

SIMPLE AND COMPLEX CONTRADICTION

AND THE USE OF EMPHATIC DO

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The use of emphatic do to express contradiction is a topic not widely discussed in English as a Second Language textbooks. Nevertheless, its complexity poses many difficulties for ESL students and for ESL teachers who seek to describe it. In this paper, I will discuss several types of contradiction and demonstrate the importance of careful study of English syntax by ESL teachers.

The term do is generic for do, don't, does, doesn't, did, and didn't. A rather straightforward example of the use of do in contradiction is given in sentences (1a) and (1b):

(1a) This paper does not include a full results section.

(1b) It does, however, give the two major components, which are methodology and findings.

(I will use double underscoring throughout to indicate emphatic stress.) In sentence (1b), the emphatic affirmative does signals contradiction of the preceding negative statement (1a).

I have chosen to concentrate on do rather than other auxiliaries, such as be, have, or the modals, on pedagogical grounds: non-native speakers of English are likely to have more difficulty mastering the use of do in contradictions than the use of the other forms. The reason for this is obvious: do is not visible in affirmative declarative sentences which are not emphatic, so it must be derived from an invisible source to create emphasis. With the other auxiliaries, stress alone may indicate emphasis. Compare the following pair of sentences:

(2a) She is a rotten cook.

(2b) She is a rotten cook.

The first uses the copula be to express a fact which does not

surprise anyone, whereas the second suggests 'I tried not to believe it, but it's true.' Stress on the copula alone indicates emphasis; in print, underscoring or italics would be necessary (unless the emphasis is clear from context). But you cannot say sentence (3a) if you wish to refer to the normal occurrence of a man appearing at your office:

(3a) *A man did come into my office yesterday.

In such a case, of course, you would use the preterite came:

(3b) A man came into my office yesterday. [Givón
1978: 78]

Only if you were contradicting the normal or expected state of affairs would you use emphatic do with stress, as in sentence (3c):

(3c) A man did come into my office yesterday.

Thus, the presence of do in surface affirmative declarative sentences is a visible sign of the emphatic. In contrast to this use of do, ESL students occasionally add do to non-emphatic affirmative declarative sentences, creating such ungrammatical sentences as (3a) above, in a mistaken attempt to express past time.

Several months ago, I found myself unable to answer a particularly inquiring student in an advanced ESL class who brought me sentences (4a-d):

- (4a) We conducted a study whose purpose was to determine if client attraction to helper would increase if the helper went out of his way to do a small favor or extend an extra courtesy to the client.
- (4b) The courtesy involved was offering the client coffee and a donut, not a usual event in counseling or psychotherapy.
- (4c) While this procedure did improve their relationship, attraction increased even more at those times when the helper made it clear that the coffee and donut he was calling for were for himself, and not for the client!

(4d) We had not predicted this result. [Kanfer and Goldstein 1975: 26]

The student's question was: 'Why is did used in sentence (4c)?' The usual 'rule' offered by ESL textbooks and teachers concerning contradiction states that a sentence with emphatic do overturns a statement that precedes it. Clearly, such an explanation is insufficient for an example like (4a-d). In order to clarify contradiction, I will discuss several examples which do not fit the oversimplified rule.

It is first necessary to distinguish the do of contradiction from other emphatic do's. In the rest of this discussion, I will not be considering do of the following two types: First, the imperative or persuasive do used in requests (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik 1972: 406), as in sentence (5a):

(5a) Do sit down.

The absence of a surface subject helps distinguish persuasive do from the do of contradiction. A further test for identifying this do is to add the word please. For example, sentence (5a) could be rewritten as sentence (5b):

(5b) Please do sit down.

If we apply the test to sentence (1b), for example, and add please, the resulting sentence would be foolish, as shown in (5c):

(5c) *It please does, however, give the two major components, which are methodology and findings.

Sentence (1b) is simply not a request or invitation; it is a contradiction.

The second emphatic do I will exclude is the 'emotive' do (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik 1972: 969), used in sentence (6a):

(6a) You do look a fright.

This do can be paraphrased with really as in sentence (6b):

(6b) You really look a fright.

But if we substitute really for does in sentence (1b), as I have done in sentence (6c), the meaning is clearly changed:

(6c) *It really, however, gives the two major components, which are methodology and findings.

The focus of this paper is the emphatic do which implies that the state of affairs expressed in one proposition is in contrast to or in opposition to a state of affairs to which it is being compared. Complexity of contradiction arises when the context being contradicted cannot easily be identified. To be specific, complexity arises when the context surrounds rather than precedes the contradiction and/or is implied rather than explicit.

Givón noted in his 1978 article that negatives are used to upset familiar or supposed ideas. It is normal to use the negative only when the audience has some notion in mind which the speaker wishes to overturn. Givón (1978:80) offers the example I have numbered (7a):

(7a) My wife's not pregnant.

