14, p. 25]. This sentence is exciting because of one word – seemingly. It directly signals the recipient that something is wrong, and the life may not be “perfect”. This is an example of implicit negation used for the reason of suspense because it does not directly state something is wrong in this perfection; it rather implies it, but at the same time, readers become suspicious and interested as to why it was not stated directly and what is hiding behind their seemingly perfect marriage. Only one word in this sentence creates the feeling of anticipation, and readers start craving to learn more.

Pragmatic theory aligns with the notion of “defeasible reasoning” when the initial acceptance of a proposition, here their perfection, is challenged based on new information or implication. Thus, the suspense in this case did not arise from what was said but rather from what was left unsaid and implied. This utterance demonstrates the richness and uniqueness of negation, mainly implicit negation when used for suspense creation.

The other example is even more suspenseful: “The cubicles behind us are empty, the doors ajar. This counts for privacy in court. The witness box is not the only place where you need to watch every word” [18, p. 5]. First, the sentence implies that courts have privacy; the words “empty” and “ajar” add to this fake feeling of genuine safety. But then “counts for privacy at court” is an ironic hint that not everything is as it seems. Here, the suspense starts developing as the reader gets an odd feeling. Finally, the last sentence uncovers the mystery but intensifies suspense, as the reader finally gets the answer – courts only seem safe – but at the same time, there is no answer to why people should watch their every word. Is it because the character had such an experience in their life? Or maybe they heard it from someone else? All these unanswered questions maintain suspense. It is a masterly written sentence as it creates an emotional response – the reader is disappointed because they were not given answers to all their questions and were irritated with few.

Sometimes, rhetorical questions may act as implicit negations that only challenge and suggest. “Can you ever really know the ones you love?” [2, p.1] is an example of a rhetorical question that implicitly negates the idea of trusting people we love. On the surface, it is supposed to prompt reflection, but beneath it there is a decisive implicit negation that may even be used as a form of manipulation.

The implicit negation is interconnected with scepticism because it challenges the universal belief of sincerity and trust in relationships. It subtly plants doubt into the mind of a character and readers, as they doubt whether the other character knows more than they disclose.

Using a rhetorical question as a form of implicit negation is highly effective in producing suspense. First, it results in emotional feedback from readers as they try to answer the question and, in this way, project the question onto their own lives. Secondly, it plants doubt and mystery as they do not understand the motivation of the character who introduced the question, – whether it was just a call for reflection or implicit negation and a subtle suggestion that

relationships should not be too sincere. And finally, it evokes the feeling of mystery and the desire to uncover it.

Table 2  
Implicit Negation in Three Novels

Clarification	“Behind Closed Doors”	“The Girl on the Train”	“Before I Go to Sleep”
“I don’t know” statements (only the intentional denial when an interlocutor suspects a lie)	6	7	4
Negative references to absent events (e.g. “They never arrived,” “That meeting didn’t happen,” leaving the reader to wonder why)	5	7	5
Contradictory statements (e.g. “I’m safe here”, but it is suspected to be a lie)	4	6	5
Omissions that create an adverse inference (e.g. “It’s nothing …” “Don’t worry about that …” but no further explanation is given)	6	7	5
<b>Total</b>	21	27	19

One of the instances of implicit negation used for suspense reasons in “Behind Closed Doors” happens when Grace, the victim and the protagonist, answers, “I’m fine” and “I don’t know”, and the reader strongly suspects the opposite. Repeatedly using explicit negation “Nothing is wrong” silently contradicts the audience’s overall impression, suggesting that it is rather an implicit negation than the explicit one.

“The Girl on the Train” has instances of implicit negation that result from her foggy memory; they, in turn, typically lead to suspense. She usually insists, “I can’t remember,” but does not want to. Readers can feel the dishonesty, and thus it triggers tension.

In “Before I Go to Sleep”, the situation is like in the above-mentioned book: the main protagonist avoids revealing the truth because she fears it. However, she is reluctant to tell the truth without pressure from the other characters.

Thus, implicit negation is a vital yet understated tool in creating suspense in fiction. Operating more subtly, this negation creates active engagement with the reader, inviting them to decode, guess and fill in the gaps themselves.

The ability to produce doubt and expectation is the power of implicit negation crucial to creating suspense. Through dialogue between characters or the narrator’s speech, the author can effectively involve readers and even make them project the negation onto their own lives. It engages readers cognitively to uncover the mystery and enhances their emotional experience. It can help writers transform readers’ experience from a passive activity into an active one.

**2.3. Presuppositional Denial in Suspense Creation.** In thriller literature, presuppositional denial plays a crucial role in shaping the readers’ expectations and influencing their emotional responses.

Presupposition in pragmatics refers to the information the speaker assumes to be known by a listener before an utterance is made. Presuppositions are, in a way, background information that a speaker believes is universally known. For example, when a speaker says,

“Regretfully, I will miss your party” [20, p. 181], it presupposes they will not be at the party mentioned. Or when the speaker uses the factive word “know”, and later in the story, it is proved wrong, the initial presupposition fails.

