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Verbal Negation in the Context of Power: The Theme of Identity in a Colonial Society

Abstract: The relevance of this study is determined by the growing importance of linguistic, literary and postcolonial approaches to the analysis of identity formation in societies shaped by colonial domination and its long-term consequences. In postcolonial literature, language functions not only as a means of representation, but also as an instrument of resistance, self-definition and cultural reconstruction. Within this framework, verbal negation acquires particular significance because it allows characters and narrators to reject imposed colonial meanings, question dominant power structures, and articulate alternative forms of individual and collective identity. The research problem lies in the insufficiently explored pragmatic and narrative role of verbal negation in representing identity conflicts, uncertainty, social constraints and the search for autonomy in colonial and postcolonial discourse. The object of the study is verbal negation in English-language colonial and postcolonial novels. The subject of the research is the pragmatic function of verbal negation in shaping the theme of identity within literary discourse. The aim of the study is to reveal how verbal negation reflects conflicts, limitations, resistance and self-identification in societies marked by colonial and postcolonial power relations. The scientific novelty of the article lies in combining quantitative analysis of recurrent negation forms with pragmatic interpretation of literary fragments in order to demonstrate the role of negation as both a linguistic marker and a narrative strategy of identity construction. The study analyses verbal negation forms such as *did not*, *was not*, *could not* and the full verb *stop*, focusing on their frequency, distribution and contextual functions in selected postcolonial novels, including *Efuru*, *The River Between*, *No Longer at Ease*, *Things Fall Apart*, and *Girl, Woman, Other*. The results show that verbal negation is not limited to grammatical denial. It functions as a means of expressing refusal, psychological tension, social restriction, resistance to colonial narratives, and the desire to preserve or restore indigenous cultural identity. The study concludes that verbal negation in postcolonial novels is a multifaceted linguistic and pragmatic phenomenon that reveals the complexity of identity formation under conditions of colonial influence, neocolonial pressure and cultural transition.

Keywords: verbal negation, postcolonial literature, identity formation, colonial discourse, narrative resistance, pragmatics of negation, indigenous identity, social constraints.

Introduction

The phenomenon of verbal negation occupies a central place in linguistic, literary and cultural studies, as it reflects not only grammatical structures, but also pragmatic strategies of meaning-making. Negation is one of the fundamental mechanisms through which language expresses rejection, absence, contradiction, limitation, prohibition, opposition and alternative interpretation. In literary discourse, it becomes particularly significant because it participates in the construction of character psychology, narrative conflict, social evaluation and ideological positioning. Therefore, the analysis of verbal negation makes it possible to examine not only the formal organisation of language, but also the ways in which linguistic structures convey cultural, psychological and political meanings.

In postcolonial literature, negation becomes a powerful narrative device through which authors challenge colonial ideologies, resist imposed identities and articulate the search for autonomy. Colonial discourse historically functioned through the production of hierarchies, oppositions and exclusions, defining colonised subjects through categories imposed by imperial power. In this context, verbal negation may function as a linguistic form of refusal, a pragmatic act of resistance and a means of reconstructing identity. By denying, rejecting, interrupting or limiting imposed meanings, postcolonial texts create space for the reevaluation of indigenous experience, collective memory and cultural self-definition.

The relevance of this study lies in the increasing scholarly interest in how language functions as a tool of resistance and identity reconstruction in societies marked by colonial domination and its aftermath. Postcolonial identity is often formed under conditions of cultural displacement, historical trauma, social constraint, linguistic hybridity and the conflict between inherited traditions and imposed colonial norms. In such conditions, negation is not merely a grammatical category. It becomes a means of expressing uncertainty, disagreement, resistance, psychological pressure, social limitation and the desire for autonomy. By focusing on verbal negation, the present research contributes to the broader discourse on postcolonial identity formation and the pragmatics of literary communication.

The research problem is determined by the fact that, although negation has been widely examined in syntax, semantics, logic and discourse studies, its role as a pragmatic and narrative mechanism of identity formation in postcolonial literary discourse remains insufficiently systematised. Existing studies provide important theoretical foundations for understanding the structure and functions of negation (*Payne, 1985; Rowlett, 1986; van der Wouden, 1997*), as well as its pragmatic, sociocultural and discursive dimensions (*Roitman, 2017; Roitman, 2023; Widdowson, 2004*). However, less attention has been paid to the way recurrent verbal negation forms operate in literary texts as markers of colonial pressure, personal limitation, resistance to imposed identities and the search for cultural continuity.

This problem is particularly important for postcolonial novels, where identity is often represented as a process of negotiation between the self and the dominant structures of power. Characters may experience internal conflict, uncertainty, alienation or an inability to act freely because of colonial and neocolonial constraints. In such contexts, forms such as *did not, was not, could not* and the verb *stop* may acquire meanings that exceed their grammatical function. They can mark refusal, impossibility, psychological restraint, social prohibition, rupture with imposed norms

or an attempt to interrupt oppressive processes. Therefore, the pragmatic interpretation of verbal negation allows researchers to reveal deeper layers of identity conflict in postcolonial literature.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the combination of quantitative analysis of recurrent verbal negation forms with qualitative pragmatic interpretation of literary fragments in selected colonial and postcolonial novels. This approach makes it possible to show that verbal negation functions simultaneously as a linguistic marker, a pragmatic strategy and a narrative device. The study does not reduce negation to a formal grammatical phenomenon, but interprets it as a meaningful element of literary discourse that participates in the representation of power relations, social constraints, identity reconstruction and resistance to colonial narratives.

The object of the study is verbal negation in English-language colonial and postcolonial novels.

The subject of the study is the pragmatic and narrative functions of verbal negation in shaping the theme of identity within colonial and postcolonial literary discourse.

The purpose of the research is to demonstrate how verbal negation functions as a strategy of resistance, identity reclamation and critique of colonial and neocolonial practices, as well as to reveal how negation reflects conflicts, uncertainty and self-identification in societies marked by colonial domination.