Such a sentence is peculiar out of context because it suggests that an utterance is called for to upset a normative state in which the speaker's wife usually is pregnant. In this day and age, pregnancy is not assumed to be a woman's normal state, so there is no usual need to utter a sentence in order to upset that norm.

Givón's paradigm to explain negation is the dichotomy of figure/ground (1978:104). The natural, normative state of affairs is the ground, or expected, common happenings of every day. Thus, 'My wife's not pregnant' need not be uttered in normal circumstances; it 'goes without saying'.

In relief against the ground is the figure, the surprising, unusual, or counter-normative occurrence which does not 'go without saying'. A more likely counter-normative sentence to express a surprising or unusual state would be the following:

(7b) My wife is pregnant.

Applying Givón's idea to this study, I will describe contradiction using the figure/ground dichotomy. The ground, or normative state of affairs, is a stated proposition or an error assumed to exist in the hearer's mind (Givón 1978: 109), and the figure is a sentence using do which challenges or refutes that notion. In reference to several examples, I will offer generalizations which may help teachers explain contradiction to ESL students and point interested linguists in a direction for further research. My remarks are purely descriptive; I make no claim to a theory of contradiction or to the empirical accuracy of my intuitions. I will simply describe a range of complexity of contradiction based on these definitions: the term simple contradiction refers to syntactic simplicity of figure and ground and to ease of perception of the norm being contradicted; the term complex contradiction refers to syntactic complexity of figure and ground and to difficulty of perception of the norm being contradicted.

An example of a rather simple contradiction in which the context to be refuted is clearly and overtly stated was given in sentences (1a-b). The figure (do-contradiction) follows the ground (the context), the sort of pattern described by the simplistic rule. I refer to the relative order of figure and ground in simple contradictions in the following generalization:

† G 1. Ground precedes figure in simpler contradictions.

A second feature of example (1a-b) is that a synonym for the verb in the ground, rather than the identical verb, is used in the figure. The verb in sentence (1a), include, is contradicted using a near synonym, give, in sentence (1b). Compare sentences (8a-b), where the verb of the ground, regard, is repeated in the figure:

- (8a) If, as they maintain, the best way to preserve peace is to prepare war, it is not altogether clear why all nations should regard the armaments of other nations as a menace to peace.
- (8b) However, they do so regard them, and are accordingly stimulated to increase their armaments to overtop the armaments by which they conceive themselves to be threatened. [Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson 1967: 58]

I predict that the use of a distinct verb in the figure will make it more difficult for the hearer or reader to identify the ground being contradicted, hence the following generalizations:

- † G 2. In simpler contradictions, the verb of the ground is repeated in the figure.
- † G 3. Complexity increases when a synonym for the verb of the ground is used in the figure.

A third feature of sentences (1a-b), which appears in other examples as well, is the use of a concessive conjunct, however, which connects the two sentences by implying 'You may have lost faith in the paper after reading sentence (1a) but. . .' Notice that the conjunct however helps to foreground the surprising information contained in the figure, thus strengthening the distinction between figure and ground. As a consequence, the co-occurrence of concessives and emphatic do of contradiction is common, as stated in generalization 4:

- † G 4. Concessives such as however, while, and whereas often co-occur with emphatic do in the figure of contradictions.

Other concessives appear in sentences (4c): while, (8b): however, and (9b) and (10b) below.

I will now return to sentences (8a-b) on the previous page as an example of a more complex relationship between figure and ground. In sentence (8a), the negative element not has been raised out of the embedded question 'Why should all nations regard the armaments of other nations as a menace to peace?' into the phrase 'it is not altogether clear'. The figure (8b), 'they do so regard them', stated in the affirmative, appears on the surface to follow another affirmative, the embedded question. Identifying the normative ground which the contradiction overturns is difficult because of the distance between not and the verb regard, whose polarity is reversed in the figure. Comparing (8a-b) with (1a-b), I will make the following generalizations:

- † G 5. In simpler contradictions, the polarity of the verb of the ground is explicitly reversed in the figure.
- † G 6. The greater the distance between not and the verb whose polarity is reversed, the greater the complexity of the contradiction.

Precise definition and measurement of this distance is a problem I will not attempt to solve here.

Sentences (9a-b) provide another example of complex figure/ground relationship. The proposition which is contradicted is relatively explicit, insofar as the verb understand in (9a) is repeated in (9b), as described in generalization 2 above.

(9a) Pet lovers are often convinced that their animals 'understand' their speech.

(9b) What the animal does understand, needless to say, is certainly not ~~The~~ meaning of the words, but the wealth of analogic communication that goes with speech. [Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson 1967:63]

The complexity of this example is increased because of the distance between the verb whose polarity is reversed and the word not which appears after the emphatic does. Thus, the appearance is created of a positive figure following a positive ground, as in example (8a-b).

Consider example (10a-b), which constitutes a simple contradiction on two counts: the verb know appears in both figure and ground and the polarity of the verb of the ground is overtly reversed in the figure.

