Description vs. Rejection in the Analysis of Negation

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Prefatory Remarks

- What is negation?

(1) He is not the president of the party anymore.
(2) I have not promoted him.
(3) She is not beautiful; she is gorgeous.
(4) She is not beautiful but ugly.
(5) She is not driving but walking.

- ***Descriptive Negation vs. Metalinguistic Negation***
  (Ducrot 1972, 1984; Carston 1996, 1999; Horn 1985, 1989/2001; Moeschler 1992, 1997, 2010, 2013)
  → truth-conditional vs. metalinguistic operator

- ***Descriptive Negation (DN) vs. Metarepresentational Negation (MetNeg)***

- **Aim**: the cognitive and communicative behaviour of **DN** and **MetNeg**

- **Premise**: DN and MetNeg represent two distinct negative types that have ***fixed configurations*** and ***fixed interpretations***, i.e. they are the output of different cognitive mechanisms

- **Configuration**: the manner in which a negative utterance is computed at the mental level, i.e. what ***inferences*** are triggered and what ***cognitive effects*** are generated

- **Framework**

  - *Relevance Theory* (Sperber and Wilson 1995)

  - *Metarepresentation* (Sperber 2000; Wilson 2000)

- **Corpus**

  - Romanian and English political discourses

http://www.psd.ro/transcripte.php

http://www.crinantonescu.ro/Public/cat/14/Noutati.html

http://www.parliament.uk/

Overview

- *Relevance Theory*
  - Descriptive vs. Interpretive Use // Metarepresentation
  - Cognitive effects

- *Descriptive vs. Metarepresentational Negation*

- *Formal Affirmative Correspondent vs. Semantic Affirmative Correspondent*

- *Logical, Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis of DN and MetNeg*

Relevance Theory

- An ostensive inferential approach to communication

- An input is relevant to an individual when its processing yields enough ***cognitive effects:***

  - "a worthwhile difference to the individual's representation of the world" (Wilson and Sperber 2002: 251)

- Types of cognitive effects:

  - Contradiction and elimination of an existing assumptions
  - Derivation of some new contextual assumptions
  - Strengthening of some contextual assumptions

Descriptive Use vs. Interpretive Use

- the interpretation of a description
- the interpretation of an interpretation

- **Metarepresentation**: "a higher order representation with a lower order representation embedded in it" (Wilson 2000: 411)
  - HOR: mental (thoughts), public (utterances)
  - LOR: mental, public, abstract

- The mental representation of a public representation:
  {Peter thinks that [Mary said that (pigs fly)]}

