

Textual-Conceptual Functions of Negation in Emily Dickinson's Selected Mystic Poems: A Study in Literary Discourse

Asst. Prof. Alaa Hussein Sharhan

**Department of English /College of Education for Human Sciences /
University of Basrah**

Abstract:

Emily Dickinson adopted and developed a philosophical approach to the subjects of Death and Immortality; a matter considered incomparable addition to American Literature. She devoted many of her poems to the physical creative processes that Death went through, bringing about her digging quite deep to survey the scope of Immortality. Thus, the current research examines linguistically and critically Dickinson's relation and attitude in the mystic poems through her employment of negative constructions. Negation, as the results showed, was found to serve a key role in the majority of the mystic poems under analysis in exposing her religious standpoint and personality

Keywords : Death, Immortality, Negation, Mysticism, morpho-syntactic structures

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وظائف المفاهيم النصية للنفي في القصائد الصوفية للشاعرة إيميلي ديكنسون: دراسة في الخطاب الأدبي

الأستاذ المساعد علاء حسين شرهان

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية / كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية / جامعة البصرة

المخلص:-

تبنت إيميلي ديكنسون وطوّرت مقاربة فلسفية لموضوعات الموت والخلود. وهي مسألة تعتبر إضافة لا تضاهي إلى الأدب الأمريكي. حيث كرست العديد من قصائدها للعمليات الإبداعية المادية التي مر بها الموت، مما جعلها تفكر بعمق لتستقصي نطاق الخلود. وبالتالي، فإن البحث الحالي يدرس علاقة ديكنسون وموقفها في قصائدها الصوفية لغويًا ونقديًا من خلال توظيفها لتراكيب النفي. وكما أظهرت النتائج، وجد أن النفي يلعب دورًا رئيسًا في غالبية تلك القصائد في كشف شخصيتها ووجهة نظرها الدينية. ففي مثل هذه القصائد، تمت مصادفة مجموعة من التراكيب الصرفية النحوية بشكل متكرر منشأة مجموعة متنوعة من المشاهد الواقعية التي تمكنت من خلالها الشاعرة تجسيد ممارسات الموت المختلفة وتكثيف جوانبها المتعددة.

كلمات مفتاحية: الموت، الخلود، النفي، التصوف، التراكيب الصرفية-النحوية

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Introduction:-

Speakers and writers undertake a world as they view or prefer to have it interwoven in the texts they produce. However, other textual presentations and practices may be expected to result in constituting aspects of the world, which are not present for personal reasons. The speaker could like their world to incorporate things as a wish, aspiring versions of that world to have been accomplished. Thus, the ideological-textual experience of constructing such texts can be analyzed from the perspective of negation encompassing all those elements that surpass the verb negation alone (Jeffries, 2010: 106).

Nahajec (2012:16) asserts that the value of negation in discourse stretches out to the speaker and writers' intended meaning. In this respect, the concept of negation has a pragmatic outcome where such effect has much to contribute to the sentential elements based on semantic foundations to provide expressive, suggestive, purposeful, and meaningful functions in a variety of contexts (ibid: 15). Comprehending the practice of negation demands the assumption of the presence and absence of actions, states and entities simultaneously (Nahajec, 2019: 26). This aspect of discussion is largely articulated in the cognitive approach to language where the processing of structures with reference to negative constructions is a matter of stages of understanding negation in contextualized and decontextualized situations. Further, negation is also discussed in relation to presupposition and Implicature as part of the power of textual and contextual triggers that ultimately leads to consider the texture and its forms as fundamental issues in determining implied and presupposed textual meanings (ibid: 27). Pagano (1994: 250) extends the argument of negation from the pragmatic perspective, now concerning "implicit negative or denials". This means that negation conveys two intentions, namely: "to reject suggestions and to deny assertions", which in turn refer to rejection (the speaker's preference) and denial (the reference to factual situation). Such classification needs a modification, in Pagano's view, that it is to recognize the two types according to functional parameters in each situation (ibid: 251).

