

Negative Polarity Items

Corpus Linguistics, Semantics, and Psycholinguistics

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So far...

- licenser: strong-weak distinction
- licensee marking
- licensing relation: semantic?
- status: more difficult than licensed NPIs

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Problems interpreting the results:

- unexpected cross-linguistic variation
- possibly task-related effects
- inherent ambiguity of measures

Other problems:

- only a handful of licensors tested
- always the same NPI (*ever, jemals*)

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Our experiment

testing the weak–strong opposition in NPIs

WL/W Elisabeth hat **kaum** etwas von dem **ausstehen können**, was es zum Essen gab.

Elisabeth could stand hardly any of what there was to eat.

WL/S Mit seinen komplizierten Beispielen hat er bei **wenigen** Studenten **einen Blumentopf gewinnen können**.

With his complicated examples he could impress few students.

SL/W Elisabeth hat **nichts** von dem **ausstehen können**, was es zum Essen gab.

Elisabeth could stand none of what there was to eat.

SL/S Mit seinen komplizierten Beispielen hat er bei den Studenten **keinen Blumentopf gewinnen können**.

With his complicated examples he could impress no students.

Our experiment

offline questionnaire, rating on 7-point scale

Hypothesis:

- weak NPIs can occur with either strong or weak licenser
- strong NPIs need strong licenser

Prediction:

- WL/S condition should receive lower ratings than the others

Our experiment

First try –results:

- all NPI conditions rated high
- all conditions equally good

Why?

Distractors: complex syntax, some ungrammatical

Katharina hat den Ukrainer und den Notar, der das Dokument bekritzelt, fasziniert, obwohl sie humpelte.

Katharina fascinated the Ukrainian and the notary who scribbled on the document, although she had a limp

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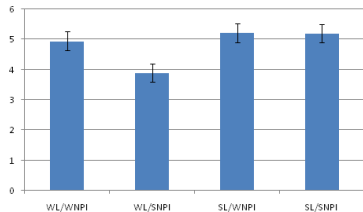
Our experiment

Second try – distractors:

- bad: slightly modified idioms
(*ein Korb erhalten* → *Körbe erhalten*)
- good: somewhat stylistically marked

Our experiment

Results



Our experiment

Summary:

- the weak-strong distinction is real
- NPI licensing has a collocational component

more work is needed...

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