  ► **Descriptive vs. Metarepresentational Negation**

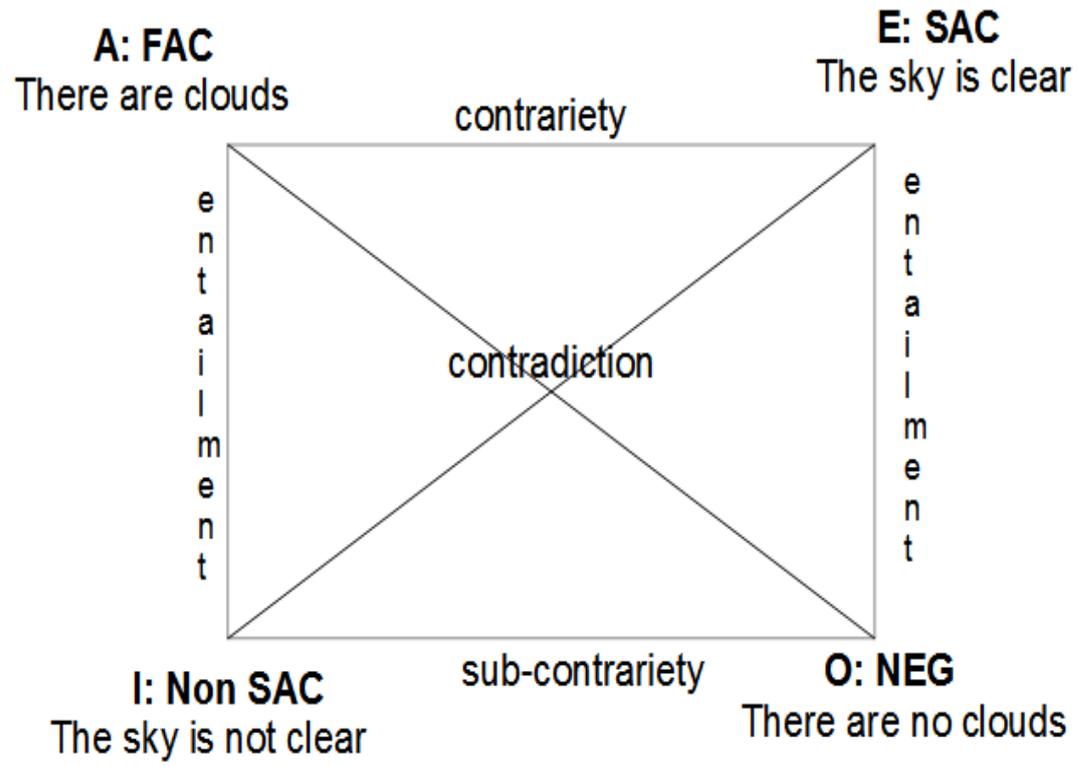# Formal Affirmative Correspondent vs. Semantic Affirmative Correspondent

a. Il n'y a aucun nuage au ciel. (Ducrot 1972: 37)
b. There are no clouds in the sky.

a. Il y a des nuages au ciel.
b. The are clouds in the sky.
   ► **FAC**

a. Le ciel est pur.
b. The sky is clear.
   ► **SAC**

(1)   He is not the president of the party anymore.
(2)   I have not promoted him.
(3)   She is not beautiful; she is gorgeous.
(4)   She is not beautiful but ugly.
(5)   She is not driving but walking.

FACs

1. he is the president of the party

2. I have promoted him

3. She is beautiful

4. She is beautiful

5. She is driving

SACs

1. to have a different function or no function at all

2. to obstruct, to discourage someone (?)

3. to be ugly

4. to be ugly

5. to be walking, taking the bus(?)

► **Which one is activated?**

SACs

- have *large denotations* --- representationally ambiguous
- the *scope of negation* is ambiguous:

(a) $\neg\ \exists x\ B(x)$

(b) $x \exists\ \neg\ B(x)$

■ How is *only one SAC* selected and activated in a particular context?

→ *the derivation and interpretation of DN and MetNeg*: the interplay between their logical, semantic and pragmatic features

■ In which contexts and under what circumstances are the two positive counterparts activated?
■ What roles do they play in the generation of the negative structure?

- Reporter: Would you advise him to run for president in the next elections?
- Traian Băsescu: No, for Romania's presidency … maybe people like Baconski, maybe Preda. Baconski is a well-defined intellectual. *I have not promoted him.*

- Mihai Gâdea: If this kind of situation were proposed to you, situation which you had proposed to Cristian Diaconescu, **when you were not the president of PSD** and were negotiating for your support, would you endorse it? Yes or no.

