
МОВНІ СИСТЕМИ: ПРОБЛЕМИ РОЗВИТКУ ТА ФУНКЦІОНУВАННЯ В ПОЛІЕТНІЧНОМУ ТА ПОЛІКУЛЬТУРНОМУ ПРОСТОРИ

Отримано: 29 вересня 2025 р.

Прорецензовано: 10 жовтня 2025 р.

Прийнято до друку: 22 жовтня 2025 р.

email: Iona.Yurchyshyn@lnu.edu.ua

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7775-0761>

DOI: [http://doi.org/10.25264/2519-2558-2025-27\(95\)-116-122](http://doi.org/10.25264/2519-2558-2025-27(95)-116-122)

Yurchyshyn I. M. The manipulative force of negation in English: Creating the world of the mastermind manipulator. *Наукові записки Національного університету «Острозька академія» : серія «Філологія» : науковий журнал*. Острого: Вид-во НаУОА, 2025. Вип. 27(95). С. 116–122.

УДК: 81'42:81'367.335

Iona Yurchyshyn,
*PhD, Associate English philology,
Ivan Franko National University of Lviv*

THE MANIPULATIVE FORCE OF NEGATION IN ENGLISH: CREATING THE WORLD OF THE MASTERMIND MANIPULATOR

The focus of this article is on the manipulative nature of two types of negation: implicit and double, focusing on how they are used in both real-life and fictional discourse. The article aims at examining how implicit and double negation may be used to subtly influence, control or manipulate people's perceptions. By analyzing what linguistic strategies manipulators use, the article examines psychological effects of them on a recipient. Research offers insight into the manipulative potential of implicit and double negation and how it may be used to create confusion, ambiguity or manipulate outcomes. The findings are particularly useful for those who wish to understand the techniques used by abusers. The article underscores the importance of treating negation not only as a grammatical construct, but as a powerful pragmatic tool of manipulation.

Keywords: negation, implicit negation, double negation, linguistic manipulation, pragmatics of manipulation, literary linguistics.

Юрчишин Ілона Миколаївна,
*аспірантка, асистентка кафедри англійської філології
Львівського національного університету імені Івана Франка*

МАНІПУЛЯТИВНА СИЛА ЗАПЕРЕЧЕННЯ В АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ: СТВОРЕННЯ СВІТУ ГЕНІАЛЬНОГО МАНІПУЛЯТОРА

Стаття зосереджується на маніпулятивній природі двох типів заперечення – імпліцитного та подвійного, акцентуючи на тому, як вони використовуються як у реальному, так і в художньому дискурсі. Мета статті – дослідити, як імпліцитне та подвійне заперечення можуть застосовуватися для тонкого впливу, контролю чи маніпулювання сприйняттям людей. Аналізуючи мовні стратегії, які застосовують маніпулятори, стаття висвітлює їх психологічний вплив на адресата. Дослідження дає уявлення про маніпулятивний потенціал імпліцитного та подвійного заперечення і про те, як їх можна використати для створення плутанини, двозначності чи маніпуляції результатами. Отримані висновки є особливо корисними для тих, хто прагне зрозуміти техніки, які застосовують аб'юзери. Стаття підкреслює важливість розгляду заперечення не лише як граматичної конструкції, але й як потужного прагматичного інструмента маніпуляції.

Ключові слова: заперечення, імпліцитне заперечення, подвійне заперечення, мовна маніпуляція, прагматика маніпуляції, літературна лінгвістика.

1. Problem statement.

Recent studies in manipulation report growing numbers of disinformation and manipulation in both offline and online communication. "Organised social media manipulation campaigns were found in each of the 81 surveyed countries, up 15% in one year, from 70 countries in 2019" (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019, p. 1).

According to the 2019 Open Access Government report, in the UK 58% of employees, aged between 18 and 54, have experienced gaslighting in the workplace.

Half of the American women experienced psychological abuse by their partners, the report by Michele Black in the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report says. They have found that subtle manipulation tactics harm relationships more and cause long-term damage to human health. Such tactics usually involve manipulation, indirect aggression, playing the victim and push/pull tactics.

Katie Chen's data for Stanford Medicine website in 2022 shows that half of American high-school students (55%) faced abuse by their parents or any other adult in the family, when they were stuck at home during a pandemic. The most popular complaints were manipulation, criticism, name-calling and shaming.

All these reports prove that a person faces psychological abuse, particularly manipulation, daily – at work, in personal relationships and even in social media and politics. Studying how manipulators use language to their advantage is crucial, as it helps people to identify the signs of manipulative language.