The present research addresses textual issues of negation in Emily Dickinson's mystic poems. It is an attempt to settle on how the poet's personhood, privacy and public views of God can be approached and reconstructed textually shedding light on those structures and functions of

negation that are ideologically significant. Accordingly, the current research is based on a hypothesis that negation plays a considerable role in exposing the poet's attitude and position from religious and faithful issues in relation to God and Death.

1. Literature Review

2.1 Negation: Morpho-syntactic Issues

Many linguists and grammarians approach the concept of negation from a particular perspective, following the linguistic school they follow. Thus the subject has been treated differently in different linguistic branches. Negation, as defined by Leech (2006:66), is a grammatical process through which a sentence or part of it can be made negative by adding the particle 'not' to the operator, and particularly, after the "first auxiliary verb", or a finite verb (be):

"Secrets" is a daily word

Yet does not exist_ " (Dickinson, *Secrets is a Daily Word*, lines: 1-2)

or to the finite verb "be":

It is not of the Bird

Who sings the same, unheard,

As unto Crowd- (Dickinson, *To Hear An Oriole Sing*, lines: 4-6)

or to the modal verb:

"Her message is committed

To Hands I cannot see-" (Dickinson, *This is my letter to the World*, lines: 5-6)

If there is no overt auxiliary, 'a dummy operator' is used with the negative particle (ibid: 67).

In terms of morphology, negation is formed by a group of derivational prefixes such as de-, un-, a-, in-, dis-, and mis-, carrying the meaning of oppositeness, and/or the entire meaning of the resulting form is determined by the "free morpheme" itself. The new meaning may signify "directional opposite" or a "complementary opposite" (Jeffries, 2006: 80-1). As in Dickinson's "The last Night That She Lived":

A Jealousy for Her arose

So nearly infinite-

And in "I Heard A Fly Buzz- When I died-" (line 13)

With Blue- uncertain stumbling Buzz-

Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 787-90) classify negation syntactically and morphologically into three contrastive categories:

1. Verbal vs. non-verbal negation: the verbal type of negation is formally constructed by the addition of a negative element to the verb phrase with an explicit negative particle. Three other sub-categories are referred to under this type, namely: primary, imperative and secondary negations. The primary type requires a negative particle associated with "a primary verb-form":

"Men do not sham convulsion", (Dickinson, I like the look of Agony, line 3)

For the imperative negation, 'do' is always there to be negated:

"Don't tell! They'd advertise! You know". (Dickinson, I'm nobody, who are You? Lines 4-5)

Whereas the secondary type comprises "infinitivals, adverbials, complements, subjunctives, gerund-participials", etc. The non-verbal negative form is attributed to the other elements in the verb phrase such as an adjunct or object:

"I tasted a liquor, never brewed." (Dickinson, I tasted a liquor, never brewed, line 1)

"The Soul Selects her own Society,

Then- shuts the door-

To her divine Majority

Present no more" (Dickinson, The Soul Selects Her Own Society, lines 1-4).

"And worms presume

Not quite with him at home-" (Dickinson, In Winter In My Room, lines 5-6).

"I am nobody, who are you?" (Dickinson, I am nobody, who are you? Line 1).

2. Analytic vs. synthetic negation: the analytic type includes expressions that perform negative meaning as their only 'syntactic function':

"Not one of all the purple Host

Who took the flag to-day

Can tell the definition,

So clear of Victory" (Dickinson, Success is Counted Sweetest, lines 5-8)

In the case of synthetic negation, the negative forms convey other functions, not only the negative meaning. The verbal type of synthetic negation has a morphological negative marker for the verb:

"Tell her it wasn't a practiced writer." (Dickinson, Going to her, line 9)

whereas the non-verbal synthetic category comprises three forms; namely: 'Absolute negators' as in: *"It made no Signal, nor demurred,*

But dropped like Adamant", (Dickinson, 'It Was Warm, lines 15-16)

'Approximate negators' as in:

"Which little yellow boys and girls

Were climbing all the while" (Dickinson, I'll Tell You how the Sun Rose, lines 11-12)

and 'Affixal negators' as in:

"The Time was scarce profaned by speech;

The symbol of a word

Was needless" (Dickinson, There Came a Day At Summer's Fall, lines 9-11).