On the other hand, presupposing denial occurs when an utterance contradicts the assumption previously made based on the text or conversation. This contradiction may be explicit when a straightforward denial and implicit implication is made.

For example, in an utterance “She stopped answering my calls, but again she never started” the second proposition denies the first one in the beginning: the presupposition is that she did answer the calls, but the latter proposition contradicts that.

Another example is “Everyone believed him to be a self-made man, and now you tell me he sells drugs?”. Presupposition in this case is that he is a good businessman, but the second part of the sentence denies it and is meant to shock and confuse the recipient.

Presuppositions in English are usually rendered with the help of different linguistic tools, such as factive verbs, cleft sentences, and change-of-state verbs, which help to show that specific facts exist without directly stating that.

In thrillers, presupposition denials are particularly useful in creating and maintaining suspense. When the narrative sets up a presupposition, it intensifies their expectations. Still, when this presupposition is denied, the reader is first surprised and later starts questioning all the other presuppositions becoming continually engaged and entertained by the text. The readers are always kept at the edge of their seats, which makes the story gripping and highly unpredictable, as they never know what to expect next.

Presuppositional denial is a critical tool in creating suspense as it directly undermines the foundation on which the readers base their opinions about the plot and the trustworthiness of the characters. Even if the information that challenges the reliability of characters or their motivations is not straightforward but rather implicit, it still contributes to suspense and results in presupposition denial because even a hint may look too suspicious for readers, especially if they were “fooled” once before in the story.

Depending on the quantity, many instances of presuppositional denial may be both suspenseful and boring. If there are few instances of presuppositional denial in a text, readers are constantly alert, trying to guess whether this time is a red herring. Still, if there are too many cases, it is no surprise anymore, thus losing the main idea of presupposition denial, which is suspense.

The novel “Before I Go to Sleep” is quite interesting as it uses presuppositional denial on almost every page. Still, it is not perceived as boring but rather anticipated. The reason for that is the main character’s amnesia: “The person in the mirror is me, but I am twenty years too old” [28, p. 2]. The presupposition here is that she knows who she is, as it is what people take for granted. It is a universal belief for anyone, an axiom, but it is challenged on page 2. It starts with a presupposition trigger: “The person in the mirror is me”; however, then the conjunction “but” is added which immediately signals that it is a deviation from the norm. Further, the repetition “Twenty-five. More” intensifies the feeling. Finally, ellipses at the end of a proposition create ambiguity, which also contributes to suspense.

Another example is a presuppositional denial towards a character: “Jack insists on choosing the house himself, telling me it was to be my wedding present, so I saw it for the

first time when we came back from our honeymoon. Even though he'd told me it was perfect for us, I didn't fully realise what he meant until I saw it" [22, p. 21]. The beginning of a proposition fools the main character into believing that the house is perfect, as anyone would treat it as a romantic gesture. As the story unfolds, she learns that "perfect" for her husband means that the house resembles his soul – dark and possessive. "I didn't fully understand it until I saw it" is a subtle implicit hint, and some readers may even confuse it with a positive reaction. However, even in the beginning, there is a word that hints the man is an abuser, that is "insists".

Table 3

**Presuppositional Denial in Three Novels**

Clarification	"Behind Closed Doors"	"The Girl on the Train"	"Before I Go to Sleep"
Denying a presumed fact introduced earlier	8	9	6
Correcting or overriding a newly formed assumption	7	8	6
OVERTURNING a key premise	6	7	5
The metalinguistic contradiction of context	7	7	5
<b>Total</b>	28	31	22

In "Behind Closed Doors", presuppositional denial happens when a reader is given facts about the life of the main couple, which are later revealed to be untrue. The storyline constantly keeps the reader alert about the next lie.

The storyline of "The Girl on the Train" is based on memories; the reader suspects they may be unreliable. However, the narrator can keep it a mystery about who is a reliable source and who is not, which keeps the suspense.

"Before I Go to Sleep" also develops suspense through memories; however, the story is not about the trustworthy character. The storyline depends on the diary entries and the memories of the protagonist.

Presuppositional denial was useful in manipulating readers' expectations and challenging their assumptions, thus contributing to the suspense. As this section proves, writers may use this technique to create complex and unpredictable suspenseful plots. Presuppositional denial keeps the reader guessing whether this is a fundamental assumption and makes them regularly reevaluate their attitude toward a character and their understanding of a storyline.

Presuppositional denial is crucial in subverting expectations, which is surprising and entertaining. However, too many cases of presuppositional denial may make the reader angry or even disappointed, and therefore it takes much skill to balance the storyline. The benefit of this technique is that it triggers all kinds of emotional responses, starting from surprise and curiosity and finishing with tension.

If layered with other triggers of suspense, presuppositional denial will contribute immensely to an unpredictable and suspenseful plot that will keep the reader continuously surprised.

**3. Comparative Analysis of Negation Types.** Negation is crucial not only as a part of grammar but also as a contribution to the topic in stylistics, specifically suspense. Some types exhibit properties that are useful for that stylistic device. Three types of negation, pragmatic withholding, implicit negation and presuppositional denial stand out when creating suspense. Each type contributes in its way, and they have both similarities and differences.