Analysis of recent research and publications. In the field of manipulation Dr. George K. Simon made the most significant contributions, he is one of the first to explain and describe patterns of manipulative behaviour. In his book *In Sheep's Clothing* (1996) he focuses on how they use subtlety and implicitness to their advantage. Teun A. van Dijk made innovative research (2006) on how manipulative personalities use the language, he describes their main linguistic strategies.

Laurence Horn (1989) and Maillat and Oswald focus on the linguistic side of English and they delve into the characteristics of negation from the perspective of pragmatics. They briefly mention ambiguity of double and implicit negation and how potentially it may be manipulative, but they don't elaborate on it.

It must be noted that manipulation and manipulative language have long been a focus of many researchers' attention, but the practical manifestations of it in the language – specifically through double or implicit negation – have not been studied at all. Examining these phenomena is crucial, because if there is potential, it will be exploited by skilled manipulators to their advantage.

Fiction could also benefit from such research as writers can employ different manipulative techniques in the speech of their antagonists. This will be particularly useful for thrillers, detectives, psychological thrillers or dramas.

Purpose and objectives of the study. The purpose of the study is to explore the pragmatic potential of implicit and double negation as tools of linguistic manipulation in both real-life and fictional discourse. The objectives are to analyze the linguistic strategies employed by manipulators through these types of negation, to examine their psychological effects on recipients, to identify how implicit and double negation may create ambiguity, confusion or plausible deniability, and to demonstrate the contribution of manipulative negation to the development of authentic antagonists in literary works.

2. Presentation of the main material.

Understanding manipulation and its literary effects

When it comes to defining psychological manipulation Dr. George K. Simon, a renowned psychologist and an expert on manipulation, states in his book *"In Sheep's Clothing: Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People"* that manipulators use only four tactics: their aggression is undetectable, they employ powerful deception techniques that are not recognizable by a victim, they know about the weaknesses and insecurities of others and use them to their advantage and their behaviour is the complete opposite of what people believe about the human nature (p. 24). According to him, "manipulators employ subtle, indirect language, often leaving their victims unaware of the control being exerted over them" (Simon, 1996, p. 45). He asserts that anyone can be subjected to manipulative behaviour. Studying how the brain of a manipulator works and what kind of language they use may help everyone to recognize and fight it.

In his book he gives some practical examples and warns that people may think that they are winning the conversation, but this is a trick from a skilled liar, they want people to believe that they are in control. No one is safe because it is impossible to know how good the manipulator in front of you is. He claims that the victims are usually far from being weak, as such people like a challenge.

Teun A. van Dijk provides the following definition of psychological manipulation through language, a celebrated scholar in discourse manipulation, "Manipulation not only involves power, but specifically abuse of power, that is, domination. That is, manipulation implies the exercise of a form of illegitimate influence by means of discourse: manipulators make others believe or do things that are in the interest of the manipulator, and against the best interests of the manipulated." (p. 3) So, the manipulators use the language in such a way that they may benefit only them; it is never in the victim's interest. He gives examples from social life, media, political life, etc.

According to van Dijk manipulators often have influential positions, such as professors, politicians, journalists, leaders and even parents (p. 362). They are attracted to positions that give them greater opportunities to manipulate others, emphasizing and taking pride in their positions. Manipulators can distinguish even the subtle change in the emotions of people as well.

Several key techniques can be observed in the language of a manipulator to influence the victim's mental processes and cognition. To achieve their goal manipulators resort to different strategies, most of them are subtle, implicit and indirect. Here are the linguistic strategies that potentially may be used on a victim:

1. Exploitation of contextual constraint

When a manipulator constrains the context, a victim is not able to properly decode the message. With this manipulation, it is possible to channel the cognitive processes of a listener in the specific direction, suitable for a manipulator, while the other options are excluded due to lack of context. A manipulator is in control of what kind of context a victim is given. This manipulation is possible because of the Relevance theory, which suggests that humans have the tendency to seek relevance in communication. Humans always try to maximize the cognitive effects, while minimizing cognitive effort spent on decoding. That is what manipulators use to their advantage, they intentionally limit the amount of context, which ultimately leads to incorrect interpretation – the one intended by a manipulator (Maillat & Oswald, p. 360).

2. Selective topicalization

Similarly to the previous one, a manipulator focuses only on a specific topic or idea, completely ignoring the other side. For example, when a manipulator focuses on how much suffering the listener caused them, neglecting the good part. On the contrary, they may focus only on the bad things while discussing their opponents or people they do not like, thereby twisting the perception of the listener. It naturally leads to incomplete and biased understanding of the situation.

