

Problems of the Partial Negation and English Usage-Part I

Part I : Definition and Method

Part II : The Prescriptive Evidence

Part III : The Survey and Conclusion

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The partial negation is deeply rooted in the history of English teaching in Japan, and as a codified rule of English grammar was once rigorously taught. Over the past decades, however, the rule has undergone substantial modification: changing interpretations have redefined it, progressively reducing its scope to a bare minimum, so that, while not a subject of controversy, the partial negation remains, at its core, uncertain and problematic. And yet, it is unlikely that the term will ever disappear from English teaching in this country, not only because it is a good one but also because there was, behind the rule, an important concept, essentially *a priori* in nature, and therefore universal. In defining the partial negation it is paramount to recognize this fundamentally bipartite nature, that of a rule and concept. Why it failed, then, in spite of the strength and validity of its theory, is the theme of my research. In searching for answers to this question, the greatest obstacle, which later proved to be the underlying cause, has been the deficiencies, inconsistencies, and illogicalities of the English language itself.

I will define and expand within the framework of two basic problems. The first is that neither the rule nor the term exists in British or American English. When asked if he or she has heard of the partial negation, a native speaker of English will invariably, if somewhat pensively, give a negative reply. This,

however, not being ground for conclusive evidence, I initially hypothesized that the term did exist at one time in the past, had become obsolete, yet perpetuated in Japan.

For verification of this presumption, I availed myself of many sources, British and American, dating from as early as 1862. These were mainly dictionaries, grammars, and guides to usage, of which the list, too exhaustive to be given here, will be found in the notes.¹ The efforts of my labor proved fruitless: in almost all of these sources there was a definition for the double negative, but nowhere did I find the term partial negative, or partial negation. Although the origin, specifically the why, when, and by whom, still remains a mystery at this stage of my investigation, I think it is safe to conclude, based on the evidence, or perhaps would it be more correct to say, the non-evidence that I have accumulated, that the partial negation was conceived and formulated in Japan, by Japanese, for the Japanese.

To my observation, the above fact slowly became known to Japanese scholars of English after the Second World War, particularly among those who had been to study abroad. Although this recognition was tacit, we see cautious rewording and nuances appearing for the first time. As contact with the West accelerated at a hitherto unprecedented pace, the rule had to evolve in light of the growing exposure to native

speakers of English. In retrospect, so much has the rule changed from its original affirmation, that the partial negation no longer dictates; it merely describes. In this very diminished role, therefore, it could hardly be called a problem. What is problematic, and here I present the second problem, is that the change does not reflect a single, unified and co-ordinated effort. The salient feature from the very beginning was that there was complete freedom, as far as interpretation of the rule was concerned, revision being in the hands, and left to the discretion, of individual scholars and publishers. The result is that there is somewhat of a confusion, with different source saying different things, and in some cases even contradicting each other. I will attempt to present an objective viewpoint, from one whose mother tongue is English. My research is therefore based on a survey, which has required extensive fieldwork over a number of years. Before I formally expose my method, I will give a brief outline of the partial negation.

My sources have been grammars and dictionaries published in Japan. Of the former the distinction must be made between reference grammars, intended for individual reference, and pedagogical, or school grammars, intended for class use under the guidance of a teacher. Both types of grammars, notably the school grammars, indicate a definite pattern of change, allowing me to propose three phases in the evolution of the partial negation. Phase I: 1930s-1950s, when the partial negation meant primarily the construction *All...not* and *Both...not*, and secondarily the construction *not...all* and *not...both*. Phase II: 1960s-1990s when we see a phasing out of the construction *All...not*, *Both...not*, but a strong reaffirmation of the *not... all*, *not... both* construction. Phase III: 1990s, when *not...all* and *not...both* tend to be overshadowed by the word-order, as *not*

all, *not every*, *not always*. The dates can only be an estimate and are not definitive because they are based on the sources available to me at the time. It must also be noted that reference dictionaries for students took a separate course from school grammars and will be discussed immediately after Phase III.

