



# *Clover English*

## Podcast PDF Guide

### **Halloween special: Dracula's Irish Roots**

**GRAMMAR: NEGATIVE STRUCTURES**

**IRISH MYTHS & FOLKLORE**

**IDIOM OF THE WEEK**

# TRANSCRIPT



Hey everyone and welcome to this week's episode of the Clover English Podcast. This week is a special Halloween episode about the Irish gothic classic Dracula (which also happens to be my favourite book of all time). I really enjoyed doing the research for this week's episode because it reminded me of my time in university as I've written a few essays about this book. So, it took me back to my uni days.

You may notice my voice sounds a little strange, that's because I'm really blocked up and stuffy because I have a cold also I'm officially nine months pregnant which means it's quite hard to breathe at the minute! So I hope it doesn't bother you too much.

Before we start I'd like to remind you that the PDF guide for this episode can be downloaded from my website [www.cloverenglish.org](http://www.cloverenglish.org) (I'll include a link in the show notes). There you can find the transcript, vocabulary explanations, extra vocabulary and this week's grammar lesson which is about useful negative structures in English. Okay, this isn't just negative structures in English if you're listening to this podcast I know that you can do that with quite a lot of confidence! This is using more advanced negative structures and decoding of certain negative structures that you might not be aware of when you hear them.

In today's show I'll be speaking about the legend of the vampire in general and how oral folklore and events in Ireland inspired Stoker's novel, so basically the context of the world's most famous vampire novel.

First, I'd like to start by recognising that we can't begin to understand the importance of the vampire **without understanding** two important things; the **sacred** power of blood and a belief in life after death.

Notes:

Without + gerund; remember without is followed by the gerund form of the verb

Sacred: holy, connected to religion, treated with reverence

The association between blood and life has been made since ancient times, and it's not surprising why. If someone was wounded (or injured), they leaked a red liquid, and if they lost too much, well they would die. So it wasn't difficult for people of these ancient civilizations to realize that this red liquid (AKA blood) was somehow fundamentally important to our existence. And if it was somehow responsible for keeping us alive, what would happen if we ingested it? If we consumed it. Could it keep us alive longer? Would it help us recover from illnesses? Could it even give us the attributes of the people it came from?

Many tested this theory, for example some warriors<sup>1</sup> used to drink the blood of the people they killed in order to obtain their courage and strength. Some traditional medicines still use animal blood, such as tiger or snake blood, as an active ingredient because it's supposed to give the drinker some type of quality associated with that animal and help cure diseases. Bathing in blood has also been used in medicinal practices, for example as an old remedy against leprosy.

Nowadays, we use blood transfusions when people lose a lot of blood or if they have some type of illness that requires a blood transfusion in order to recover. This practice must have been quite new and innovative by the time Stoker wrote *Dracula* because when the character Lucy begins **wasting away** due to a loss of blood, Van Helsing has to describe what a blood transfusion is to his friends and how they can use it to save her life.

So, apart from the strong belief in the regenerative power of blood, the vampire legend depended on a belief that there was life after death, and that the boundaries between these two worlds are sometimes blurry. An anxiety about life after death is prevalent in every society, especially with regards to how the dead may interact with the living. I can't mention this anxiety without mentioning with ancient Celtic pagan festival of Samhain, which eventually became the modern day Halloween. And, of course, being a Celtic festival, it was celebrated in ancient Ireland.

Notes:

AKA: acronym to mean "Also known as"

Waste away: lose too much weight especially through illness

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1 Leatherdale, Clive. (1985). "The Origins of Dracula"

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During this festival the dead and the living were able to interact. During the **harvest**, sacrifices were made to the pagan Gods and the Celts dressed as animals and monsters so that they wouldn't be kidnapped by the fairies. So we can see where we get our modern day costume dressing, no? From this ancient tradition. So, we can see that from very early on this anxiety existed over the barriers of the living world and the afterlife, and the vampire, being both dead and undead, is in many ways another incarnation of this fear.