To achieve this purpose, the following tasks are set:

- to analyse the frequency and distribution of verbal negation forms in selected colonial and postcolonial novels;
- to identify the most recurrent verbal negation patterns, including forms with *BE*, *DO*, *HAVE*, modal verbs and full verbs;
- to interpret the pragmatic functions of negation in literary discourse;
- to examine how verbal negation reflects internal conflicts, social constraints, psychological pressure and processes of self-identification;
- to determine how negation contributes to the representation of resistance to colonial and neocolonial power structures;
- to reveal the role of verbal negation in reclaiming indigenous identity, collective memory and cultural autonomy;
- to contextualise the findings within broader theoretical frameworks of negation, discourse analysis and postcolonial studies.

The theoretical significance of the study lies in deepening the understanding of verbal negation as a pragmatic and culturally embedded phenomenon. The research contributes to the development of linguistic and literary studies by demonstrating that negation in postcolonial novels should be understood not only as a grammatical or semantic category, but also as a discourse strategy connected with power, resistance and identity formation. It also expands the theoretical interpretation of negation in literary discourse by integrating quantitative corpus-oriented observation with pragmatic and postcolonial analysis.

The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using its results in courses on English philology, pragmatics, discourse analysis, stylistics, postcolonial literature and literary linguistics. The findings may be useful for scholars, lecturers, postgraduate students and researchers interested in the linguistic mechanisms through which literary texts represent cultural conflict, social pressure and identity transformation. The proposed approach may also be applied to the

analysis of other linguistic categories in literary discourse, especially where language functions as an instrument of ideological resistance and cultural self-representation.

In brief, the study demonstrates that verbal negation in postcolonial novels is not only a linguistic marker, but also a narrative strategy that reveals the complexity of identity formation. By resisting colonial narratives, reclaiming indigenous heritage and exposing social constraints, negation becomes a means of articulating both conflict and hope in the postcolonial condition. It enables literary texts to express not only what is denied or rejected, but also what is being sought: autonomy, dignity, cultural continuity and a renewed sense of self.

Methods

The methodological framework of the study is based on a mixed linguistic and literary approach that combines quantitative analysis of verbal negation forms with qualitative pragmatic interpretation of selected literary fragments. This combination of methods was chosen because verbal negation in postcolonial novels functions simultaneously as a formal linguistic structure, a pragmatic device, and a narrative strategy connected with the representation of power, resistance, social constraint, and identity formation.

The study is corpus-oriented in nature. The empirical material consists of selected English-language colonial and postcolonial novels in which the themes of identity, colonial domination, cultural displacement, indigenous self-definition, and resistance to imposed social norms are represented through narrative discourse. Particular attention is paid to novels such as *Efuru*, *The River Between*, *No Longer at Ease*, *Things Fall Apart*, and *Girl, Woman, Other*, which are analysed as literary texts reflecting different dimensions of colonial and postcolonial experience. These works were selected because they contain narrative situations in which identity conflict, social pressure, cultural opposition, and the search for autonomy are expressed through recurrent verbal negation.

The main unit of linguistic analysis is the verbal negation construction. In the study, verbal negation is understood as a grammatical and pragmatic structure that expresses denial, refusal, absence, impossibility, prohibition, interruption, exclusion, resistance, or limitation through verbal forms. The analysis includes negative forms with auxiliary and modal verbs, as well as full verbs that carry negative or restrictive semantics. The following groups of verbal negation were considered:

- negative forms with the verb *BE*: *is not, are not, was not, were not, isn't, aren't, wasn't, weren't, ain't*,
- negative forms with the auxiliary verb *DO*: *do not, does not, did not, don't, doesn't, didn't*,
- negative forms with the verb *HAVE*: *have not, has not, had not, haven't, hasn't, hadn't*,
- negative modal constructions: *cannot, can't, could not, couldn't, may not, might not, should not, shouldn't, shall not, shan't, must not, mustn't, need not, needn't, dare not*,
- full verbs and lexical units with negative or restrictive meaning, including *absent, fail, forget, exclude, stop, avoid, prohibit, forbid, doubt, refuse, deny, ignore, and refrain*.

At the first stage of the research, the selected texts were examined in order to identify and extract verbal negation forms. The identified units were grouped according to their grammatical type and lexical-semantic function. This classification made it possible to distinguish between auxiliary negation, modal negation, and lexical negation. Such grouping was necessary because different types of negation may perform different pragmatic and narrative functions in postcolonial

discourse. For example, forms such as *did not* and *was not* often indicate refusal, contradiction, or the denial of imposed meanings, whereas *could not* frequently marks limitation, impossibility, or the pressure of external circumstances. The verb *stop* may function as a marker of interruption, resistance, or an attempt to terminate an oppressive psychological or social process.

At the second stage, a quantitative analysis was carried out. The frequency and distribution of verbal negation forms were calculated across the selected corpus. Both absolute and relative frequencies were considered. Absolute frequency made it possible to determine which forms occur most often in the analysed texts, while relative frequency helped to compare the use of negation across works of different length. Special attention was paid to the most frequent forms identified in the study, namely *did not*, *was not*, *could not*, and *stop*. These forms were selected for further pragmatic interpretation because their statistical prominence indicates their potential relevance to the representation of identity conflicts and postcolonial resistance.

At the third stage, the quantitative results were visualised and interpreted. Frequency distribution was represented through figures showing the occurrence of selected verbal negation forms in the analysed literary corpus. This made it possible to identify dominant patterns of negation and to determine which forms were most strongly associated with particular novels. The visual analysis supported the interpretation of *did not* and *was not* as recurrent forms in novels such as *Efuru*, *The River Between*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Things Fall Apart*. It also made it possible to highlight the significance of *could not* in *The River Between* and the role of *stop* in texts such as *Girl*, *Woman, Other*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Efuru*.

At the fourth stage, qualitative pragmatic interpretation was applied to selected literary fragments. This method was used to determine how verbal negation functions in specific narrative contexts. The interpretation focused on the relationship between negation and the representation of identity, autonomy, cultural belonging, psychological tension, social constraint, and resistance to colonial or neocolonial power structures. Each selected fragment was analysed not only in terms of the grammatical structure of negation, but also in relation to the broader narrative situation, character motivation, social context, and ideological meaning.