PHASE I : 1930s-1950s My search for the origin of the partial negation led me to examine pre-war school grammars at the library of the Osaka University of Education. There I found numerous *Readers* and *Compositions* (as grammars were called at the time), from 1897 to 1938, that is, the Meiji, Taisho, and early Showa Eras. Here also I could find no mention of the term partial negation, or of any such rule.

The earliest mention of the partial negation that I have found is from a reference grammar of 1932. It is perhaps significant that its author was the famous scholar of English of the Meiji Era, Hidezaburo Saito. In his *Practical English Grammar*, in the section on adverbs, for *not*, we find the rule thus stated: "When a sentence contains *all*, *every*, or *both*, *not* in the Predicate expresses Partial Denial. Complete Negation may, in such cases, be expressed by using a word that is the negative of the Predicate, or by changing *all*, or *every* into *no* or *none*, and *both* into *neither*. Partial Negation: *All* my brothers are *not at home*. = *Not all* are at home. *Some are* and *some are not*. Complete Negation: *All* my brothers are *out*; *None* of my brothers are *at home*. (For *both*), Partial Negation: *Both* my parents are *not living*. = One is living. = One is living and the other is not. Complete Negation: *Both* my parents are *dead*; *Neither* of my parents is *living*. In the section on adjectives he says, "*not every* signifies partial negation, and is equivalent to *some*; complete negation is expressed by *no* or *none*: I do not know

every one of them (=I know *only some* of them) ; *Every* man *cannot* be a poet (=Few can) ; I am *not* asked out to tea *every day* (=seldom).” What is clearly implied is that the word-order *not every* logically would have the same effect even when separated in the construction *not... every*. We find the same implication in the same section for *both*: “*not both* expresses partial negation = (*one*), just as *not all* means *some*: *Both the brothers* are here. I do *not* know *both*; I know *only one* of them; *All the students* are here. I do *not* know *all* of them; I know *only some* of them.”²

This concept of the partial negation, *not all* = *some*, *not both* = *one*, comes close to one part of Otto Jespersen’s “negation of the absolute extremes.” It is schematized in his tripartition of the two absolute extremes *all* and *nothing* with the intermediate *something* : A. everything, all, everybody B. something, some, somebody C. nothing, none, nobody. Thus, also the adverbs: A. always, everywhere B. sometimes, somewhere C. never, nowhere. He writes,

“Here we have the general rule that if the negative word is placed first, it discards the absolute element and the result is the intermediate term: Not A = B ; not C also = B. If, on the other hand, the absolute term is mentioned first the absolute element prevails, and the result is the contrary notion: A... not = C ; C... not = A. ...Exceptionally, the same effect (B) is obtained even though the negative comes after the A-word in such sentences as “All that glisters is not gold.”³ Although *both* is not considered in Jespersen’s schema, the same could be logically said, because *both* is the same as *all*, only of two persons or things. Thus treated as an absolute extreme: A = both, B = one, C = neither, the justification of *not both* = *one* rests on a sound basis. This concept that when the absolute element is negated, there is left the remainder could be said to be universal, but it must

also be said that Jespersen was not explicit on the construction *not... A*.

The rule of the partial negation, as it appears in Saito’s Practical English Grammar, embodies the essential teaching of “the old school,” which seems to have been firmly established in reference grammars by the early 1950’s. The phrasing “*not* in the predicate,” however, is found changed to a broader and vaguer wording in a grammar of 1949, *Essentials of English Grammar*; in the adverb section, under *not* : “partial negation means when *all*, *every*, *both*, *always*, *necessarily*, and such words are used with *not*.”⁴ Two things should be pointed out here: first, that the liberty of adding *necessarily* has been taken, although *not necessarily* technically in not partial negation, and second, that the only example sentences given are still examples of “*not* in the predicate” : “All is not gold that glitters,” and “Both my parents are not living.” Likewise, in *An Outline of English Grammar*, 1950, partial negation appears in the section Indefinite Pronouns : “Both of these books are mine” ; “Both of these books are not mine” = partial negation; “All of these books are mine”; “All of these books are not mine” = partial negation; “I don’t know both of them” = “I know one of them.”⁵ *English Grammar*, 1950, also gives only two example sentences for partial negation: “Both of them are not my brothers”; “All men are not happy.”⁶