3. Lexicalization

This is a type of manipulation when the speaker carefully chooses the words or phrases to change the perception of a listener. For example, using the collocation "religious fighters" instead of "terrorists" is a deliberate choice so the listener's emotional response

will be entirely different. Here such stylistic devices could be mentioned as euphemisms, dysphemisms, litotes, understatement, etc. They usually aim either to soft or intensify the preposition (van Dijk, p. 372)

4. Covert or implicit manipulation

It is crucial that a victim is unaware of manipulation, so they cannot detect it and shield themselves. When manipulation is explicit, its effectiveness significantly decreases. The covertness is achieved through subtle, indirect or implicit language, so a victim would conclude needed for a manipulator, without the latter stating it themselves. Implicit language is more challenging for processing, so in most cases it goes undetected. The benefit of such an approach is a victim is left thinking that it was them who came to such a conclusion, they do not understand it was planted. This type of manipulation is discussed in detail in the next chapter (Maillat & Oswald, p. 357).

5. Polarization

This term refers to segregation of the manipulator and victim's surrounding, a manipulator basically creates two separate groups "We vs They". It is particularly visible in political discourse when a politician focuses on the good actions in their own group and casts doubt or criticizes the opponent. Such division not only changes the perception of listeners, but also segregates the society (van Dijk, p. 374)

6. Manipulation through negation and implicature

This type of negation is when a manipulator subtly negates the preposition and, in this way, leads a listener to perceive the information in the way they want. One of the cases is double negation, it is challenging for processing, because it can mitigate the negation or intensify it. DN is also deeply dependent on the context, so a listener is spending extra effort on decoding, in this way manipulation itself goes unnoticed. Another type is indirect negation or implicature, implied idea combined with negation is a masterly manipulation. The benefits of manipulation through negation lie in its two qualities: ambiguity and plausible deniability. Because negation, especially so complex as double or implicit, may be interpreted in various ways, it creates a good way out, in case a manipulator needs to deny the manipulation (Maillat & Oswald, p. 354).

The strategies discussed in this chapter provide invaluable insight for authors of most importantly psychological thrillers, but also dramas, detectives, etc., as they help to understand how the mind of a manipulator or an abuser works. Understanding linguistic tactics of people who have manipulative behaviour helps to develop a character that will impress the reader for being really life-like and convincing. However, it is also important for any person, as anyone must be prepared to find the clues that people who want to harm us leave behind. It is crucial to be able to understand what the manipulators subtly imply, as, in this case, knowledge is not only power, but also weapon.

Manipulative personalities usually use the language to their advantage, they know how to control, deceive and dominate others, and, unfortunately, they usually do that without being detected. When authors want to create a fictional character that will both impress and scare a reader, they must use the techniques that covert aggressive personalities use in real life, that is topicalization, lexicalization, restricting the context, polarization, implicitness and negation. The last two are analyzed in more detail in the next chapters.

By employing such techniques, authors can create the effect when the reader is excited, as they will be unable to understand what is real and what is fabricated. It will make the story more dynamic and engaging for the readers, creating the feeling of thrill that thrillers are supposed to convey. These techniques will enhance the psychological depth of a character, create suspense and tension, and draw readers into a gripping story.

Convincing antagonists crafted with detail and subtlety will terrify readers, making them feel unusually authentic. In genres that thrive on mind games, plot twists and power struggles, such characters can keep readers engaged until the final page, leaving them wanting more.

3. The manipulative power of Implicit Negation

Implicit negation (IN), unlike explicit negation, does not rely on words like "no" or "not". Instead, it relies on pragmatics and context, making it context-dependent. A speaker conveys meaning through carefully chosen words, which can be quite manipulative, because it is so subtle, it may go unnoticed by the listener.

Horn (1989) provided the following examples of IN: "Helen is absent" and "Helen is not present" (p. 4). These sentences are complete synonyms and convey the same meaning. However, the words "not" or "no" are not used in the first example, demonstrating implicit negation.

Given the subtlety of implicit negation, can it still be used for manipulative purposes?

When it comes to clarity explicit negation, which requires less time from the listener to process (Horn, 1989, p.168), is direct, creates no confusion about what is negated, is an obvious choice, why then speakers use implicit one? Of course, sometimes it could be subconscious or even random, however, some people use it for a reason. Laurence Horn (1989, p.447) demonstrated that implicit negation is less confrontational, and can be used to soften the impact of a direct negative statement, especially with the help of "no", making it less likely to provoke any negative reaction or conflict.

Dr. George Simon, in his book about manipulators (1996, p. 45), mentioned that quite a lot of covert aggressive personalities tend to use subtle, indirect or implied language. They are inclined to use indirect language as it is not easily detectable, both Horn and Simon believe that humans need more time to process it, so the manipulation may be overlooked.