The pragmatic analysis was guided by the assumption that negation in literary discourse does not simply deny a proposition, but also produces meaning through contrast, opposition, implication, and contextual inference. In postcolonial novels, negation may reveal the tension between individual desire and collective expectations, between indigenous cultural memory and colonial domination, or between personal autonomy and social restriction. Therefore, the study examined how negation contributes to the construction of implicit meanings, emotional intensity, ideological resistance, and narrative perspective.

The interpretation of literary fragments was performed according to several analytical criteria:

- the grammatical form of verbal negation used in the fragment;
- the immediate syntactic and semantic context of the negative construction;
- the character or narrator associated with the negation;
- the social, cultural, or psychological conflict represented in the fragment;
- the pragmatic function of negation, such as refusal, limitation, impossibility, prohibition, self-defence, resistance, or rejection of imposed identity;

- the role of negation in revealing the broader theme of identity formation in colonial or postcolonial society.

The theoretical basis of the methodology is formed by studies of negation in syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and postcolonial literary studies. The research draws on approaches that consider negation as a linguistic category with grammatical, semantic, pragmatic, and sociocultural dimensions. The works of Payne, Rowlett, Roitman, Widdowson, van der Wouden, Vernay and other scholars provide the conceptual foundation for interpreting negation not merely as a formal marker of denial, but as a socially and culturally embedded discourse phenomenon.

The study also applies elements of discourse analysis. This made it possible to consider verbal negation as part of broader narrative and ideological structures. In postcolonial discourse, language often reflects asymmetrical power relations, cultural conflict, and the struggle for self-representation. Therefore, verbal negation was analysed as a discourse mechanism through which literary texts express disagreement with colonial narratives, expose social constraints, and construct alternative forms of identity.

The method of contextual interpretation was used to connect individual verbal negation forms with broader literary and cultural meanings. For example, the form *did not* may indicate a character's refusal to obey social or familial expectations; *was not* may signal the rejection of an imposed interpretation of identity; *could not* may reveal the impossibility of acting freely under external pressure; and *stop* may mark a desire to interrupt psychological self-blame, social control, or oppressive circumstances. Such interpretation makes it possible to demonstrate that negation participates in the representation of both internal and external conflict.

The research procedure consisted of several consecutive stages. First, the theoretical literature on negation, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and postcolonial identity was examined. Secondly, the literary corpus was selected and prepared for analysis. Thirdly, verbal negation forms were identified, classified, and counted. Fourthly, the most frequent and pragmatically significant forms were selected for closer examination. Fifthly, literary fragments containing these forms were analysed in relation to narrative context, character identity, social pressure, and postcolonial meaning. Finally, the quantitative findings and qualitative interpretations were synthesised in order to determine the role of verbal negation in representing identity in colonial and postcolonial societies.

The validity of the study is supported by the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis provides measurable evidence of the frequency and distribution of verbal negation forms, while pragmatic interpretation reveals their contextual and narrative significance. This dual approach reduces the risk of relying only on subjective literary interpretation and allows linguistic patterns to be connected with broader thematic and ideological meanings.

At the same time, the study has certain limitations. The analysis focuses on selected colonial and postcolonial novels and therefore does not claim to represent the entire field of postcolonial literature. The interpretation of negation is also context-dependent, since the same grammatical form may perform different functions in different narrative situations. In addition, the study concentrates primarily on verbal negation and does not fully examine other forms of negative meaning, such as lexical opposition, irony, silence, rhetorical questioning, or metaphorical denial. These limitations may serve as directions for further research.

Despite these limitations, the selected methodology makes it possible to analyse verbal negation as a complex linguistic and narrative phenomenon. The combination of corpus-oriented frequency analysis, classification of negation forms, pragmatic interpretation of fragments, and postcolonial discourse analysis enables the study to demonstrate how negation contributes to the representation of resistance, limitation, uncertainty, self-identification, and the reconstruction of identity in colonial and postcolonial literary discourse.

Literature Review

The study of negation has a long intellectual history and occupies an important place in logic, semantics, syntax, pragmatics and discourse analysis. In linguistic theory, negation is usually understood as a fundamental category that enables speakers and writers to deny propositions, reject assumptions, mark contradiction, express absence, indicate impossibility or establish contrast between alternative meanings. At the same time, in literary discourse, negation performs functions that go beyond its formal grammatical role. It participates in the construction of narrative conflict, character psychology, ideological opposition and the representation of social relations. Therefore, the analysis of verbal negation in postcolonial fiction requires an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines linguistic, pragmatic and literary approaches.

Early approaches to negation were closely connected with logic and the problem of meaning. Partridge (1971) examined negation as a problem in logic and semantics, emphasising that negative meaning cannot be reduced to a simple reversal of affirmative meaning. This position is important for the present study because verbal negation in literary texts often produces complex interpretative effects. A negative construction may deny a factual statement, but it may also imply resistance, hesitation, conflict, social constraint or emotional tension. Thus, the semantic meaning of negation must be interpreted together with its pragmatic and narrative context.

The syntactic and typological study of negation provides another important theoretical basis. Payne (1985) analysed negation within the framework of language typology and clause structure, showing that negative constructions vary across languages and grammatical systems. Rowlett (1986) further developed the analysis of negation by examining its syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions. These works are significant because they demonstrate that negation is not a marginal grammatical element, but a central component of linguistic organisation. For the present research, this means that verbal negation in postcolonial novels should be examined not only as isolated word forms, but as part of broader syntactic and discourse structures.

The bibliographic and systematising work of Seifert and Welte (1987) also indicates the breadth of scholarly interest in negation as a linguistic phenomenon. Their bibliography demonstrates that negation has been studied from multiple perspectives, including logic, grammar, semantics, pragmatics and natural language analysis. This plurality of approaches is methodologically important because it supports the need for a combined analysis of negation in literary discourse. In the context of postcolonial novels, negation cannot be fully explained by grammar alone; it must also be interpreted in relation to discourse, power and identity.