3. Clausal vs. subclausal negation: the first one refers to the negation scope of the whole clause, which is related to syntax:

"The Robbing-could not harm-

Himself-to Him-a Fortune-

Exterior-to Fire-" (Dickinson, This was A Poet- It is That, lines 14-16).

The second type does not imply this scope, a matter related to morphology:

"We Wonder it was not Ourselves

Arrested it- before-" (Dickinson, This was A Poet- It is That, lines 7-8).

1.2 Negation: Semantic Issues

Negation has been discussed in semantics to a great extent with reference to language levels that convey negative references. Cruse (2006:117) argues that the semantic consideration of negative morphemes varies considerably with associated meanings in which the stem is the core

determinant of that meaning. Cruse (ibid: 118) classifies negative meanings into logical, polar, reversive, private, and evaluative. Jeffries (2010: 108) points out that some lexical items have implied negative connotations of being or not, taking action or not, etc., The list is endless

associated with this meaning comprising nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs (ibid: 109). Hence, the negative reference gets more complicated and harder to pin down if there is no grammatical or morphological marker (Nahajec, 2012: 147). Givon (2001: 375-6) adds that in an antonymous lexical set, negative meaning is always and implicitly there with reference to the idea of marked theory of lexical relations concerning states, not events. This is asserted in the presence of a particular property in the positive member referred to as 'marked' and the absence of that property in the negative member which is 'unmarked' (ibid).

Mazzon (2004: 108) adds to the meaningful level of negation the idea of 'contrastive negatives' identified according to the placement of 'local negation'. The local negative marker helps emphasize the negative contrast where the entire structure of the predication part becomes the carrier of the proposition. In terms of structure, this type of negation may be complex to frame, but semantically, such negative issue could be marked out as a process of propositional meaning in both parts of the contrasted sets, being coordinated. Further, there is an "emphatic affirmative" when discussing the notion of contrast. This notion is carried by the use of the structure "not only...but also" especially when inversion is included in such structure. The idea of contrastive meaning could be conveyed via the employment of "concessive clauses" (if not). Equally important is the structure with 'not' that precedes the subjunctive and enhancing the focal point in the predication part of the proposition (ibid: 109).

1.3 Negation: Pragmatic Issues

The textually-oriented discussion of negation carried out with reference to "the implied negation" could indirectly allow text receivers comprehend such negative meanings with no presence of explicit negative markers (Nahajec, 2012: 161-2). Hence, part of the propositional meaning of a sentence is highly suggestive, and discussed in terms of presupposition with reference to its scope (Nahajec, 2019:27). Within this border, the idea of shared knowledge between the text producer and receiver will be a case of agreement upon which the speaker may believe that the negative implication is to be taken into consideration (ibid). Such belief is

already, in detail, asserted by Leech (1983:100-1) when critically examining the maxim of manner in relation to informative negation. He claims that a negative sentence is regarded as "less favoured than positive one". This attitude can be attributed to the traditional association

between negation and informativeness in that the positive structures are more informative than the negative ones. Accordingly, if a negative form is employed, it will be produced for a deliberate aim and when they are to be more informative as its counterpart structure. Further, when making a negative reference to something, where the positive may be available, that negation works as marked which needs precise attention and interpretation. All in all, negative structures, cognitively, require more time to process and comprehend than the positive ones (ibid). In terms of conventional implicatures, negation, especially the morphologically marked forms, could help generate implicatures (Nahajec, 2012:87).