According to Grice's maxims (1975), the use of implicit negation for manipulative purposes violates the maxim of Quantity, because even if the manipulation is not intentional, the speaker withholds information, leading to a violation of the maxim. It is in the core of implicit negation to violate this maxim. Another maxim that is threatened is the maxim of Quality, because the information is not fully presented, quite a lot stays hidden from the listener, so the latter must spend extra time trying to extract the missing information. Implicit negation, particularly when used for manipulation, often contradicts the Cooperative Principle of Communication as outlined in Grice's maxims.

It was not particularly challenging to find instances of implicit negation used for manipulative reasons in fiction. Antagonists of psychological thrillers use it often as it is a powerful tool in communication, they use it to influence the thoughts and behaviors of

their victims, without making the intent explicit. The subtlety and manipulative potential of implicit negation have been skillfully employed by writers to create realistic and life-like manipulative characters.

Examples given next contain manipulative language with both explicit negation and implicit. Examples that contain implicit negation are in italics; the explicit negation is present to prove that the utterances are manipulative. Manipulative language is highly context dependent; the examples that are given may be not manipulative under other circumstances. However, when the whole utterance is considered, the covert intention is clearly visible in the cases of the later examples. This combination of explicit and implicit pressure was common in the speeches of antagonists and manipulators possibly to “toy” with the victim confusing them and concealing their true intentions.

The first example is the following:

“You don’t need Adam. *You have me now.* We’re together. You don’t need Adam. You don’t need Ben.” At his words, I feel all the strength I had within me disappear, and, as it goes, he seems to recover. I sink to the floor. He smiles. “Don’t be upset,” he says brightly. “*What does it matter? I love you. That’s all that’s important.* Surely? *I love you, and you love me.*” (Watson, p. 196)

Christine is a woman that lost her memories, so men around are keeping her under their influence. The sentence “you have me now” means that you do not need anyone else, it is an example of IN. Then he manipulates and convinces her that she does not need anyone but him. The repetitions in this passage are the form of psychological pressure, he is indoctrinating the idea into her head. He undermines her feelings as well, when the protagonist is “sinking to the floor”, so she is clearly devastated and feels trapped, but he simply states that she should not be upset. With the question “What does it matter?” he negates the importance of the other two men in her life, he is persuading her that nothing matters in this life for her, except his love.

Implicit negation may be rendered with the help of a question. “*You think she might be making it up?*” (Mackintosh, p. 172). The character asks a question that implicitly makes the person discussed guilty, negating the possibility of them being innocent. But they do not accuse the person straightforwardly, instead they coerce the interlocutor into making the “right” conclusion themselves. This sentence plants doubt in the interlocutor and subtly nudges them toward a particular thought.

Another example is when the person, in this case Alison, who is a chronic manipulator, uses implicit negation to gaslight her victim. She starts questioning the way the character thinks. “You’re not reacting with your heart, are you? *You’re just letting your brain dictate how you feel.*” I force myself to remain calm – Alison is extremely troubled, so I can’t tip her over the edge.” (Croft, p. 273) She denies the possibility that thinking rationally is a good way, she makes it look as if only the heart can help you think clearly and not the brain. The inner thoughts of the victim reflect fear of causing another breakdown of the unstable manipulator.

The nature of Alison’s particular linguistic choices must be thoroughly analyzed to understand how they contribute to her manipulative behaviour and what kind of psychological effect it has on her victim – Josie.

Alison exhibits manipulative and domineering behaviour, her techniques are always subtle and discreet, making her the mastermind villain of the story. Her key manipulative strategy is the usage of implicit language, implicit negation included. She uses rhetorical questions, indirect statements, deliberate omission of some information to force the victim to come to the conclusions intended by her, without them noticing that. In her speeches she uses implicit negation as it allows to indirectly plant the idea in the mind of a listener.

She can plant the most unbelievable ideas in her victim's mind, like in the example above. Most people value the brain more than the heart and it would be the choice most would opt for, but Alison manages to make it look as if such a choice is madness. She managed to confuse the victim, so she starts questioning the adequacy of her choice. She implicitly negates the actions taken by Josie, suggesting that they are wrong, without directly accusing her of anything. She does not confront her but plays with her perception, making her even more susceptible to further manipulation. She exhibits such techniques throughout the novel.

Alison’s manipulation with the help of implicit negation is crucial in adding tension and suspense to the novel. She is also the most dynamic character in the story. She is not aggressive or overtly antagonistic, rather, she is the Moriarty of the novel – cool-headed, shrewd and scheming villain.

Implicit negation may fail as a tool for manipulation in a few cases. The first one is the above-mentioned case, when the person possesses cognitive sophistication and can identify manipulation even if it is subtle. Other reasons may include the awareness of the victim that the person talking is a chronic manipulator, language acquisition, inattentiveness, negation too complex that it went unnoticed, etc.