**Withholding** of information operates on the *level of pragmatics* through deliberate omission. According to Grice's maxims, communication is when both parties contribute equally and consent to mutual trust and honesty; this type flouts the maxim of Quality. When recipients receive less information than they need to decode the message successfully, they are forced to employ their cognitive abilities to fill the gap created because of *insufficient facts*. Surprisingly, most readers do not view withholding as manipulation; they feel more curious and engaged. This type involves the reader emotionally and allows a writer to unfold the story at a pace that suits them.

**Implicit negation**, on the other hand, refers not to omission but to what was *implied*, although not directly stated. Instead, it relies heavily on the context and the power of implicatures. This type *requires much attention, cognitive abilities and logic* to be fully deciphered, which may be its disadvantage, as it *may go unnoticed*.

**Presuppositional denial** introduces a *shift* in the narrative or a proposition, it operates more like a twist or climax but on a smaller scale. It highly *depends on the readers' background information* and successfully subverts it. This type of negation is quite *dynamic*, as it changes the readers' assumptions with each instance and makes them challenge each proposition, thus making them suspicious and always alert. Surprisingly, it does not disappoint the reader but intensifies their interest.

Both **withholding and implicit negation** create a sense of mystery although they do this differently. Withholding of information results in a gap in the information that the reader expects, and it frustrates them, and they try to fill the space themselves. Implicit negation takes more advantage of the language itself, successfully exploiting its nuances. It is not about the absence of something but reading between the lines.

Presuppositional denial is more about "playing" with the reader; it first establishes the assumption and later refutes it. It causes both an immediate reaction and long-term consequences. At first, readers are entertained, but later, they become overly suspicious and question each assumption they make, which is particularly thrilling in the thriller genre.

The choice for the negation type for suspense reasons depends on the demands and the desired effect. However, blending these types would intensify the suspense immensely, especially with the other triggers. Each type serves a unique role because of its linguistic and cognitive impact.

**Conclusions.** It is crucial to research specific suspenseful triggers for successful storytelling. Many have researched how to build suspense, but little research has been done into types of negation that contribute to suspense.

This article delves into the specifics of different types of negation and their suspenseful potential. This crucial storytelling technique could be rendered through negation, which now intensifies the readers' anticipation and stimulates their cognitive processes, triggering emotional feedback and engaging the reader.

Three types of negation are particularly prominent: pragmatic withholding, implicit negation, and presuppositional denial. Although acting on different levels, each type creates a dynamic plot and influences readers' engagement. Pragmatic withholding operates by deliberately creating a narrative gap that readers are compelled to fill. It helps a writer control the information flow and create plot twists where needed. Implicit negation relies on hints rather than explicit markers to convey a subtle, indirect negation. It requires much cognitive effort from a reader to understand the meaning, strengthening their curiosity. Presuppositional denial does not directly negate any statements and subverts the expectations and assumptions, keeping readers' attention throughout the novel and forcing them to be constantly alert.

The research could be further extended, e.g., by researching cultural differences and preferences, cross-genre analysis, comparative media studies, etc. The research does not cover the other types that may contribute, like conditional negation, because they are less prominent.

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## ЗАПЕРЕЧЕННЯ ЯК ПРАГМАТИЧНИЙ ІНСТРУМЕНТ САСПЕНСУ: ЛІНГВІСТИЧНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ПСИХОЛОГІЧНИХ ТРИЛЕРІВ

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У статті досліджено взаємодію між саспенсом і запереченням у межах наративних структур із застосуванням всебічного аналізу літературних теорій та зразкових текстів. Встановлено, що саспенс – ключовий наративний механізм – тісно переплетений із різними формами заперечення, що підсилюють очікування та емоційну залученість читача. Дослідження охоплює детальний розгляд наукових підходів у поєднанні з практичними прикладами, щоб показати, як взаємодія саспенсу й заперечення сприяє захопленню читача. Окрему увагу приділено лінгвістичному та прагматичному аналізу трьох британських психологічних трилерів – “Behind Closed Doors” Б. А. Паріс, “The Girl on the Train” П. Гокінз та “Before I Go to Sleep” С. Дж. Вотсона – для демонстрації того, як заперечення функціонує в реальних наративних умовах. Аналіз засвідчує, що заперечення – метамовне, неявне або прагматичне (приховування інформації) – суттєво підсилює елемент саспенсу, підтримуючи високий рівень зацікавлення, особливо у жанрі трилеру. Отримані результати дають змогу оцінити когнітивний та емоційний резонанс таких наративних стратегій, що підкреслює їхню ключову роль у сучасному оповіданні. Наведений опис взаємозалежності між саспенсом і запереченням сприяє глибшому розумінню їхніх функціональних механізмів і робить внесок у наратологію та літературознавство.

**Ключові слова:** саспенс, заперечення, саспенсне заперечення, типи заперечення, наративні стратегії, літературна лінгвістика.