1.4 Emily Dickinson's Poetic and Linguistic Style

Emily Dickinson's verse is short in format with four lines for each stanza. There is always an explicit personal thump print. She treats what is believed as big and dangerous with common and recognizable entity. 'Death' is almost always there in her poems. For her, death is an opportunity of how to be in liberty, how to feel lofty, and how to practice confession (Lall, 2010: 15-16) Dickinson's linguistic and literary style is summarized clearly by Vanspanckeren (1994: 35) as follows:

Dickinson's terse, frequently imagistic style is even more modern and innovative than Whitman's. She never uses two words when one will do, and combines concrete things with abstract ideas in an almost proverbial compressed style. Her best poems have no fat; many mock current sentimentalities, and some even heretical. She sometimes shows a terrifying existential awareness. Like Poe, she explores the dark and hidden part of the mind, dramatizing death and the grave.

Most of her verse is abundant with dashes which represent "voice pauses". There is a diversification at the level of metrics and rhymes, especially half-rhymes in her poems. She selects words according to the elegance and nicety. Images are created and supported with syntactic isolated expressions and very short lines. For certain activities of various scenes, she prefers amalgamated syntactic extensions that exceeds a whole stanza (Jones, 1980: 90-1).

Dickinson's reading desire is oriented towards romantic poets and many prose writers that, as she confessed, affected her literary style and content. When a quote is taken from any of such literary figures, she is after a clarification and elucidation of a particular point of view or to

enhance her stance and attitude towards a particular case. There is a shared common linguistic poetic style and thematic approach with the Metaphysical poets that Dickinson showed in her writings. Many of her poems are composed in the first person, though she declared that the persona in some poems could stand for someone else, not herself, thus, trying to be outside the prevailing views her poems expound. Her poetic method tends to adopt a single uncomplicated condition to present a simple scenario that could shape out her treatment of language and theme (Saradhi, 2002: 19-21).

Emily Dickinson is often referred to as a religious poet though her poetic practice with reference to religion was mostly under scrutiny. She strongly tended to prefer to discuss divine and Godly matters with a strict separation from science, just on the basis of faith (Blair et al. 1974: 162). Her renewed and increasing contemplation in death and heaven became an obsession; but such mystic activity hinged on her emotional imagination and personal experience (Lall, 2010 :63).

2. Research Methodology

The major procedural issue related to the discussion of negation in Dickinson's poetry is to find out the variety of negative indicators in her selected mystic poetry. Such poems are mainly concerned with topics about life, death and immortality. Thus, approaching her mysticism in poetry through negation helps examine the nature of the three phases of mystic practices, namely: purgative, contemplative, and unitive. The poems under analysis are to be investigated qualitatively selecting those poems in which negative markers abound and play a thematic role in conveying the nature of mysticism. The qualitative approach is adopted for those poems that address issues such as levels of desire for uniting the poet with God, references to Christ, faith and religion, rebelling against orthodoxy, free thinking and Puritanism, revering of Nature, and death. In order to gain better insight into how negation works in such groups of mystic poems, negation is to be assigned as an indication to support the general and detailed justifications and interpretations.

3. Analysis and Discussion of Findings

American Literature was largely fed by the theme of death in a variety of insights. Many of such insights were presented by Emily Dickinson tending to treat it from a philosophical standpoint

and associating it with love. She also examined death in detail as a physical phenomenon. Death, as a mysterious and fascinating process, was what Dickinson was able to dimly perceive. Some of Dickinson's poems also inspect Death as an experience of pain and misery that escorts despair. These poems highly explore the stages of self-change as indicated by "It was not for Death, for I Stood up". The somber and contemplative mood the poem evokes is dominated by the occurrence of consecutive syntactic negative markers:

It was not Death, for I stood up, (line, 1)

It was not Night, for all the Bells, (line, 3)

It was not Frost, for on my Flesh, (line 5)

Nor Fire- for just my Marble feet (line 7)

And could not breathe without a key (line 15)

The lines above comprise explicit repeated negative structures that help come to terms with the speaker's self-affliction and agony. The syntactic negation forms unbroken and causal chain of contrasted dimensions of life and death: (death... night; frost... fire). Accordingly, such language style draws attention to the overall suffering represented by the speaker's sense of despair.