One who did not agree entirely, Niitsu Yonezo, author of many reference grammars of that period, writing in 1952, in *A New Handbook Of English Grammar*, says that partial negation is “when *not* is used with *all*, *both*, and *every*,” but the examples are: “All that glisters is not gold” ; “They are not both of them fools” : “Every man cannot be a poet.”⁷ Another evidence of the uncertainty of *both*-negated is found in *Modern English Syntax*. Margaret Bryant,

eminent grammarian and pioneer in usage studies in the United States, collaborating with Momozawa Chikara, allowed the wording of the rule of the partial negation without *both*: “*not* together with *all*, *every*, *always*, or *entirely* negates partially.”⁸

Pedagogical grammars of the same period indicate concord with reference grammars, but the degree of acceptance of the “*not* in the predicate” doctrine was not the same throughout: some show strict adherence, while others show adherence to a lesser degree, and with much caution. Of the school grammars of the Post-War Period, housed at the Osaka Prefectural Education Center in Abiko, the earliest is one of 1949, *Grammar and Composition, High School English*. In the section Negatives -*No*, *Not*, *Never*; the partial negation is only implied: “Neither of the two is a scientist” = total negation; “Both of them are not scientists” = one is a lawyer; “No country in the world has enjoyed freedom of the press” = total negation; “All the countries in the world have not enjoyed freedom of the press.” The term appears explicitly in the section Particles: “*not all*, *not both*, *not always*, these are used in partial negation: “Not all of them are good” ; “I do not know all of them” ; “These pens are not both mine” ; “He was not always fortunate.”⁹ In *High Road to English Grammar and Composition*, 1950, under “use of *all*, *every*, *each*, and *both*,” with no mention of the partial negation, the examples are: “All of them were present. I don’t know all of them” ; “Every man cannot be a poet” ; “Both his parents are not living.”¹⁰ Other textbooks adhere strictly to “*not* in the predicate,” such as *Fundamental Course in English Grammar and Usage*, 1957 : “*Both*, *every*, *all*, in a negated sentence is partial negation : “Both my parents are not in Tokyo” ; total negation = “Neither of my parents is in Tokyo” ; “Every scholar cannot be a good teacher” ; “All that sparkles is not a diamond.”¹¹

An important student reference dictionary of the period, *Kenkyusha’s New School Dictionary*, first published in 1928, and revised in 1956, acknowledges both the first and second constructions. Under the entry *all*, “All men are not wise” is translated as partial negation. Under *both*, *not both* expresses partial negation: “I do not want both books” ; “Both his parents are not living.” Similarly, under *every*, *not every* is partial negation: “Every man cannot be a poet” ; “I don’t know every one of them.”¹²

PHASE II : 1960s-1990s This phase is marked by a definite phasing out of the *All... not*, *Both... not* construction in school grammars and a strong reaffirmation of the *not... all* and *not... both* construction. It is noteworthy that as early as 1954, Aoki Tsuneo, Honorary Professor in the Tokyo Higher Normal School, in *Aoki’s Practical English for High Schools*, gives only two examples for the partial negation : “I don’t know both of his parents” : “I don’t know all of them.”¹³ Another who was ahead of his time, eminent scholar and expert on negation Ota Akira, writes in 1956, “When a negative word is used with *every*, *all*, *both*, *entirely*, *altogether*, *necessarily*, the meaning is often partial negation” : “Not all parents love their children” ; “I haven’t read both books” ; “It is not altogether true.”¹⁴