In almost every culture there has been some version of the vampire in folklore and legend. It's something which Bram Stoker himself recognized in Dracula when Van Helsing says that the vampire "is known everywhere that men have been" from ancient Greece to China. But how did this myth of the vampire look in Ireland?

The vampiric creatures of ancient Irish folklore are feminine in nature, at least the ones that I found in my research. The most famous is perhaps the Dearg-due (Hope I'm saying that right, if anyone knows that that pronunciation isn't correct and wants to correct that's totally fine!) So this creature, apparently used her immense beauty to tempt men to follow her and then she'd drain them of their blood. Perhaps this creature is what Stoker **had in mind** when he wrote the three vampire wives of Dracula who seduce Johnathan Harker and almost **devour** him. These women may also have been inspired by another figure of Irish folklore called the Ban sí whose scream announced death to those who heard it.

Notes:

Harvest: the season when crops are gathered (farming word)

Have in mind: think about something. In this context, Stoker was possibly thinking the Dearg-due when he wrote the three wives of Dracula

Devour: eat rapidly and hungrily

It's certain that Stoker was intimate with these creatures of Irish folklore. He said that during the first seven years of his life he didn't know what it was like to be on his feet. This is because he suffered from illnesses during childhood that left him **bed-bound**, but this was the perfect opportunity for his mother to share Ireland's rich folklore heritage with her son. Stoker's mother, Charlotte, **made sure** that her son was well versed in this folklore. She even claimed to have heard the terrible scream of the Ban sí herself when her mother died.

Not only did Charlotte **pass on** tales of Irish folklore to her son, but Stoker heard true tales of horror from his mother about The Potato Famine and the cholera outbreak in Ireland. Stoker was born in 1847, otherwise known as "Black '47" because it was known as the worst period of the Irish Potato Famine. And while Stoker himself would have been too young to remember many of the horrors of those years, his mother certainly was not.

The idea of the living dead was not so surreal to Famine Ireland as the countryside and cities were flooded with starving people who were so weak that they looked like **corpses** already. Even worse, there were many stories of these people being buried alive. Charlotte apparently had an obsession with being buried alive and she was aware of two people who had narrowly escaped this fate. One of these cases was particularly brutal. A man who was not yet dead but was in some type of comatose state woke up as the **grave diggers** were about to break his legs so he could fit into a smaller coffin. I mean that's the stuff of real, true horror stories. A coffin by the way is the wooden container they bury you in when you die.

## Notes:

Bed-bound: if you're bed bound you are unable to leave bed

Corpse: dead body

Make sure: ensure

Pass on: transmit

Grave: a grave is the hole in the ground where dead people are buried. So a grave digger is the person who digs these holes

# TRANSCRIPT



Another prominent image of the Famine was the so-called coffin-ships which took Irish refugees to North America. These ships got their name by being incredibly unsanitary and dangerous for the passengers aboard. The lower-class passengers had to bring their own food which was supposed to last them the entire four week journey. Can you imagine having to pack your own food, without the use of refrigerators, for that long? Many people had never even travelled more than a few miles from their own village before and they suffered immensely from sea-sickness and disease that spread throughout the ship. When someone died, and there were many who did die, they were simply thrown overboard (which means they were simply thrown off the boat) to a watery, unmarked grave in the Atlantic ocean.

Stoker evokes the image of the coffin ships in *Dracula* in chapter seven when a type of ghost ship appears on the English coast with a corpse tied to the front. We discover that Dracula was aboard the ship and killed the sailors aboard, much like disease killed those aboard the coffin ships on their way to America. I'd also like to point out that the English government did little to nothing to **alleviate** the suffering in Ireland during the Famine, which has led many to accuse them of a type of genocide and being only too happy to export their problem to America. So, I wonder if this image of the ghost ship arriving on the English coast with Dracula inside ready to terrorize the local population is a type of literary revenge for Stoker? Perhaps a **hint** that the Irish would no longer **put up** with the mistreatment that the English crown had made them suffer.