The historical foundations of the study of negation may be traced back to classical logic. Aristotle's treatment of categories and interpretation established early principles for understanding affirmation, denial and propositional opposition (Aristotle, 1963). Although contemporary linguistic analysis has moved far beyond classical logical models, the opposition between affirmation and

negation remains essential for understanding how language structures reality and meaning. In postcolonial discourse, however, negation is not only logical opposition. It is also a rhetorical and ideological act through which colonised or postcolonial subjects may reject imposed representations and assert alternative forms of self-understanding.

An important contribution to the study of negation is made by research on collocation, polarity and multiple negation. van der Wouden (1997) examined negative contexts, polarity phenomena and collocational patterns, showing that negation often functions within wider lexical and grammatical environments. This approach is relevant to corpus-oriented literary analysis because recurrent patterns of negation may reveal not only grammatical frequency, but also typical semantic and pragmatic associations. In the present study, forms such as *did not*, *was not*, *could not* and *stop* are significant not only because they occur frequently, but also because they appear in contexts of refusal, limitation, pressure and identity conflict.

The cognitive and usage-based perspective is also relevant to the analysis of negation in literary discourse. Taylor (2012) argues that language is represented in the mind through experience, usage and recurrent patterns. From this perspective, frequent verbal forms may be understood as part of a mental and textual corpus that shapes interpretation. In literary texts, repeated negative constructions can create a recognisable pattern of meaning and contribute to the reader's perception of characters, social constraints and ideological tensions. Therefore, frequency is not merely a quantitative indicator; it may also point to cognitive and narrative salience.

The pragmatic study of negation is particularly important for the present article. Roitman (2017) examines negation as a pragmatic phenomenon, emphasising that negative forms are shaped by context, speaker intention, communicative situation and social meaning. In later work, Roitman (2023) further develops this approach by analysing the relationship between negative form, negative meaning and the sociocultural context. These studies are central to the present research because postcolonial literary discourse is deeply embedded in relations of power, cultural hierarchy and social conflict. In such discourse, negation may perform the pragmatic function of rejecting imposed identities, resisting colonial assumptions, expressing internal conflict or challenging dominant narratives.

The discourse-analytic dimension of negation is also supported by Widdowson's work on text, context and pretext. Widdowson (2004) emphasises that meaning is produced not only by linguistic form, but also by the interaction between text and context. This idea is especially relevant for literary analysis, where negation must be interpreted in relation to the narrative situation, character position, ideological background and cultural conflict. A form such as *could not*, for instance, may express grammatical impossibility, but in a postcolonial novel it may also reveal social limitation, psychological pressure or the boundaries imposed by colonial and neocolonial structures.

Recent research has also drawn attention to contrastive and constructional variation in negation. Silvennoinen (2019) analyses contrastive negation and constructional variation within and across languages, demonstrating that negation may function as a means of producing contrast, differentiation and interpretative tension. This is relevant for postcolonial literary discourse because identity is often constructed through contrast: between coloniser and colonised, tradition and modernity, imposed identity and self-definition, collective memory and cultural erasure. In this context, verbal negation contributes to the articulation of difference and conflict.

The relationship between negation, emotion and postcolonial experience is addressed by Vernay (2024), who examines the productivity of negative emotions in postcolonial literature. This approach is important because negation in postcolonial novels is often connected with emotional states such as fear, shame, anger, alienation, disappointment, resistance and hope. Negative emotions do not merely indicate psychological damage; they may also become productive forces that enable critique, reflection and identity reconstruction. Therefore, verbal negation may be interpreted as a linguistic form through which emotional and ideological resistance becomes narratively visible.

The postcolonial dimension of verbal negation is especially significant because colonial discourse historically relied on the denial, marginalisation or distortion of indigenous identities. Postcolonial literature often responds to such discursive violence by rejecting colonial categories and rearticulating cultural memory. In this sense, negation functions as a strategy of narrative resistance. It allows authors to expose the limitations imposed by colonial power, challenge inherited stereotypes and create space for alternative identities. Negation may therefore be read as both a destructive and constructive mechanism: it denies imposed meanings while simultaneously opening the possibility of self-definition.

The theme of identity formation in postcolonial society is closely connected with the pragmatics of negation. Characters in postcolonial novels frequently exist in situations of conflict between inherited cultural traditions and colonial or neocolonial expectations. Their speech and narrative representation often contain markers of refusal, impossibility, hesitation and interruption. These markers are not accidental. They reflect the instability of identity under conditions of cultural displacement and power asymmetry. Verbal negation may indicate a character's refusal to accept external control, inability to act freely, rejection of social pressure or attempt to preserve cultural continuity.

Previous quantitative research on negation in colonial and postcolonial English novels has demonstrated that negative words and constructions occupy a significant place in such literary texts. Tatarovska et al. (2023) analysed the quantitative status of negation words in colonial and postcolonial English novels, showing that negative linguistic units may be studied as measurable indicators of thematic and pragmatic tendencies. This research provides an important empirical foundation for the present article. However, the present study seeks to deepen the analysis by combining quantitative observation with pragmatic interpretation, thereby connecting frequency patterns with the narrative representation of identity, resistance and social constraint.

The analysis of verbal negation in selected novels such as *Efuru*, *The River Between*, *No Longer at Ease*, *Things Fall Apart* and *Girl, Woman, Other* demonstrates that recurrent forms of negation are closely connected with the themes of autonomy, collective identity, cultural conflict and psychological struggle. Forms such as *did not* and *was not* often mark conscious refusal, denial of imposed interpretations or the rejection of socially prescribed roles. The modal form *could not* frequently signals limitation, impossibility and the pressure of external circumstances. The verb *stop* may mark interruption, resistance or the desire to end a process of self-blame, social domination or emotional dependence. These forms show that negation operates simultaneously at grammatical, pragmatic and narrative levels.

