

# Ample Negatives as Truncated Clause Constructions: A Corpus-Based Investigation and Construction Grammar Approach

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This paper examines presumptive ample negatives in English, a type of truncated clause construction that combines a fronted negative fragment with VP ellipsis (VPE), as seen from attested data:

- (1) a. People talk. Not to me, they don't. (COCA 2019 TV)
- b. He worships you. Not anymore, he doesn't. (COCA 1992 MOV)

These constructions instantiate radical truncation in two ways: the fronted element is a bare fragment (lacking clausal structure), and the following clause undergoes VPE (eliminating the VP) [Lawler, 1974, Horn, 2010]. Despite surface appearances with two negative elements, these constructions express only a single logical negation, making them ideal test cases for theories of truncation, linearization, and the syntax-pragmatics interface.

Drawing on a corpus of 169 attested examples from COCA, this study demonstrates that presumptive ample negatives exhibit systematic structural and functional properties that distinguish them from superficially similar constructions. The corpus analysis reveals several key structural properties: (a) the fronted fragment is overwhelmingly an adjunct (94.67%) rather than an argument, predominantly realized as PP (53.25%) or AdvP (39.64%), (b) the elliptical clause displays a strong preference for pronominal subjects (especially second person *you* at 38.46%). VPE is licensed by various auxiliaries (*be* 45.56%, *do* 30.17%, modals 20.71%, *have* 3.55%), and (c) the construction exhibits sprouting in 91% of cases, where the fragment introduces material not overtly present in the antecedent as in (2b) (only 9% of merger as in (2a):

- (2) a. Merger: you'll have a bag [over your head]. Not up there, I won't. (COCA 2019 TV)
- b. Sprouting: This isn't going to work. Not with that attitude it won't. (2015 TV)

The corpus data also reveal several key functional properties: (a) the construction serves to correct or qualify a prior utterance, foregrounding the contextual restriction under which the negation holds, (b) the high frequency of second-person subjects supports the construction's dialogic, responsive function, and (c) the construction instantiates what we term "logically weakening but informatively emphasizing" negation, where the proposition ( $p$ ) denoted by the not- $X$  specifies a more restricted context that the elliptical  $S$  ( $q$ ) ( $p \models q$  in downward-entailing terms), while yet pragmatically strengthens the force of the negation.

From the perspective of truncation theory, ample negatives offer valuable empirical constraints for several reasons. First, the reduced structure limits the hypothesis space for competing syntactic analyses: the fragment cannot be analyzed as a full clause undergoing deletion, as it systematically lacks verbal structure and appears only as bare XP. Second, the construction provides evidence for the independence of different types of ellipsis, as it combines fragment answers (the fronted *not*-XP) with canonical VPE in a single construction. Third, the strict ordering (fragment precedes VPE clause) and the fixed information structure (given subject, focused auxiliary) constrain theories of linearization in truncated contexts.

The construction also bears on fundamental questions about the size and structure of nominal arguments in truncated clauses. The overwhelming preference for adjunct fragments over argument fragments (94.67% vs. 5.32%) suggests that truncation is more natural with non-selected material, supporting theories that distinguish core arguments from adjuncts in terms of structural attachment height (e.g., *Not good ones, he hasn't* vs. *Not this time, she won't*).

Within Construction Grammar [Goldberg, 2006], we analyze ample negatives as form-meaning pairings with the schematic structure  $[[not\ X]_1\ [NEG\ S-VPE]_2]$ , where the propositions from both are pragmatically recoverable from discourse context, and the construction as a whole licenses the interpretation that the

negation in S holds specifically under the condition or context specified by X. In particular, we suggest that the relationship between these two propositional components instantiates downward entailment [Ladusaw, 1979], while the pragmatic function involves emphasis, intensification, and foregrounding of the negation's scope or absoluteness, creating logically weakening but informatively emphasizing constructions. This analysis builds on work on negative polarity items [Fauconnier, 1975] and scalar implicature [Levinson, 2000], demonstrating how downward-entailing contexts license specific emphatic constructions. The fragment not-X is linked to unfamiliar discourse information but is then re-evoked for emphasis. The elliptical S with VPE in ample negatives is consistently what Miller & Pullum [2013] term the Aux Focus kind, with given subjects (typically pronominal) and focused auxiliaries.

Evidence for treating ample negatives as independent form-function pairings (constructions rather than merely compositional patterns) comes from several sources. First, the not-X component exhibits constructional flexibility, appearing with various syntactic forms (PPs, AdvPs, NPs, clauses) while maintaining the same discourse function. Second, as demonstrated by the presumptive examples in (1), the negative proposition S can appear in fragmentary form in conversational contexts, yet the construction remains interpretable through pragmatic inference. Third, the ample negatives share the same semantic-pragmatic profile with the so-called resumptive ample negatives (e.g., *it does not hamper productivity, neither at individual level nor at national* or *I had never seen a militarized police, not even in Chicago*) despite their different surface configurations, suggesting an abstract constructional schema unifying both subtypes [Dowty, 2008].

The paper demonstrates how corpus-based investigation of truncated clauses can provide strong empirical evidence bearing on theoretical questions about the nature of ellipsis, the syntax of fragments, and the interaction between information structure and linearization—precisely the issues that make truncated clauses such a valuable empirical domain for syntactic theory.

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