Notes:

Alleviate: reduce

Hint: in this context it means a perceived suggestion

Put up [with something]: a phrasal verb which means to endure a bad situation

There is other evidence for this theory. Catholics at the time were gaining more and more rights and were beginning to **assert** themselves and **move up the social ladder** in greater numbers. There was growing pressure for independence from England, or at least more autonomy from the English government, and ever since Catholic emancipation in 1829, more and more Irish Catholics were becoming empowered politically, which of course threatened the **status quo**.

This was actually a cause of anxiety for writers such as Bram Stoker who came from a Protestant family and who had traditionally held power in Ireland. Irish gothic literature normally came from writers with a similar background to Stoker's, such as the Irish writer of Huguenot descent, Sheridan le Fanu. The idea that the oppressed Irish natives of the land they inhabited were coming to punish them was a constant fear in the lives of the rich Anglo-Irish who feared that their days in the country **were numbered**. This anxiety was also strong because the local catholic population outnumbered them immensely. So, there was a type of "us versus them" mentality that was growing exponentially in the Victorian era and led many Anglo-Irish writers to write Gothic tales about things like blood sucking vampires.

Even though Dracula begins in Transylvania the parallels with Victorian Ireland are evident. For example, the local population are highly superstitious and are largely country peasants who have their own measures and protections against evil. According to one book I read, Ireland is considered one of the most superstitious countries in Europe, I'm not sure how that was measured exactly like how...you measure that, but it is true that superstitions are very common in Ireland and many people still go to see tarot readers and fortune tellers even now. Also, at the beginning we see a peasant woman screaming outside Dracula's castle for the return of her baby, which Dracula has given to his wives to eat. This idea of children being kidnapped by evil forces is very common in Irish folklore and myths.

Notes:

Assert oneself: maintain or defend oneself

Move up the social ladder: this idiom keeps appearing in my podcasts! To become more economically and socially prosperous

Status quo: the status quo is the established state of things

Be numbered: if your days/time is numbered it means it's coming to an end.

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So, why didn't Stoker just **set** his novel in Ireland? Why in Transylvania? Well, it's possible that Stoker set part of his novel in Transylvania instead of Ireland for the same reason that other Irish writers did: because some publishers at the time considered Irish stories 'unpopular'. So this might explain why. However, there can be no doubt as to Dracula being a very Irish novel, I've outlined some of these reasons in this week's episode but there are many more. However, I'll leave it at that today.

I'd like to end the show with an idiom, which is a new thing I'm going to do. So, as it's Halloween I thought I'd include one with the word "devil" in it. As many of you may know the Devil is the force of evil in Christianity, the opposite of God if you will. And we have an expression in English which is; "Better the devil you know". So, what does that mean? It means that when you're in a bad situation and have the choice of changing that situation you shouldn't always take that opportunity because maybe you end up in a worse situation than before. So, even though you're miserable in one situation, at least you know what to expect. **Whereas** if you go into a different situation, maybe you're much worse.

Personally, I think it's a terrible mindset to have, you should always take risks and try something new, even if you fail or find yourself in a worse situation than before. What do you guys think? Let me know on social media or the blog post for this episode.

Notes:

Set: we use this verb in relation to works of fiction about where the story happens. So Dracula is set both in Transylvania and England.

Whereas: conjunction to introduce something contrary

So, I hope you enjoyed today's episode, please get in touch with any feedback or suggestions I'd really like to hear your thoughts. Don't forget to follow me on [instagram](#) (@cloverenglishpodcast) and [twitter](#) (@clover\_english) to get even more English language resources. I've also started a newsletter on my website so you can sign up to that simply by visiting [www.cloverenglish.org](http://www.cloverenglish.org) or just direct message me with your email address and I'll add you to the list. Don't worry this is just so I can communicate new material I have for you and also to pass on discounts and other offers when my products and services go live!