For most of the school grammars, revision seems to have taken place in the 1960s. In *High Road to Grammar and Composition*, revised ten years later in 1960, the rule is stated in the same way, only the examples have changed: “I don’t know all of them” ; “Every body cannot be a poet” ; “We cannot do everything” ; “They haven’t lost both of their children.”¹⁵ That there were pressures to revise is especially manifest when comparing Ishibashi’s *The Art of Practical English*, 1959, rule 84, partial negation: “Every bird cannot sing” = Some birds can sing;

some cannot ; “All the students do not work hard” ; “Both of his parents are not dead,”¹⁶ with the revised *New Art of Practical English* three years later in 1962: rule 79, partial negation: “I do not know all of the students of our school” (I know some of them); “I do not like both of these paintings,” total negation, “I like neither of them.”¹⁷

Although the teaching of the first construction prevailed in some school grammars even until the 1970s, for the majority it had become standard by then that the partial negation meant the second construction and the word-order. One of 1972 typifies this new interpretation: “Not every man can be a poet” ; “Not all of us are happy” ; “I have not read all of them”; “I have not read both of them.”¹⁸ One of the staunchest defenders of the prescriptive *not... all* and *not... both* is Egawa Taiichiro, who in *A New Guide to English Grammar*, one of the most comprehensive and reliable reference grammars to date, says *not... all* is always partial negation, but *All... not* in some cases can be total negation.¹⁹ In his *A New Approach to English Grammar* for high schools, the examples for partial negation are: “Science cannot answer all our questions”; “Friendships do not always last forever”; “Not all birds can fly”; “Not every horse can run fast; “I don’t want both of them.”

PHASE III : 1990s In this phase there is a noticeable trend to teach only the word-order as partial negation, as *not all*, *not every*, *not always*. In most cases the rule is no longer stated and simply under the term partial negation are given example sentences. For this segment of my investigation I requested access to high school grammars which are currently being used in the public schools of the 7th District of Osaka Prefecture. Of the twenty textbooks that I examined, four have nothing on the partial negation. Only two give both prescriptive structures *not... all*

and *not... both*. Two textbooks give principally the *not... every* structure without *both*. For example, *Vista* says that when *not* is used before *every*, it is partial negation: “Not every Scot speaks the language” ; “I don’t know every one of those people,” likewise when *not* is used before *all* and *always*: “Not all of his pictures are good” ; “She is not always busy.” Five textbooks give, besides the word-order, only the *not... all* structure, such as *Mainstream II* : “She was not able to answer all of the questions” ; “Not everybody knows how to cook a fish, ; “The rich are not always happy.”²² Seven textbooks give only the word-order, without stating the rule, such as *Genius English Course II Revised*: “we are now learning that big projects are not always the best” ; “A bad harvest does not necessarily mean starvation” ; “Most of the students passed the test, but not all of them.” There is also *The Crown English Series-New Edition*: “Not everyone believed in”them ; “This saying is not always true” “Not all the streets have names.”²⁴

Examining grammars for college and university students, it is interesting that the majority of them are silent on the partial negation. In the three that do mention it, the preference for the word-order is evident. In *English Grammar Plus*: “Not every person can be a writer” ; “Not all of them were Americans.”²⁵ In *Basic Skills in English*, Kenichi Tamoto gives only the example “Not all of us were brave.”²⁶ In *English Grammar : Essentials for College Students*, Keiichiro Fukui states the rule and gives the examples: “Not all of them are students” ; “I didn’t use both of the pencils” ; “I am not always at home on Sundays.”²⁷

If school grammars have taken a stringent course, dictionaries currently show, in their handling of the partial negation, a strong inclination toward descriptive grammar. In *Introduction to the Grammar of*

English, Rodney Huddleston gives the distinction between prescriptive, or “normative” grammar, which “aims to tell what grammatical rules should be followed,” and descriptive grammar, “which aims to present the grammar that underlies the actual usage of speakers of the language: the difference is one of goals.”²⁸ I speak specifically of reference dictionaries for high school and college students because of the valuable grammar and usage points found in them. All fifteen that I examined are recent editions, from the late 1980s to 1998, and each mentions the partial negation. The wording of the rule, usually found under the entry *not*, has not changed, although quite a few dictionaries now say “... is usually partial negation.” Also remarkable is that dictionaries are still wrestling with the *All... not*, *Every... not*, *Both... not* structure, even if it has completely disappeared from pedagogical grammars. Although the interpretation of the rule can vary from one dictionary to another, there emerge two points that they would unanimously agree on: first, that the structure *All... not* can be interpreted as partial or total negation, and second, that the structure *not... both* is partial negation.