- *I have not promoted him*
- *you were not the president of PSD*

- ***I have not promoted him***
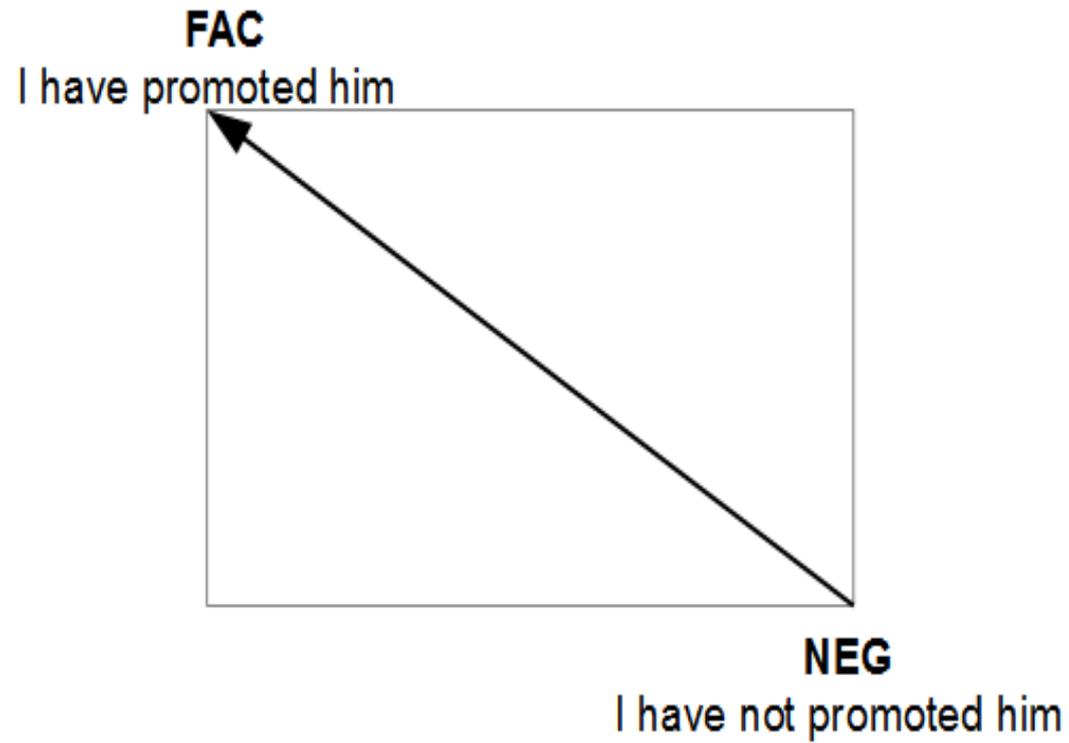 ??? **FAC**: I have promoted him
  ??? **SAC**: I discouraged him

- Reporter: Would you advise him to run for president in the next elections?
- Traian Băsescu: No, for Romania's presidency … maybe people like Baconski, maybe Preda. Baconski is a well-defined intellectual. ***I have not promoted him.***
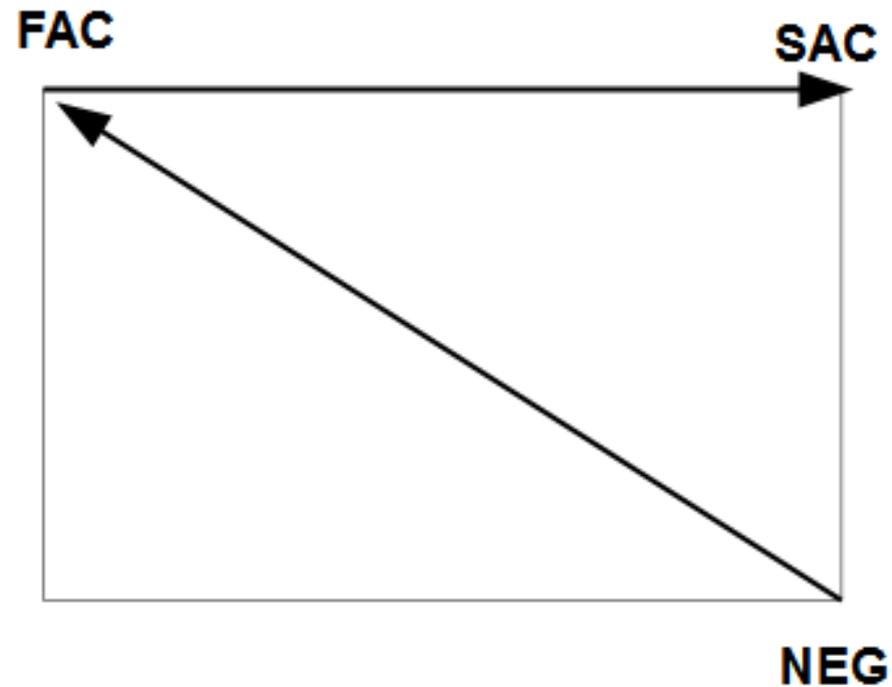