Despite the substantial body of scholarship on negation, several issues remain insufficiently explored. First, the relationship between the frequency of verbal negation forms and their

pragmatic functions in postcolonial novels requires further systematisation. Secondly, the role of negation in the construction of identity within colonial and postcolonial societies has not been sufficiently examined through combined quantitative and interpretative methods. Thirdly, existing studies often analyse negation as a linguistic category, whereas its function as a narrative strategy of resistance and self-identification requires deeper attention. Finally, the connection between negation, power, social constraint and indigenous identity remains a productive area for literary-linguistic research.

Thus, the literature review shows that negation is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. It has been studied as a logical relation, a semantic category, a syntactic structure, a pragmatic act, a discourse mechanism and a literary device. For the purposes of the present study, the most productive approach is one that integrates these perspectives. Verbal negation in postcolonial novels should be understood not only as a grammatical form, but also as a pragmatic and narrative strategy through which texts represent conflict, uncertainty, resistance, limitation and the search for identity. This theoretical basis justifies the need for a mixed analysis combining quantitative corpus-oriented methods with pragmatic interpretation of literary fragments.

Results

Verbal negation in postcolonial novels is an important narrative strategy that authors use to challenge and deconstruct colonial ideologies. This section examines how verbal negation functions in postcolonial literature, exploring its role in confronting colonial narratives, affirming indigenous identity, and critiquing neocolonial practices.

Verbal negation involves using language to deny, reject, or dispute statements, ideas, or conditions. In postcolonial literature, this often manifests as characters or narrators who explicitly refute colonial ideologies, histories and identities. This form of negation is not merely a linguistic device, but a powerful act of resistance and reclamation.

Verbal negation serves as a form of resistance against colonial and neocolonial power structures. By rejecting imposed identities and narratives, postcolonial characters assert their freedom of action and autonomy. Through verbal negation, postcolonial writers reclaim the history, culture and identity of indigenous peoples who were suppressed or distorted by colonial discourse. Verbal negation allows both colonial and postcolonial societies to be criticised. It highlights the contradictions and injustices inherent in these systems, prompting readers to question and challenge them.

Verbal negation in postcolonial novels is a multifaceted and powerful narrative strategy. It allows writers to resist colonial narratives, reclaim indigenous identity, and critique existing forms of oppression. Examining the use of verbal negation in postcolonial literature deepens understanding of the complexity and nuances of postcolonial resistance and identity formation.

Verbal negation explores the theme of identity in postcolonial society by reflecting on conflicts, uncertainty, and the search for self-identification among people who have experienced colonial domination and its consequences. Through refusal or a sense of alienation from accepting certain norms, values, or cultural traditions, individuals in postcolonial society feel oppressed and influenced by colonisers. The pragmatics of verbal negation reflect the search for a new sense of identity, opposition to or rejection of the dominant colonial culture, and the desire to preserve or restore one's own cultural and historical heritage.

Thus, verbal negation in the context of literary colonial discourse quantitatively reveals the theme of identity in postcolonial society through verb forms- BE: *is not* (712), *are not* (231), *was not* (1227), *isn't* (64), *aren't* (29), *ain't* (1), *were not* (260), *weren't* (20); DO: *do not* (432), *did not* (1543), *don't* (507), *doesn't* (37), *didn't* (196), HAVE: *have not* (204), *has not* (104), *had not* (521), *haven't* (31), *hasn't* (52), *hadn't* (37); modal verbs – CAN: *cannot* (10), *can't* (159); COULD: *could not* (695), *couldn't* (77); MAY: *may not* (35), *mayn't* (-); MIGHT: *might not* (31), *mightn't* (-); SHOULD: *should not* (76), *shouldn't* (13); SHALL: *shall not* (37), *shan't* (1); MUST: *must not* (74), *mustn't* (11); DARE: *dare not* (6), *daren't* (-); NEED: *need not* (18), *needn't* (4); full verbs – *absent* (37), *fail* (238), *forget* (220), *exclude* (26), *stop* (880), *avoid* (126), *prohibit* (19), *forbid* (89), *doubt* (276), *refuse* (356), *deny* (69), *ignore* (99), *refrain* (25).

The most common verbal negations are the verb forms *did not*, *was not*, the modal verb *could not*, and the full verb *stop*. The verb form *did not* most often appears in the novels *Efuru*, *The River Between*, *was not* – in the novels *No Longer at Ease*, *Efuru*, *The River Between*, *Things Fall Apart* (Figure 1).

He has sent some young men to fetch his daughter, but she *did not go* with them. And since then he has done nothing about it. If it were in his youthful days, Nwashike would have taught that fool a lesson. Things are changing fast these days. These white people have imposed so much strain on our people (*Efuru*, p. 7)—in this fragment of text, we see that the daughter did not go with those who were sent for her, which indicates her independence and self-awareness; about the struggle for identity and self-determination under colonial influence, as the white community excessively abused their rights over the local population: *These white people have imposed so much strain on our people*.

The old man who broke the kola nuts in Lagos and called Obi Okonkwo an only palmfruit *was not*, however, thinking of Okonkwo's family. He was thinking of the ancient and war-like village of Umuofia. Six or seven years ago Umuofians abroad had formed their Union with the aim of collecting money to send some of their brighter young men to study in England (*No Longer at Ease*, p. 6)—the author-narrator notes that post-colonial society preserves its collective identity and traditions, which are connected to the native village or tribe. The use of *was not* indicates that the action was not aimed at individual interests or needs, but at the preservation and support of shared, identical experiences and hereditary values within the collective.

The modal negation *could not* is significant in the novel *The River Between* with a relative frequency of 0.0015 (Figure 2).

Hence, the verbal negation *could not* in the given text fragment reveals the theme of identity in a post-colonial society by emphasising limitations and the desire for more than what the traditional environment can offer. In this case, the character born in Kamenno, like Mugo, was not satisfied with the limited life on the hills and sought to break free from his native land. This indicates that in a post-colonial society, there is a tension between traditional constraints and new opportunities, which creates a new dimension of identity. The negation *could not* highlight the character's inability or unwillingness to remain within narrow social confines, symbolising the search for oneself beyond traditional boundaries and established norms: Or there was that great witch, Kamiri, whose witchery bewildered even the white men at Muranga. His witchery and magic, before he was overcome by the white men with smiles and gifts, had won him resounding fame. He too, it was said, had been born at Kamenno. Like Mugo before him, he had *disappeared* from the hills to the country beyond. He *could not* be contained by the narrow life of the ridges (*The River Between*, p. 18).