(10a) I don't know how we can restore credibility to the office.

(10b) What I do know, however, is that we must.

It is also significant that sentences (9b) and (10b) are pseudo-cleft sentences, because that is a pattern which foregrounds the verb whose polarity is reversed. Hence, I make generalization 7:

G 7. The emphatic do of contradiction may occur in pseudo-cleft sentences.

Finally, notice that sentences (9b) and (10b) include the concessive phrases needless to say and however, respectively, whose role I mentioned earlier.

Another co-occurrence pattern of note is the presence of embedded questions in the ground of three examples: in (4a), the ground includes an embedded question beginning with if; in (8a), there is an embedded question with why; and, in (10a), an

embedded question with how. A possible explanation for the co-occurrence of embedded questions and emphatic do is that the question encourages emphasis of the actual answer, which is foregrounded with do, as distinct from other possible answers. I refer to this co-occurrence pattern in generalization 8:

- G 8. Embedded questions may occur in the ground of contradictions.

The last variable I will discuss is the effect of relative order of figure and ground on complexity of contradiction. In the first generalization, I suggested that ground precedes figure in simpler contradictions. In contrast, the example which is the most difficult to analyze, sentences (4a-b), is a contradiction in which the ground surrounds the figure. I repeat the example here for convenience:

- (4a) We conducted a study whose purpose was to determine if client attraction to helper would increase if the helper went out of his way to do a small favor or extend an extra courtesy to the client.
- (4b) The courtesy involved was offering the client coffee and a donut, not a usual event in counseling or psychotherapy.
- (4c) While this procedure did improve their relationship, attraction increased even more at those times when the helper made it clear that the coffee and donut he was calling for were for himself, and not for the client!
- (4d) We had not predicted this result. [Kanfer and Goldstein 1975: 26]

Sentence (4a) presents a research question to be answered. From sentences (4b-c), we infer that the researchers expected the answer to the question to be an emphatic yes, but this expectation is only implied; it is not explicitly stated. How, then, is emphatic do used?

The clue in locating the ground for contradiction is the forward-looking concessive while in (4c), which implies: 'We had expected the attraction to increase, but it did not increase as much as when the food and drink were for the helper rather than the client.' The contrast is between an expected result, although that expectation is not overtly stated, and an unexpected one;

notice that sentence (4d) states that the result was 'not predicted'. Thus, the ground for contradiction lies partly in the research question embedded in (4a), which precedes the figure, and partly in the expected answer to that question, which is implied, and follows the figure. Against this surrounding ground, the unexpected finding, the figure, has a surprise effect. Consequently, I make two generalizations about more complex contradictions:

† G 9. Ground surrounds figure in more complex contradictions.

† G 10. In complex contradictions, the ground may be partially implied rather than fully explicit.

Notice also that the polarity of the ground is not overtly reversed in sentences (4a-d); ground and figure appear to be positive in that the word not is simply not visible. The key to distinguishing figure from ground in this example is the phrase 'increased even more', which implies that a comparison is being made between the amount of increase expected and the greater amount which actually occurred under unexpected circumstances. In a sense, this is an extreme case of distance between not and the verb whose polarity is reversed by the contradiction--the gap is between explicit 'did improve' and implied 'did not improve as much as when the food and drink were for the helper rather than the client'. I refer to this point in generalization 11:

† G 11. In more complex contradictions, the figure may reverse the polarity of the verb in an implied proposition.

On several counts, then, sentences (4a-d) form a more complex contradiction: the verb of the ground is not repeated in the figure (improve rather than increase is used); the polarity of the verb of the ground does not appear to be reversed; the ground is only partially explicit; and, the ground surrounds the figure. It is now clear why the simplistic rule which stated that emphatic do is used in the contradiction of a preceding statement was misleading and unsatisfying.

To summarize, after studying several examples of the use of emphatic do in contradictions, I made generalizations of two kinds: numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, and 11 (marked with a dagger) concern the ordering of figure and ground and internal features of figure and ground which may increase complexity.

Generalizations 4, 7, and 8 concern co-occurrence of emphatic do with other syntactic features or lexical items. The first set should be useful to the ESL teacher in classifying and identifying the complexity of a set of examples of contradiction shown to students. The second set should be useful to the teacher in setting up production exercises in which certain specific sentence types and lexical items are given, to which emphatic do sentences may be added. It should be obvious that the generalizations are for the teachers' eyes only.

I have not attempted to suggest a theory which can subsume my generalizations or to quantify my findings. Those tasks I leave to an enterprising linguist. What I have demonstrated is that ESL teachers must look closely at patterns their students question, eschew simplistic rules, and develop generalizations which more completely describe the use of a particular form. Further, my discussion suggests that the applied linguist, confronted with students' misconceptions about the target language and motivated by the need to describe it clearly and accurately, may serve as a collector of data to be passed on to the theoretical linguist, thus providing a link from data to theory.

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