■ **FAC**: *I have promoted him*
→ **NOT [I promoted him]**

I have not promoted him

FAC
I have promoted him

NEG
I have not promoted him

She is not beautiful; she is gorgeous

MetNeg: Main Features

- there is **a FAC activated**:
  - it is an intrinsic case of metarepresentation
  - it involves more representations, more discursive levels and discursive entities

- **cognitive effect**: 'contradiction and elimination of some contextual assumptions'
  → one's representation of the world is improved when there is a contradiction between some new and old information (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 114)
  → the interpretation goes through *the activation and rejection of a FAC* (which is in a contradictory relation with the negative utterance and qualified as false)

- **FAC**: can be marked explicitly or can be left implicit for the hearer to infer it with some additional cognitive cost

- ***you were not the president of PSD***

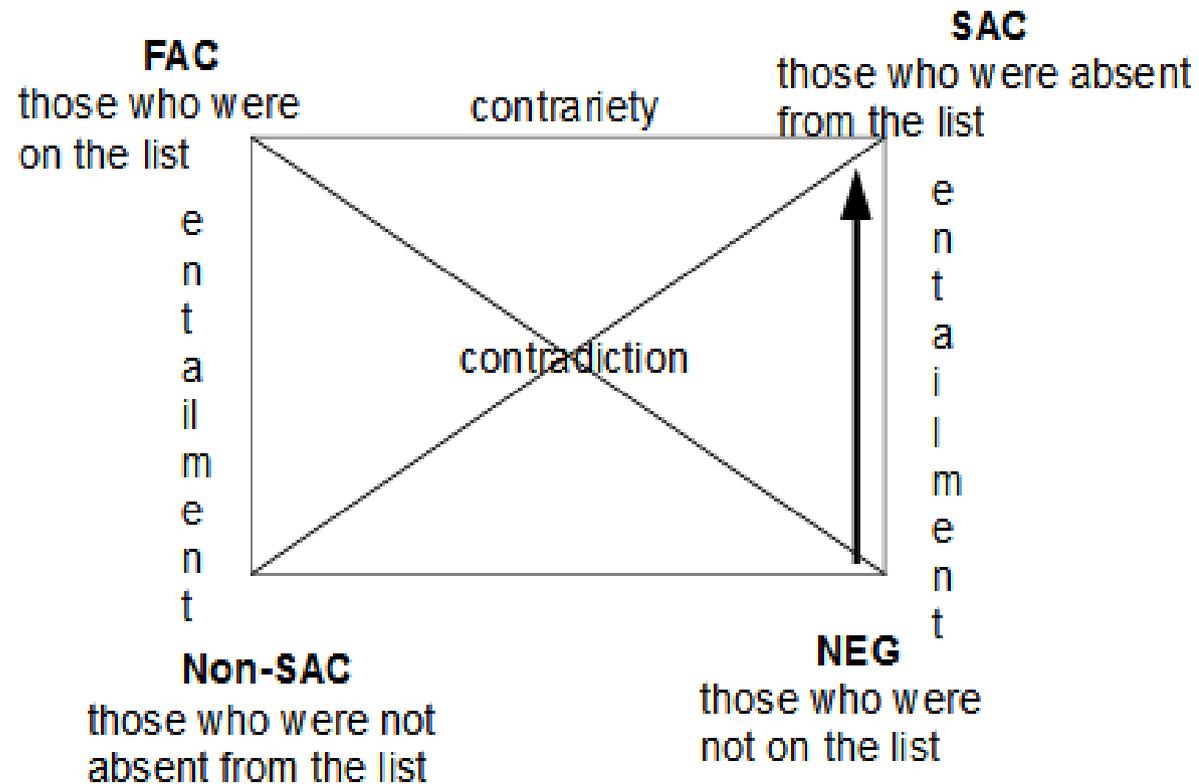 ??? **FAC**: you were the president of PSD
  ??? **SAC**: you had a different function in the party
  you were the vice-president of the party

- Mihai Gâdea: If this kind of situation were proposed to you, situation which you had proposed to Cristian Diaconescu, **when you were not the president of PSD** and were negotiating for your support, would you endorse it? Yes or no.