The full verb *stop* shows the highest absolute frequency in the novels *Girl, Woman, Other*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Efuru*, with a relative frequency of 0.0004 (*Figure 3*).

Since in a postcolonial society people face internal conflicts resulting from the colonial past, Dominique's self-blame can be seen as a metaphor for the broader process where people stop blaming themselves for circumstances caused by external forces or colonial influence: It took years for Dominique *to stop* beating herself up for staying with Nzinga for as long as she did—nearly three years, three years how could she have been so weak when she'd been so strong, and was again after she left her? grateful to go back to the self she had lost... (*Girl, Woman, Other*, p. 57). *It took years for Dominique to stop beating herself up* indicates a long process of inner struggle and self-recrimination that prevented Dominique from restoring her identity. This emphasises that her journey towards self-discovery and self-acceptance was difficult and prolonged.

Therefore, the verbal negation *stop* in the following text fragment plays a key role in highlighting the conflict between personal desires and social constraints characteristic of a post-colonial society. It emphasises the character's internal struggle for identity and autonomy. The negation *stop* symbolises Obi's desire to halt all external influences and obstacles in order to make his personal choice: The doctor must have said something about him because Clara looked in his direction once and immediately took her eyes away. Obi wanted to rush out of his car and shout: '*Stop*. Let's go and get married now,' but he *couldn't* and *didn't*. The doctor's car drove away (*No Longer at Ease*, p. 108). Obi wants to shout *Stop. Let's go and get married now*, which reflects his strong desire to immediately resolve the issue and find personal happiness. However, he cannot do this due to an internal conflict related to his identity and role in society. It should be noted that the verbal negations *couldn't* and *didn't* in this excerpt not only describe the impossibility and absence of actions but also add depth to the understanding of Obi's internal conflict and his struggle with social constraints and expectations in a postcolonial society. They emphasise the complexity of choosing identity and autonomy under the pressure of tradition and modernity.

As a result, in postcolonial artistic discourse the verbal negations *did not*, *was not*, *could not* are significant in revealing the theme of identity. They are essential elements for depicting characters' internal conflicts, their social constraints, and the psychological pressure they experience in postcolonial society. The negations *did not*, *was not* indicate the conscious refusal of characters to act, driven by fear of social reproach or lack of confidence in their abilities. The negations *could not* and *stop* point to the limitations of characters' possibilities due to external or internal factors. Thus, the author-narrator portrays the complexity and diversity of the process of identity restoration through profound social and personal conflicts that arise along the path to self-discovery and self-acceptance in postcolonial society.

The pragmatics of verbal negation emphasises themes of conflict, uncertainty, and the obstacles faced by individual characters and social groups in a post-colonial society, regarding colonial stereotypes, power structures, and cultural norms. At the same time, they reflect hope for change, improvement and integration into new social, political and cultural contexts.

Discussion

The results of the study confirm that verbal negation in colonial and postcolonial novels should not be interpreted only as a grammatical marker of denial. In the analysed literary texts, negation functions as a complex pragmatic and narrative mechanism through which the themes of

identity, resistance, social constraint and psychological conflict are articulated. The quantitative predominance of forms such as *did not*, *was not*, *could not* and the full verb *stop* demonstrates that negation occupies a structurally significant place in the linguistic organisation of postcolonial narrative. At the same time, the pragmatic interpretation of literary fragments shows that these forms acquire specific ideological and identity-related meanings in the context of colonial domination and its consequences.

The frequency of the form *did not* is particularly important because it often marks a refusal to perform an expected action or to submit to an imposed order. In postcolonial literary discourse, such refusal cannot be reduced to a neutral statement of non-action. It may indicate a character's attempt to preserve autonomy, resist external pressure or reject a socially prescribed role. In this sense, *did not* becomes a linguistic form through which the narrative represents the conflict between individual self-determination and collective or colonial expectations. The example from *Efuru*, where the daughter "did not go" with those sent for her, illustrates that negation may signal agency, independence and the emergence of self-awareness under conditions of social and colonial pressure.

The form *was not* performs a related but distinct function. It frequently marks the rejection of an imposed interpretation or the denial of an expected identity position. In postcolonial novels, identity is often constructed through the tension between what a character or community is assumed to be and what they refuse to be. Therefore, *was not* may function as a narrative device for correcting, challenging or destabilising externally imposed meanings. In the fragment from *No Longer at Ease*, the use of *was not* redirects attention from the individual family context to the collective identity of Umuofia. This demonstrates that negation can serve not only as a denial, but also as a means of reorienting the reader towards collective memory, communal belonging and inherited cultural values.

The modal negation *could not* is especially significant for the representation of limitation. Unlike *did not*, which may suggest refusal or conscious non-compliance, *could not* often foregrounds impossibility, constraint or the pressure of circumstances. In postcolonial discourse, such impossibility is rarely purely personal. It is frequently produced by social hierarchy, colonial restriction, inherited trauma or the conflict between traditional norms and new historical conditions. In *The River Between*, the statement that a character "could not be contained by the narrow life of the ridges" reflects both the limitations of the traditional environment and the desire to exceed them. Thus, *could not* articulates the tension between belonging and departure, rootedness and mobility, cultural continuity and the search for new identity.

The full verb *stop* occupies a special place because it expresses interruption, cessation and the desire to terminate a process. In postcolonial novels, this process may be external, such as social control or colonial domination, or internal, such as self-blame, fear, dependency or psychological fragmentation. The example from *Girl, Woman, Other*, where Dominique needs years to "stop beating herself up", demonstrates that negation may participate in the representation of trauma recovery and self-restoration. Here, the verb *stop* does not simply indicate the end of an action; it marks a long and difficult process of regaining selfhood after emotional and psychological damage. In this case, negation is connected with healing, self-acceptance and the reconstruction of identity.

