

ROMANIAN *VRE*-NPIs - AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

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This paper re-evaluates the licensing conditions of Romanian weak Negative Polarity Items (NPIs), such as the indefinite determiners *vreun* m./*vreo* f. ‘any’, in antimorphic (the negative marker *nu* ‘not’), but also in simply anti-additive contexts (especially, with pre-verbal n-words) and provides empirical - corpus and experimental - evidence against their claimed ‘bagel’ occurrence pattern (Fălăuș 2008, 2009); the latter has been attested for weak NPIs in other strict negative concord languages, esp. Slavonic - for example, in the case of the Polish *kolwiek*-indefinites (Błaszczak 2003) or of the Russian *libo*-items (Pereltsvaig 2006). This type of distribution would make weak NPIs admissible in all negative polarity environments, yet banned from direct negation contexts, where n-words are licensed instead.

Given the fact that the literature on *vre*-NPIs offers contradictory evaluations of well-formedness in the context of direct negation (see examples (1)-(4) below), we have conducted a corpus investigation and also set up a perception experiment with Romanian native speakers, in order to answer if the acceptability of *vre*-NPIs in strong environments is dependent on factors such as context, modification of the noun determined by the *vre*-indefinite, and occurrence of a preverbal n-word in the sentence. In all the cases below, the judgments are being made on constructed examples which are completely isolated from a discourse context:

Examples where the noun determined by the *vre*-indefinite receives no modification:

- ungrammatical** (Fălăuș 2008:10; Fălăuș 2009: 66)
- (1) ***Nu** am scris **vreun articol**.
‘I **haven’t** written **any article**’.
- vs.
- grammatical** (Fălăuș 2014:152; Dobrovie-Sorin & Ion Giurgea 2013: 19)
- (2) Lisa **nu** a citit **vreo carte**.
‘Lisa **didn’t** read **any book**.’
- (3) **N-am** văzut **vreun film**.
‘I **haven’t** seen **any movie**’.

Examples where the noun determined by the *vre*-indefinite receives postmodifiers - in (4’), Iordăchioaia 2007 argues that, in the absence of contrastive-focus intonation on the negative marker, only an n-word would be grammatical:

- grammatical** (Fălăuș 2014: 124)
- (4) **Nu** cunosc **vreun medicament** [care să-l ajute].
‘I **don’t** know of **any medicine** [that could help him].’
- vs.
- ungrammatical** (Iordăchioaia 2007: 201)
- (4’) ***Nu** cunosc **vreun medicament** [care să-l ajute].
‘I **don’t** know of **any medicine** [that could help him].’

The results show that Romanian weak NPIs such as *vreun/vreo* are not ‘ungrammatical’ with clausemate sentential negation, although they can have a degraded acceptability if isolated from context - typically, contrastive contexts; moreover, even in their out-of-the-blue occurrences, the *vre*-NPIs register a quite high acceptability score, which is significantly above the threshold, when compared to the clearly ungrammatical controls. This confirms the behavior previously predicted for the *vre*-NPIs (Rizea 2018), which, as it has been shown for Positive Polarity Items (PPIs) like *some* (see Larrivéé 2012), occur felicitously in the scope of negation in structures that involve *explicit* or *inferred activation* (Dryer 1996). We conclude that the claimed ‘bagel’-distribution of the *vre*-NPIs can be reduced to context-sensitive use conditions.

References

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