IN, as shown in the studies conducted by several scholars in 2023 (Montalti, Calbi, Umiltà, Gallese, & Cuccio, 2023) implicit negation involves a heavier cognitive load than explicit. The extended time on processing is due to the inferential nature of IN, which requires more cognitive effort to decode it. That is the reason why manipulation may sometimes fail, but it is why manipulation is so difficult to uncover.

As it has been proved, the subtlety of implicit negation may be intentionally exploited by the manipulator. Its ability to influence the thoughts and emotions of the listener without directly stating it is an effective tool in psychological manipulation. This form of manipulation is particularly challenging for a listener as it requires more time and cognitive effort for decoding, making it almost undetectable for a victim in both real-life and fictional contexts.

4. The manipulative power of Double Negation

George Orwell always emphasized that the speech must be clear and precise, he disliked that political language is often obscure and manipulative. Once he wanted to make fun of politicians, who use double negatives to avoid the direct answer and produced a funny and mocking sentence: “A not unblack dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field”. This sentence shows the absurdity of such overcomplication. Instead, the politicians or bureaucrats, who always leave space for retreat, use double negation, for that it is best.

Orwell skillfully noticed that double negatives give the speaker the possibility to evade conflict as they are not straightforward enough. However, in some cases DN may be used for manipulation.

Double negatives (DN) not always cancel each other out, it has been proved now by many (Horn 2001, Zanuttini 2013, Author (details removed for blind review purposes) 2023) that it is sometimes used as a way of escaping the direct answer which makes the statement less straightforward and less offensive.

In the research there are instances of grammatically correct double negation, negative concord is not treated as DN in the article. The instances are usually formed with lexical and prefixal means, i.e. not + negative prefix.

Double negation allows the speaker to omit his own words if necessary. This opinion was expressed by O.D. Seright back in 1966. In his opinion, if the person makes the sentence *It is not unlikely* instead of *It is likely*, the speaker reserves a certain possibility of retreat, in case it is necessary, the last sentence does not sound so unambiguous, then even if necessary, you can easily take your word back, referring to the fact that the listener simply did not understand the speaker in a correct way. Horn (2001) agrees with Seright and emphasized that pragmatic force of double negation may either intensification or mitigation of the proposition.

M. Osmankadic's work (2016) is an immense contribution of DN used as a tool of manipulation and it is a good argument for the statement that double negation may have manipulative nature. She uses the interviews of Bosnian politicians and how they employed DN to their advantage. It may seem like slight manipulation, dodging or simply making the statement less straightforward, but in political speeches double negatives are used not randomly.

She identifies several pragmatic reasons for double negatives in political discourse, such as maintaining ambiguity, politeness and caution – all of them align with manipulative techniques. She states that when a politician uses the phrase “not infrequent” instead of “frequent”, they want to slightly imply without committing to a straightforward answer. This leaves room for some ambiguity and if they are not able to keep their promises, they will have space for a retreat. (p. 47)

When politicians opt for “not unhappy” or “not dissatisfied”, according to Osmankadic, it is their deliberate choice not to use a strong confrontational language. This technique is mainly used to reduce a public's dissatisfaction level, but it undermines the problem, making it look less important. Even though it may have been a politeness strategy in the first place, it is manipulative in its core.

However, the most sophisticated use of double negation for manipulative reasons is the denial of presupposition in her research. Double negation allows the speaker to slightly challenge the previous statement without actually denying it. A direct contradiction is viewed as too aggressive in politics, so the qualities of DN are valued in this case. The example that she gives is “few if no areas” (p. 48), in this case the politician uses such a statement to challenge the presupposition that some areas may still be not accessible.

In 2011 researchers Dale and Duran also proved that our brain needs more time and effort to process negation, when it comes to double negation, it requires even more time. Therefore, so many people have problems with understanding the meaning of a sentence if it involves more than one negative element. Manipulators, of course, use it to their advantage.

Quite a lot of politicians use double negation when they want to soften the preposition or avoid giving promises. It is not a sign of abuse, but it is manipulative.

The first example of a politician using such subtle manipulation is the speech of Ms. Mordaunt when she called the Tories to reunite. She said: “Labour win at the general election *is not inevitable*. *It is not*. A Conservative win at the general election *is not impossible*. But right now few can imagine it.” The use of DN in this statement is a carefully chosen strategy, the politician wants to imply something, however, she is not ready to promise it. The statement is manipulative in its nature, because she did not state that she supposes that or that it is just her own opinion. It simply downplays the certainty of the victory of the Labour Party, subtly reminds the listeners that the possibilities for the Conservatives remain and at the same time gives no assurances of the outcome. It is a skillfully produced preposition, yet manipulative in its nature.