The analysis also shows that several forms of negation may operate together within a single fragment, intensifying the representation of internal conflict. In the example from *No Longer at*

Ease, Obi wants to shout “Stop. Let’s go and get married now,” but “he couldn’t and didn’t”. The combination of *stop*, *couldn’t* and *didn’t* creates a layered pragmatic effect. *Stop* expresses the desire to interrupt the current situation and assert personal will; *couldn’t* indicates the impossibility of acting freely; *didn’t* confirms the absence of realised action. Together, these forms reveal the character’s psychological paralysis under the pressure of social expectations, tradition and modernity. This confirms that verbal negation may convey not only what is absent, but also what remains desired, suppressed or unrealised.

These findings are consistent with pragmatic approaches to negation, according to which negative forms must be interpreted in relation to communicative context, speaker position and sociocultural meaning (Roitman, 2017; Roitman, 2023). In the analysed texts, negation produces meaning through implication, contrast and contextual inference. It does not merely deny propositions, but opens a space for the interpretation of power relations. A negative construction may signal that a character resists an imposed narrative, cannot act because of social constraint, or attempts to interrupt an oppressive psychological process. Therefore, the pragmatic meaning of negation depends on the relationship between linguistic form, narrative context and cultural background.

The results also correspond to discourse-analytic approaches that emphasise the role of context in meaning production (Widdomson, 2004). In postcolonial fiction, the same grammatical form may perform different functions depending on the narrative situation. For example, *did not* may express simple non-occurrence in one context, but in another it may reveal refusal, resistance or identity assertion. Similarly, *could not* may refer to physical impossibility, psychological inability or social prohibition. This confirms the need to analyse verbal negation not only at the level of grammar, but also within the broader textual and ideological environment.

From the perspective of postcolonial literary studies, the findings demonstrate that negation is closely connected with the reconstruction of identity. Colonial discourse historically imposed categories of identity on colonised peoples, often denying the legitimacy of indigenous cultures, languages, histories and social systems. Postcolonial literature responds to this by using language to reject, reinterpret and transform these imposed meanings. Negation becomes one of the linguistic means through which such rejection is articulated. It allows characters and narrators to say not only what they are not, but also what they refuse to become and what they seek to recover.

The connection between negation and identity formation is especially visible in the relationship between individual and collective experience. In some fragments, negation expresses personal refusal or psychological limitation. In others, it points to collective memory, communal identity and resistance to colonial erasure. This duality is important because postcolonial identity is rarely purely individual. It is shaped by family, community, ethnicity, colonial history, language, education and social hierarchy. Therefore, verbal negation in postcolonial novels often functions at several levels simultaneously: personal, interpersonal, communal and ideological.

The study also demonstrates that negation may be both destructive and constructive. On the one hand, it reveals limitation, absence, impossibility, prohibition and psychological suffering. On the other hand, it may create the conditions for resistance, autonomy and self-definition. This ambivalence is central to postcolonial discourse. Identity formation in colonial and postcolonial societies often begins with refusal: refusal of imposed inferiority, refusal of colonial categories,

refusal of silence, and refusal of cultural erasure. However, such refusal is not an end in itself. It becomes a step towards the reconstruction of selfhood, community and cultural continuity.

The quantitative results strengthen this interpretation by showing that negation is not occasional or marginal in the analysed corpus. The high frequency of forms such as *did not*, *was not*, *could not* and *stop* indicates that negative constructions participate systematically in the textual representation of postcolonial experience. Their repetition creates a linguistic pattern of conflict, resistance and limitation. This supports the view that frequency analysis can reveal significant tendencies in literary discourse when it is combined with contextual interpretation. Quantitative data alone cannot explain the meaning of negation, but it helps identify the forms that require closer pragmatic and narrative analysis.

The findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of negation as a socially and culturally embedded phenomenon. Traditional approaches to negation have often focused on its logical, syntactic or semantic properties (Partridge, 1971; Payne, 1985; Rowlett, 1986). These approaches remain important, but the present study shows that in literary discourse negation must also be understood as a pragmatic and ideological strategy. In postcolonial novels, verbal negation reflects not only the structure of language, but also the structure of power. It reveals how characters are positioned within systems of domination and how they attempt to resist or reinterpret those systems.

The study also develops previous quantitative research on negation in colonial and postcolonial English novels (Tatarovska et al., 2023). While quantitative analysis identifies the frequency and distribution of negative forms, the present discussion shows that these forms acquire meaning through their interaction with narrative context. The integration of quantitative and pragmatic methods therefore provides a more complete understanding of how negation functions in literary discourse. This methodological combination is especially productive for postcolonial studies, where linguistic patterns are deeply connected with historical, cultural and ideological processes.

The practical implications of the study are relevant for literary linguistics, discourse analysis and the teaching of postcolonial literature. The findings suggest that verbal negation can be used as an analytical entry point for examining identity conflict, resistance and narrative positioning. In teaching contexts, attention to negation may help students understand how grammar participates in the construction of literary meaning. In research contexts, the proposed approach may be applied to other linguistic categories, such as modality, deixis, evaluation, silence, reported speech or rhetorical questions, in order to reveal their role in postcolonial discourse.

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focuses on selected colonial and postcolonial novels and therefore cannot represent the entire diversity of postcolonial literature. Secondly, the interpretation of negation is context-dependent, and the same form may perform different functions in different literary, cultural or historical settings. Thirdly, the study concentrates mainly on verbal negation, while other forms of negative meaning, such as irony, silence, metaphorical denial, lexical opposition and narrative omission, remain outside the central scope of analysis. Fourthly, the corpus could be expanded in future research to include a larger number of texts from different postcolonial regions and historical periods.

Further research may develop this approach in several directions. One promising direction is a comparative analysis of verbal negation across different postcolonial literary traditions, including

African, Caribbean, South Asian and diasporic writing. Another direction is the study of how negation interacts with gender, class, race, ethnicity and collective memory. It would also be productive to examine the relationship between negation and narrative voice, especially in texts where the narrator's position is unstable, hybrid or ideologically contested. In addition, computational corpus methods may be used to analyse larger collections of postcolonial texts and identify broader patterns of negative constructions.