The deep mental anguish, Dickinson firsthand experiences, is a matter of frankness and directness. The following poem "*I Like the Look of Agony*" confirms the poet's victory of resistance and perseverance in response to agony and death:

"I Like the look of Agony,

Because I know it's true- "

Then agony is portrayed as something humiliated by man. The poet's imagination is dominated by a succession of syntactic negation:

"Men do not sham Convulsion,

Nor simulate a Throe. "

The idea of death as being appreciated as 'homely' gives the view a sense of normality. The morphological negation in the sixth line creates such effect:

*"The eyes glaze once, and that is death,
Impossible to feign."*

Dickinson finds it easy to approach Death and its harsh realities with the employment of hypothetical negation as in the opening of *"If I shouldn't be alive"* which makes this point explicit. The same syntactic pattern is repeated in the second stanza:

*"If I couldn't thank you,
Being fast asleep,"* (lines 5, 6)

The horror of Death, as indicated by the hypothetical negative structures, is clearly reflected by the euphemistic use of *'fast asleep'*. Her ambivalent attitude towards Death can be sensed through the opening negation in the two stanzas.

Just as she engages in associating Death with pain and suffering, Dickinson also expresses doubts and terror of immortality and faith. Her belief of being mortal is directly portrayed as mirage in *"Just Lost, I was Saved"*. The poem is haunted with terror feelings about being mortal instead of immortal especially when she closes the third stanza with denying the vision of eternity:

*"Next time, to say!
Next time, the things to see
By Ear unheard,
Unscrutinized by Eye_"*

The morphological negation (unheard, Unscrutinized), linked to the two senses (hearing and sight), is used to communicate both the physical and psychological experience of immortality.

"Dust is the only Secret" is another poem on Death through which Dickinson mockingly ventures into disclosing the assumed identity of Death. The paradoxical presentation of Death in this poem is marked by the concrete representation of its mystery and obscurity in relation to its "native town", (line 4). The syntactic negative constructions in lines 3, 5, 6 and 7 color our perception of Death as a personified local and unknown entity at the same time through the adoption of generalized negative markers:

*"Death, the only One
You cannot find out all about*

In his "native town."

Nobody know "his Father"-

Never was a Boy_

Hadn't any Playmates,

Or "Early history"-

"I heard A Flying Buzz-when I Died" sets about how a person physically and emotionally experiences Death. The restlessness the poem establishes is fostered by presenting a series of contrasts when the negative connotations are implicitly aroused: (died, line 1; the stillness, lines 2,3; dry, line 5; signed away, line 9; stumbling, line 13; failed, line 15). The list of such lexical set helps understand the discrepancy between what someone expects of Death and its reality. The tight structural form of the poem supports the argument about Death through the adaptation of the implicit negative polarity of the lexical relations in the poem.

The first contrastive image about the poetess's experiences of the approaching Death is the overall creation of the lifelessness and motionlessness inside the room:

"I heard a Flying Buzz-when I died-
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air-
Between the Heaves of Storm-"

The two created images, in terms of comparison, lie in the poetess's ability to bring the grieved scene to prominence. The implied negative reference (stillness and died) underlies the gloomy atmosphere which is made definite and distinct inside the room, in turn sick and dying, but suddenly interrupted by the storm.

The second stanza opens with how the observers now gather to watch the last moments of the dying person with "dried eyes":

"The eyes around-had wrung them dry-" (line 5)

In terms of lexical antonymous relation (dry vs. wet), the negative is almost always the unmarked element. The mental process helps to draw attention to the comfortless event inside the sick room.