Even more manipulative case was used by Richard Nixon when he was asked by a journalist if Huston plan was legal, he gave the following answer: “Well, *when the president does it ... that means that it is not illegal*” (Frost, 1977). He could have simply said that it was legal but decided to use the phrase “it is not illegal”, because the actions were not legal. There could not be a case when for the president something is legal, while for the others not. The reason why he did not use the affirmative preposition is because he wanted to shift focus from the legality of the action to what is acceptable for the president alone. Not illegal does not necessarily mean it is legal. Horn (1989, p. 271) called it “neither nor” phenomenon, that is when, in this case, Huston plan is neither legal nor illegal in the opinion of ex-president Nixon. It creates ambiguity and leaves the listener in a confused condition, as DN is not only more challenging for the brain but may also create the “neither nor” gap.

Introducing double negation to the speech of a literary manipulator could be a powerful tool to make a character look more realistic, particularly if it is an antagonist. It will create the feeling of authenticity and realism, because it mirrors the way people speak in real life; they try to dodge the question, slightly manipulate the audience, mislead or obscure the truth. Double negation is a great tool for that. It must be noted that instances of DN used for manipulative reasons were hard to find. Its potential as a subtle manipulative word twist was overlooked by the authors.

The following example is taken from a psychological thriller, and it is a great example how the manipulator (here the husband) is using DN. Ben, the husband, is the abuser in the story, he is constantly dismissing the feelings of his wife Christine. He uses gaslighting towards her, so she is always confused about how she feels and why.

– “Yes,” he said sadly. “Until then. We were happy.”

– “And now?”

– “Now? I wish things could be different, but *I'm not unhappy*, Chris. I love you. I wouldn't want anyone else.”

– “How about me? I thought. *Am I unhappy?*” (Watson, p. 300)

He deliberately uses DN, because it dismisses the topic and even if Christine confronted him, he would be able to make her question her sanity. It introduces doubt as he did not clearly state that he is happy, the listener is now compelled to find out what is missing. The manipulation lies in the strategic use of a language to control the listener and keep her uncertain about the truth. At the end of the dialogue, it is visible that she remains uncertain about his emotions and instead starts questioning her own.

When he uses “I wish things could be different”, he even more complicates the statement, because he communicates a point that there is a problem in their relationships, but instead of telling where the problem lies, he decided to dismiss the topic at the end. His wife is left with the idea that something is wrong, but she has no idea what. That is how manipulation and gaslighting work.

Another example is self-manipulation and self-deception, the main character uses repetitive double negation because he does not want to believe that his wife had an affair. Scott Hipwell is a controlling type, but he is deeply in love with his wife, that is why when the police tell him that his wife may have had an affair, he chooses to disregard it.

“Maybe he’s right. We did have that awful fight. But I can’t believe... *She wasn’t unhappy with me. She wasn’t. She wasn’t.*” When he says it the third time, I wonder whether he’s trying to convince himself. “But if she was having an affair, she must have been unhappy, mustn’t she?” (Hawkins, p. 196)

The repetition of “she wasn’t” suggests that Scott is trying to persuade himself and the police that it is impossible, it is unintentional manipulation. He dwells on what he wants to believe, not what is painfully true. The last sentence creates a cognitive dissonance as he acknowledges the possibility of an affair, but that thought is too painful, so he tries to self-deceive himself. He tries to cling to a preferable reality, instead of accepting the existing one.

Another example is from *Only the innocent*. The character Laura is under the influence of an abuser and manipulator, so she uses double negation in this case, because deep down she knows he was not kind to her. She is under the influence of a manipulative controlling man, so her choice of words is quite realistic here.

“*He’d never been unkind to me* since the day we met, and I just wanted to go and kneel at his feet and beg him to explain to me what I’d done wrong.” (Abbott, p.150)

Based on the data found it must be said, that DN may be manipulative depending on the context, its vague and “neither nor” nature is helpful in fiction as it is a powerful tool in creating an antagonist. As it is important in everyday speech if people want to detect traces of manipulation.

5. A comparative analysis of manipulative negation

Implicit and double negation are both challenging to process so they both demand more effort from the listener, making them powerful tools for manipulation.

Implicit negation requires no negative markers like “not” or “no”, so when used for manipulative reasons it is almost undetectable, the listener requires broader context to be able to correctly decode the preposition. A skilled manipulator knows it, allowing them to constrain the context accordingly. Studies have shown (Horn, 1989; Maillat & Oswald, 2009) that implicit negation requires more effort for *cognitive processing*; that is precisely why it is almost impossible to notice. The subtlety of this type of negation makes it effective in situations when a speaker wants to imply, persuade and influence a listener without being overt or confronting the person openly.