Overall, the discussion confirms that verbal negation in postcolonial novels is a multifaceted phenomenon. It functions as a grammatical structure, a pragmatic act, a discourse mechanism and a narrative strategy. Its significance lies in the fact that it expresses not only denial, but also resistance, limitation, psychological conflict and the search for identity. Through negation, postcolonial literature represents the painful complexity of societies shaped by colonial domination, while also articulating the possibility of autonomy, cultural restoration and self-definition.

Conclusion

The analysis of verbal negation in postcolonial novels has demonstrated its significance as both a linguistic device and a narrative strategy. In the first part of the study, the relevance of negation was established by situating it within the broader discourse of colonial and postcolonial identity. Negation was shown to function not merely as a grammatical category but as a pragmatic tool of resistance, enabling characters and narrators to reject imposed ideologies and reclaim indigenous perspectives.

The second section, devoted to the quantitative analysis, revealed the frequency and distribution of negation forms such as *did not*, *was not*, *could not*, and *stop*. These forms emerged as the most recurrent markers of opposition, reflecting both conscious refusals and structural limitations imposed on characters. Their statistical prominence underscores the centrality of negation in the linguistic representation of identity conflicts.

The third section, focused on pragmatic interpretation, illustrated how negation operates in literary fragments to highlight themes of autonomy, collective memory, and psychological struggle. Examples from novels such as *Efuru*, *The River Between*, *No Longer at Ease*, *Things Fall Apart*, and *Girl, Woman, Other* demonstrated that negation conveys both resistance to colonial power and the search for self-definition. The pragmatic dimension revealed how negation embodies inner conflicts, social constraints, and the tension between tradition and modernity.

The fourth section emphasized the interplay between negation and identity formation, showing that negation is not only a refusal but also a constructive act of self-assertion. By rejecting colonial narratives, characters articulate new possibilities for identity, autonomy, and cultural continuity. The forms *did not* and *was not* often signal conscious refusals shaped by fear of social judgment, while *could not* and *stop* highlight external and internal limitations, symbolizing the struggle for self-realization.

Interim results across the manuscript confirm that verbal negation functions on multiple levels:

- As a quantitative marker, it reveals recurring linguistic patterns of resistance.
- As a pragmatic strategy, it conveys psychological depth and social tension.
- As a narrative device, it enables authors to critique colonial and neocolonial structures while reclaiming indigenous identity.

The study's overall results demonstrate that verbal negation is a multifaceted phenomenon in postcolonial literature. It simultaneously expresses opposition, limitation, and hope, reflecting the complexity of identity formation in societies marked by colonial domination. Negation emerges as a linguistic embodiment of conflict and uncertainty, but also as a pathway toward autonomy and cultural restoration. By integrating quantitative and pragmatic approaches, the research underscores the central role of negation in shaping postcolonial discourse and highlights its enduring relevance for literary and linguistic studies.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

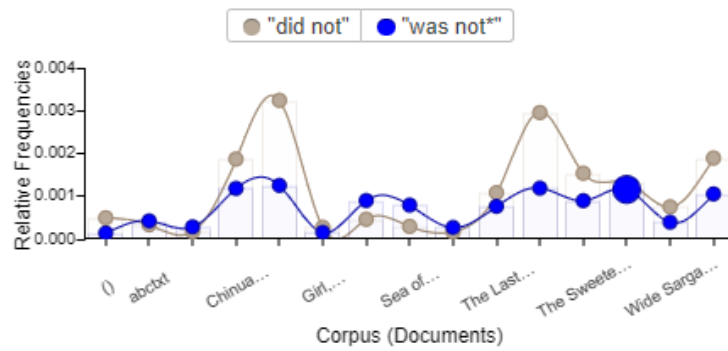


Figure 1. The pragmatics of verbal negation presented in fragments of literary texts

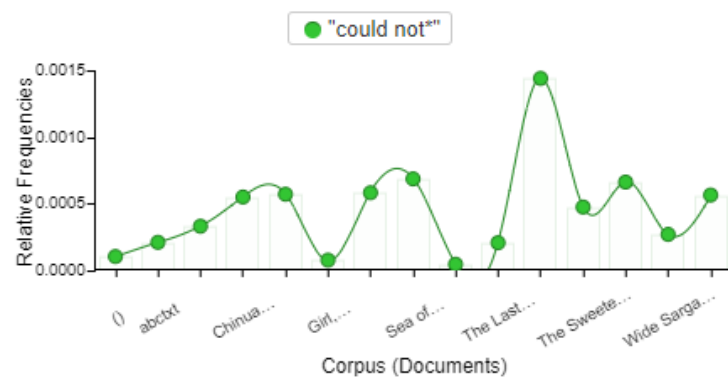


Figure 2. Modal negation could not in the novel *The River Between*

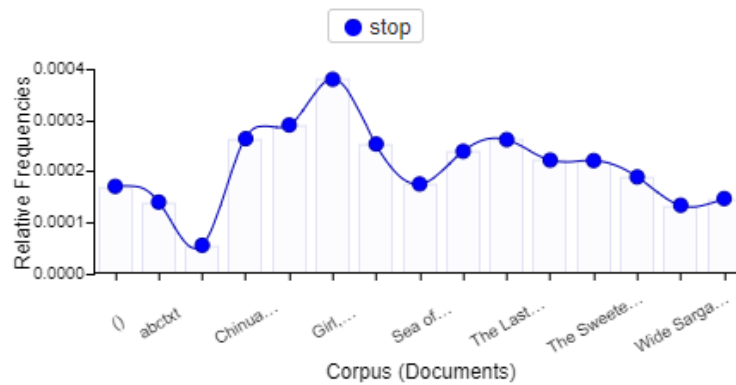


Figure 3. Verb stop in postcolonial novels *Girl, Woman, Other*, *No Longer at Ease*, *Efuru*