The fourth stanza abounds in negative implicitness and explicitness. The non-verbal morpho-syntactic negation with a participial complement

*"With Blue-uncertain stumbling Buzz-
between the light- and me-" (lines 13-14)*

and the evaluative negative in 'stumbling' constitute a heavy noun phrase that provides the reader with how the speaker's mind is in a state of complete mental confusion. The poem then closes with two types of negation; namely: the verbal type of synthetic negation "*I could not see to see-*" and the unmarked negative polarity "failed". Such negative structures serve to intensify the speaker's absolutely desperate conflict for life in that she is unable to recognize or even to feel the coming Death. Therefore, she got powerless to prevent herself from being subjugated. Finally, there is a poem through which Dickinson impersonalizes Death to be a close friend and trustworthy. The poem title, "*Because I could Not Stop For Death-*", refers to Death as someone within her close-knit community with a compassionate personality trait. The poem represents an expedition to the grave. So, in terms of the negative constructions, the poem comprises a set of implicit and explicit negative markers as classified in the chart below:

Explicit Negation	Implicit Negation
<i>Because I could not stop for Death (line,1)</i>	<i>Because I could not stop for Death (line,1)</i>
<i>And Immortality (line, 4)</i>	<i>The Carriage held but just Ourselves (line, 2)</i>
<i>We slowly drove- He knew no haste (line, 5)</i>	<i>We slowly drove_ (line, 5)</i>
<i>For only Gossamer, my Gown (line, 15)</i>	<i>And I had put away (line, 6)</i>
<i>My Tippet- only Tulle- (line, 16)</i>	<i>We passed the Setting Sun- (line, 12)</i>
<i>The Roof was scarcely visible- (line, 19)</i>	<i>Feels shorter than the day (line, 22)</i>

The chart shows the dense occurrence of negative markers, explicit and implicit. Structurally, what is striking about the poem is that all the negative constructions are generally employed to positively portray the daily life routine the poet has just abandoned. Such positive account and depiction of her journey with Death convey the weight of her emotions. This fact can be clearly shown through providing a focus on Death's graciousness when having precipitating the action of stopping for taking the poet. Though "could not" is negative in structure, the meaning is to show the graceful performance of Death to do the job of accompanying the poet. The first stanza closes with the morphological negation of 'mortality', but again the implied meaning

takes on the poet's demonstration of her willingness to aim after "immortality". This poetic practice is supported by the integration of the approximate negation "just" and the implicit lexical negation 'held' through which the poet felt very proud to be inside the carriage with Death only:

*"The Carriage held but just Ourselves-
And Immortality" (Lines, 3-4)*

Lines 5 and 6 are the beginning of her journey with Death. The two lines imply negative connotations such as the approximate negator "slowly" and the absolute negator "no" suggesting the poet's enthusiastic experience to be unhurried and to put aside her work:

*"We slowly drove-He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labour and my leisure too," (lines, 5-7)*

The repetition of the approximate negator in lines 15 and 16 "only" implicates how the poet finally gets aware of the passing time with Death, which was very fast, and how the damp and cold weather makes her realize what she wears as if she is astonished of coming out with Death only with such clothes:

*"For only Gossamer, my Gown-
My Tippet-only Tulle-" (lines, 15-16)*

The fast journey is directly pronounced by the poetess in line 22 through the gradable lexical item "shorter" which conveys the only negative attitude uttered in the poem towards the accompaniment with Death:

*"Since then-'tis Centuries-and yet
Feels shorter than the Day" (lines, 21-22)*

4. Conclusions

To sum up the above-considerable discussion, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The morpho-syntactic constructions draw attention to Dickinson's effective and powerful expression of doubts concerning immortality.
2. The majority of negative constructions are from the verbal type conveying her excitement to argue the issues of immortality and Death.

3. The employment of the imperative type of verbal negation reinforces the poet's emotional and physical reaction, with intensity, to Death.
4. Many of her poems on Death and Immortality feature absolute negators which help understand her poetic style in addressing the two themes. Thus, absolute negators create an atmosphere of generalization through transporting Dickinson's pronouncements on Death.
5. The poems discussed above also show the occurrence of some approximate negators that closely reflect the poetess's detailed obsession with Death.

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