On the contrary, double negation may fail if a manipulator is not skilled enough. However, it is also the type that requires more cognitive thinking from a listener (Horn, 1989; Dale & Duran, 2011), it is not as understandable and easy to decode. The challenge lies in its ambiguity, the listener may simply lack the ability to decode it correctly. It requires extra effort for a listener to extract the meaning, exhausting them even further. Horn (1989) has mentioned that it may either cancel each other out or mitigate/intensify the preposition, it may lead to confusion. However, sometimes it is exactly the confusion that the manipulator aims at achieving, so they could dodge the question or obscure their true intentions.

The impact both types have on a victim is crucial, as they are perceived slightly differently. Implicit negation is subtle and obscure, not overt. The main idea of it is to remain in the shadows, undetectably influencing and changing the perception of a listener. Its subtlety is its main advantage, it is not overt, therefore, not easily identified. A victim is often unaware they are being manipulated as the processes happen in their subconsciousness. They believe they arrived at the conclusion themselves, but, in fact, the idea was planted. It helps a manipulator, because they are able to manipulate without triggering defensive responses.

Double negation, on the other hand, is used to create confusion or uncertainty. The main advantage of this type is that it is open to multiple interpretations, it hides the speaker’s main intention and leaves space for a retreat, if needed. It may be used to maintain plausible deniability while still conveying negative message.

The *effectiveness* of both implicit and double negation heavily *depends on the context*. In this case a manipulator has two options: to use this type of negation in the context that compliments its manipulative nature or resort to a contextual constraint. Implicit negation is most effective in personal communication, when a manipulator and their victim are acquainted, as only then is it easy to implicitly manipulate a person, and it will go unnoticed as a victim exhibits some amount of trust to a speaker. It is easy to use implicit negation when a manipulator aims at undermining the victim’s self-esteem or gaslight them. If such manipulation is noticed, it is usually too late, a victim is already too dependent to change the situation.

Double negation is normally more effective in public discourse, it is not implicit, and it is used to maintain ambiguity and avoid giving a straightforward answer. It acts as a form of shield as the statement may later be easily denied. Politicians, for instance, resort to this kind of negation quite often, as they might deny the preposition if the public’s reaction was negative. It helps a manipulator to be always in control.

The psychological effects of such manipulation are quite interesting as well. Implicit negation, because of its subtlety, has a long term and gradual effect. It must be used consistently and gradually, only then they destroy the victim’s confidence in their sanity and affect their autonomy. Double negation, on the other hand, has an instant effect, therefore leads to a cognitive breakdown. That may result in the feeling of helplessness and confusion for a victim, inability to differentiate what is good and what is bad, critically interpret the preposition. Though it is usually short-lived.

In conclusion, the main advantage of implicit negation is that manipulation goes unnoticed, therefore a manipulator may maintain friendly relationships with a victim and target their perception gradually. Double negation, on the contrary, is a powerful tool of evading a confrontation and taking no responsibility for manipulation.

6. Conclusions

It is crucial to research what linguistic techniques are used by manipulators in their speech to be able to detect them. However, it is as important to use them in fiction to create life-like convincing antagonists, who will both fascinate and terrify the reader. Implicit and double negation serve as a powerful tool for manipulative personalities. They are subtle, ambiguous, yet dynamic. This research aimed at uncovering the subtleties and hidden power of these types of negation.

Implicit negation is characterized by its subtlety, therefore it works well for manipulation, as it allows the speaker to influence without confrontation. As this form of negation does not require the use of “no” or “not”, it operates under the radar, making it

extremely difficult to detect it. In personal communication it is effective, as the person lowers their defenses, that is why manipulators have no difficulties with leading the listener to the conclusion they need. At the same time IN helps them to obscure all the evidence, making it look like victims got that idea themselves. A consistent and gradual usage of IN for manipulative reasons may result into victims' dependance on their manipulators, they feel like they suggest the idea and they are in control and they are the ones who suggest something, when it is the other way around.

Double negation, on the other hand, is all about its ambiguity. It is so complex and open to multiple interpretations, that it is usually exploited to evade the answer, give a vague answer or obscure true intentions. Two negatives may either cancel each other out or intensify/ mitigate the preposition, depending on the context, that is what makes it effective when speakers want to evade. In fiction DN is valuable in dialogues, when speakers are confronted, but they still want to keep face. With its help they manage to create confusion or maintain plausible deniability. Such negation means that a listener or a reader are supposed to make more cognitive effort to decode the meaning. Manipulators usually employ the ambiguity and confusion that DN creates in public discourse, as it has an instant effect.

In fiction it is crucial to employ these types of negations for creating the plausible image of a villain. They will help to create a multi-layered, convincing antagonist, who will engage the readers, challenge their perceptions of reality or their idea of what is good and what is bad, make them think if what they thought to be the truth was actually so. The complexity of a character is what makes them deep and entertaining.