A dictionary in 1987 states that *All... not*, and *not... all* are partial negation, but can be total negation in such sentences as: “I haven’t seen him all day”; and “All this is not easy.” Under the entry *not*, it says, “All cats don’t dislike water” is partial negation, but depending on the intonation, it can be total negation.²⁹ Two other dictionaries say that *All... not* is total negation when all means collectively, “even all put together” in such sentences as : “All the money in the world could not have satisfied her”³⁰ ; and “All the money in the world cannot buy happiness.”³¹ Another says that “All the boys did not go there” and “All the students cannot manage the computer” can be either partial or total negation de-

pending on the intonation.³²

As for the structure *not... all*, although many dictionaries translate this as partial negation, one in 1988 says that “I didn’t take all the photos by myself” is partial negation, but in spoken English it can be total negation.³³ Two leading dictionaries now say that the structure *not... all*, like *All... not*, can be either partial or total negation depending on the intonation and give the following examples: “All children do not like apples” : “She did not answer all the questions”³⁴ ; and “All men are not wise” ; “I don’t like all these pictures.”³⁵

By contrast, the status of the structure *Both... not* is problematic because opinions are divided. Of the dictionaries examined, half do not mention this structure at all. Two comment that while *Both... not*, as in the sentences “Both are not young”³⁶ and “Both of them were not arrested”³⁷, is partial negation, in actuality, this structure is ambiguous, and therefore, is not used very much. One dictionary state that “Both of them are not coming in conversation, can be interpreted as total negation.³⁸ Another says “Both of them are not bad” depending on the intonation, can be either partial or total negation.³⁹ A very recent edition gives both translations to the sentence “Both of them are not in good shape,” but comments that it is interpreted more as total negation.⁴⁰ The dictionaries all seem to agree, however, that *not... both* is partial negation, the classic example being “I don’t want both books” means “I want one book;” total negation being “I don’t want either book,” or “I want neither book.”

The negation of *every* appears to have changed the least because most dictionaries still maintain that *Every... not* and *not... every* are partial negation. One has nuanced it by saying that “Every student didn’t answer” is usually partial negation, but depending on the intonation, it can also be total negation.⁴¹ An-

other gives even finer nuances when it says that “Every man cannot be a poet” = “Not every man can be a poet,” is partial negation while “Everyone cannot do it” is partial negation, but can be total negation.⁴² Only one dictionary has made the comment that the structures *Every... not* and *All... not* are not used very much for the very reason that a sentence such as “All of them did not remember to come” is ambiguous because it can be interpreted as either partial or total negation.⁴³

It must be emphasized that in spite of the differences, none of the above quoted dictionaries are wrong; each is correct in its own way. The prominent feature of the 1990s is that almost all of these dictionaries were compiled with the collaboration of native consultants, from both Britain and the United States. Why then the discrepancies? The reason, and this ties in with the last part of my definition, is that the negation of the universal indefinites, as much as it should be a concern strictly of grammar, in actuality, lies more in the domain of usage. For this reason, I have chosen to word my title, “Problems of the Partial Negation and English Usage,” and not “English Grammar.”