And, as always, you can download the PDF guide to this episode with the transcript, vocabulary explanations, extra vocabulary and this week's grammar explanation about useful negative constructions in English. These won't be free forever so get them while you can for free! And I'll see you all next week for Part two of the Irish language.

# GRAMMAR: NEGATIVE STRUCTURES



This week's grammar lesson is about useful negative constructions. We can use negatives in all types of ways and sometimes these meanings are hard for learners to use in practice. Let's look at some.

## QUESTION TAGS

As you know, question tags are added to the end of English sentences as a way to invite our listeners to either confirm or deny what we think. For example;

“He's really smart, isn't he?”

Here we see that with an affirmative sentence (He's really smart) we need a negative question tag at the end as a way to invite the listener to confirm what we've just said or agree with us. We expect the listener to answer in the affirmative. For example;

“Oh yes, he really is!”

The opposite happens in negative sentences. For example,

“He isn't very polite, is he?” here we change the question tag to a positive question. Don't forget that such “negative” words such as never, seldom, rarely etc also function in this way.

“She never smiled much, did she?” “He rarely went abroad, did he?”

And the same thing happens after clauses with words like little or few;

“There's little point in going now, is there? We're already too late to catch the train”

(This sentence means it's useless to go now as they won't catch the train anyway).

## NEGATIVE QUESTIONS FOR CONFIRMATION OF NEGATIVE BELIEF

Note that we can also use negative questions if we want the listener to confirm something negative. For example:

“Don’t you feel well?” means “is it true that you don’t feel well?” We expect the listener to confirm that indeed they don’t feel well.

Or we could just use the question tag form:

“You don’t feel well, do you?”

## EXCLAMATIONS & RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

In English we can use negative structures in exclamatory sentences to express a range of emotions like surprise, joy, anger etc. For example:

“Isn’t it a beautiful day!” “Aren’t those politicians idiots!”

A rhetorical question is a question that we don’t really expect an answer to because the answer is obvious. We can use negative structures to make such questions.

“Don’t you realize you’re wasting your time?” “Isn’t the answer obvious?”

## SHOWING SURPRISE

We can use negative questions to show surprise or disbelief that something we expected to happen still hasn’t happened. For example;

“Hasn’t Ted phoned yet?” “Didn’t your alarm go off this morning?”

# GRAMMAR: NEGATIVE STRUCTURES



## BEING POLITE WITH NEGATIVES

Using negative structures with *could* and *would* is a very good way to ask for help politely. Personally I use this structure all the time when I'm asking for help and people will appreciate your efforts at being polite if you use this structure.

For example: "Sorry, you wouldn't mind telling me where I can find the car park, (would you)?"

"You couldn't tell Steven that I'm in a meeting until five, (could you?)"

The question tag here is optional.

Be careful with "can't" though, because this can sound like you're complaining.

"Can't you lend me your pen for a moment?"

## SHORT ANSWERS IN THE NEGATIVE (WITH HOPE, THINK, BELIEVE, SUPPOSE ETC..)

A big mistake many learners make is using structures like "I think that no" or "I don't believe" when answering yes or no questions.

Remember we can make think negative and add "so" to convey a negative answer.

For example:

"Do you think Real Madrid will win the match?" "No, I don't think so" we also should use "so" in positive answers:

“Yes, I think so” not “Yes, I think.”

If you say “Yes I think” it conveys that you have the ability to think rather than you are agreeing with a statement. This same structure is also applicable to the word “suppose”.

“Yes, I suppose so.” or “I suppose not.”

“Hope” works similarly as we can say “I hope so” in a positive sentence, but in the negative we have to say “I hope not”.

Believe works in a similar way in that we can say “I believe so” but if we say “I don’t believe so” it sounds very formal and stilted. In the negative we would normally just use “think”: “I don’t think so”.



## SOURCES USED FOR THIS WEEK’S EPISODE

- Clive Leatherdale (1985) “The Origins of Dracula”
- David J Skal (2016) “Something in the Blood”
- Sheridan Le Fanu (1999) “In a Glass Darkly”