The research about the role of implicit and double negation in manipulation is quite valuable, as it gives insights into how they may be used strategically to harm or gaslight the person. It explores the broader implications of these types in pragmatics of communication and manipulation. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the psychological nature of negation, especially in the manipulative context. For writers it means the ability to create authentic and convincing characters.

References:

1. Abbott, R. (2012). *Only the Innocent*. Black Dot Publishing.
2. American Counseling Association. (n.d.). Identifying psychological abuse. *Counseling Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.counseling.org/publications/counseling-today-magazine/article-archive/article/legacy/identifying-psychological-abuse>
3. Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M. L., Merrick, M. T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M. R. (2011). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_report2010-a.pdf
4. Bradshaw, S., & Howard, P. N. (2019). The global disinformation order: 2019 global inventory of organized social media manipulation. *Science*, 363(6423), 348-354. DOI: 10.1126/science.aaw7287
5. Chen, K. (2022). New Data Shows Emotional Abuse Increased Among Teens During Pandemic. *Stanford Medicine Children's Health Blog*. Retrieved from <http://healthier.stanfordchildrens.org/en/new-data-shows-emotional-abuse-increased-among-teens-during-pandemic>
6. Croft, K. (2017). *Silent Lies: A Gripping Psychological Thriller*. Bookouture.
7. Dale, R., & Duran, N. D. (2011). The cognitive dynamics of negated sentence verification. *Cognitive Science*, 35(5), 983-996. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1551-6709.2010.01164.x>
8. Frost, D. (1977). Transcript of David Frost's interview with Richard Nixon. *Teaching American History*. Retrieved from <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/transcript-of-david-frosts-interview-with-richard-nixon/>
9. Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics* (Vol. 3, pp. 41-58). Academic Press.
10. Hawkins, P. (2015). *The Girl on the Train*. Riverhead Books.
11. Horn, L. R. (1989). *A Natural History of Negation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
12. Maillat, D., & Oswald, S. (2009). Defining manipulative discourse: The pragmatics of cognitive illusions. *International Review of Pragmatics*, 1(2), 348-370. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187730909X12535267111651>
13. Mackintosh, C. (2014). *I Let You Go*. Sphere.
14. Montalti, M., Calbi, M., Umiltà, M. A., Gallese, V., & Cuccio, V. (2024). The role of motor inhibition in implicit negation processing: Two Go/No-Go behavioral studies. *Psychological Research*, 88(6), 1169-1181. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00426-024-01941-0>
15. Open Access Government. (2019). Research shows gaslighting in UK workplace is 'normal'. Open Access Government. Retrieved from <http://www.openaccessgovernment.org/gaslighting-in-uk-workplace-is-normal/63721/>
16. Open Access Government. (2019 September 9). Gaslighting in the UK: The silent crime of psychological manipulation. Open Access Government. Retrieved from <https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/gaslighting-in-uk/62034/>
17. Orwell, G. (1946). *Politics and the English Language*. Reprinted in *Collected Essays* (pp. 353-67). London: Seeker & Warburg, 1961.
18. Osmankadić, M. (2015). Why is "not infrequent" not always "frequent"? Double negation in political discourse. *ExELL (Explorations in English Language and Linguistics)*, 3(2), 40-69. <https://doi.org/10.1515/exell-2017-0001>
19. Oxford Internet Institute. (2021). *Industrialized Disinformation: 2021 Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation*. Oxford University. Retrieved from <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/projects/industrialized-disinformation/>
20. Seright, O. D. (1966). Double negatives in standard modern English. *American Speech*, 41(2), 123. <https://doi.org/10.2307/453131>
21. Simon, G. (1996). In *Sheep's Clothing: Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People*. A. J. Christopher & Associates.
22. Stanford Children's Health. (n.d.). Data shows emotional abuse increased among teens during the pandemic. *Healthier Happy Lives Blog*. Retrieved from <https://healthier.stanfordchildrens.org/en/data-shows-emotional-abuse-increased-among-teens-during-pandemic/>
23. The Independent. (2024). Penny Mordaunt warns Tories of 'extinction' at general election without unity. *The Independent*. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/penny-mordaunt-tory-general-election-speech-b2541339.html>
24. van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse & Society*, 17(3), 359-383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506060250>
25. van Dijk, T. A. (1995). Discourse semantics and ideology. *Discourse & Society*, 6(2), 243-289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926595006002006>
26. van Dijk, T. A. (2014). Discourse and knowledge. In M. Prinzing & C. Zibell (Eds.), *Diskurs und Wissen: Theorien und Methoden der Diskursforschung* (pp. 11-28). Springer VS.
27. Watson, S. J. (2011). *Before I Go to Sleep: A Novel*. Harper.
28. Author (details removed for blind review purposes) 2023.