The criterion for grammar, that which decides if something is grammatical or ungrammatical is relatively simple when compared with the criteria for usage, which is infinitely more complex and nuanced. Besides the basic levels of standard, nonstandard, and substandard, there are not only formal, informal and colloquial, but also usage which is said to be “disputed” when usage is controversial, or “divided” when opinions are divided. It is reassuring to know that *The American Heritage Book of English Usage* says in its Introduction, that usage issues are settled by its Usage Panel, Which consists of 158 language professionals, and that “experience has shown that the panel’s opinion about a usage can vary considerably.”⁴⁴

The discrepancies of the dictionaries reflect, therefore, the wide spectrum of opinions on “actual usage,” in what is perhaps a difficult area of changing usage, rather than judgements on grammaticality. Another reason why the word “usage” was more appropriate than “grammar” is that the constructions *All... not* and “*Both... not, not... all* and *not... both*, are found nowhere in our grammars, past or present. The only structure that is commented on is *All... not*, and this, in usage guides. There is hardly anything on the subject of *all*-negated, or *both*-negated; we are not taught it from this angle, so to speak, as an exercise in negation. Grammar teachers us the converse; the converse of *all* being *no* or *none*, and the converse of *both* being *neither*. That which lies in-between was never codified and so usage has, to a great extent, made up for the deficiency.

Having completed the methodological preliminaries of defining the partial negation and elucidating its problems with regard to English usage, I will expose my method proper. Assuredly, a study of English usage must be based on a survey, that which consists simply of going out and asking speakers of English about this particular aspect of negation. This evidence gathered in the field will be preceded by the evidence of published writing in Part II -The Prescriptive Evidence. What actually do grammar and usage books tell us? If not rules, what guidelines do they offer us for the negation of the universal indefinites? By prescriptive evidence I mean not exclusively prescriptive grammar, but refer to what S. Greenbaum and R. Quirk call “a general prescriptive tradition for formal writing that is embodied (with some variation) in school textbooks and student reference handbooks, and in usage books for the general public.”⁴⁵

My sources for this, chiefly British and American, could not be compiled along the lines of those for the partial negation, which were equally balanced

with grammars, both pedagogical and reference, and dictionaries. Research in this area has had to comply with different constraints and conditions. Pedagogical grammars being difficult for me to obtain, my sources for grammar are mainly reference grammars. Due to the current proliferation of usage books, the role played by these is preponderant. Dictionaries figure minimally because unlike Japanese dictionaries, which give instruction on grammar and usage, traditional dictionaries of the West give only pronunciation, etymology, and meaning. As the concept of the partial negation touches upon linguistics and the branch of philosophy of logic, scholarly treatises on these two fields had also to be consulted.

Part III -The Survey and Conclusion is the final segment of my research, the aim of which is to find out if actual usage complies with the prescriptive tradition as described in Part II. Having established this tradition as meaning formal written English, "actual usage" here necessarily implies spoken English. The survey, comprising both written and oral, was begun two years ago, and although in its final stage, still continues at the time of this writing. Initially, I intended to survey only the United States and Britain, but as time went on the project came to include Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. The mainstay, no doubt, of my survey is the questionnaire, a list of negated sentences using the universal indefinites, asking the surveyed to give their interpretations of those sentences. The answers to the questionnaire will furnish the statistics from which I will draw my conclusions. Equally valuable is the oral survey, the interviews with not only Americans and British, but also with natives of other English speaking countries. Many of these interviews took the nature of consultations, especially in the beginning to make the list of questions for the questionnaire, and at the end to form my conclusions. These interviews allowed me

to investigate more in depth because of the possibility of discussion, an important element obviously lacking in questionnaires.

NOTES

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6. Yoshitake Yoshinori, Tokyo: Fukumura Shoten, p. 50.
7. Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, p. 82.

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10. Tokyo: Sanseido, Vol. II -p.17.
11. Tokyo: Sanseido, Vol. II -p.17.
12. *Kenkyusha's New School Dictionary (English-Japanese)*, Tokyo: Kenkyusha, pp.35, 152, 427.
13. Tokyo: Shubunkan, Book I , p.38.
14. *English Grammar and Composition, Recapitulation and Expansion*, Tokyo: Kenkyusha, p.208. See Ota Akira (1980) *The Meaning of Negation*, Tokyo: Taishukan, pp.354-356.
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