  ■ **SAC: you had a different function in the party**
  you were the vice-president of the party

Stelian Tănase: What did the other ministers say, *those who did not see (their names) on the list?* Because there are many people with pretensions, who might have…

- Those who did not see their names on the list

  = those who were not present on the list

  = those who were absent

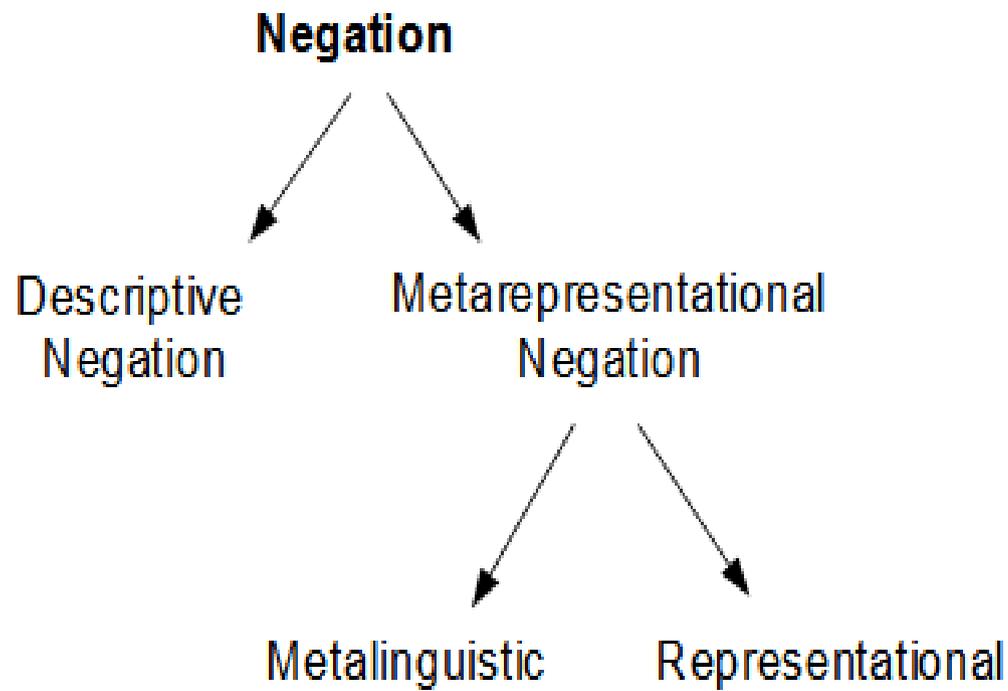# Those who were not on the list = those who were absent

DN: Main Features

- a case of **asserting a negative content**
  = *absence* or *non-existence* of some properties, entities or state of affairs
  - the negative content is not determined entirely by the action of the negator, but also by *lexical counterparts*

  ■ **the negative content**
  = *a conceptual notion* that opposes the presence of a property to the absence of it or the achievement of an action to its cessation

- **cognitive effect**: 'strengthening some existing assumptions', a special case of 'contextual implication'

DN: Main Features (2)

- **MaxContrary** (Horn 2014): the tendency for contrariety to be maximized in natural languages

- **the interpretation of DN** = **O>E drift**
  - from the predicate denial to the predicate term negation
  - from a wide-scope sentential negation to a narrow-scope constituent negation
  - from a *contradictory O* to a *contrary E*

- **DN**: the pragmatic strengthening of a contradictory in a contrary in natural language

Conclusions

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Thank you!!!

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