Negative Polarity Items
Corpus Linguistics, Semantics, and Psycholinguistics
Day 5: Homework 3 and More Data

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Homework Assignment 3

- **Aim:** Provide a quantitative profile of an NPI in your language.
- **Method:**
  1. take one of the NPIs from your previous assignments.
  2. collect the first 40 occurrences of this NPI in a corpus (or on the web)
  3. classify them, using the CoDII context categories
  4. indicate the occurrence ratios for the individual contexts
- **Mail your results by tomorrow 2pm to**
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Results and Problems

- Problems with the CoDII categories:
  - descriptions unclear
  - categories missing (wh-question)
  - CoDII design: for qualitative profiles in classical contexts.

- Other problems:
  - Non-NPI usage a distinct lexical item? *beim besten Willen (at the best will)*
  - two licensors?
Is clause-initial adverbial *instead* an NPI?

- Pat didn’t prepare for the exam.
  Instead he went to parties every night.
- Pat has to prepare for the exam.
  # Instead he goes to parties every night.

Does preposition *instead (of)* license NPIs?

- Pat stayed at home instead of going to any of his classes.
Is clause-initial *instead* an NPI?

- Licenser would be in the preceding clause.
- Quantitative profile: German, IDS-corpus, random 100 occurrences (from 10,621; all written corpora)
  - CM: 28  CN: 14
  - DEINT: 1  NegV(?) 22
  - Konj: 13  OTHER 22
- Antecedent proposition does not obtain:
  Ein Finale . . . entfiel somit. Stattdessen stand der Tabellenerste als Turniersieger fest.
- Antecedent proposition obtains but is not desirable:
  Und er würde, sagt er, die US-Truppen aus Einsätzen in internationalen Konfliktregionen zurückbeordern, “die Amerika nichts angehen”. Stattdessen möchte er die Soldaten an der Grenze zu Mexiko stationieren
- Status not clear, but rather: refers to proposition that does not hold in the *instead*-world.
Does *instead of* license NPIs?

- Entailment status: antimorph (strongly negative)
  - Peter swims instead of drinking and smoking.
  - Peter swims instead of drinking or instead of smoking.
  - Peter swims instead of drinking or smoking.
    - Peter swims instead of drinking and instead of smoking.
  - Like: *without*

- NPI:
  - *ever*
  - *a read cent*
  - *bother*

*Instead of* has strong negative entailments but licenses only weak NPIs.

- Contrasts with *without*.
- Pragmatic reasons? (instead-alternative should be a reasonable option?)
Data suggesting NPI status:
- Just because they live in Berkeley doesn’t mean they’re left-wing radicals.
- I doubt that just because they live in Berkeley means they’re left-wing radicals.
- * Just because they live in Berkeley means they’re left-wing radicals.

But:
- (So, let me get this straight,) just because we live in Berkeley means we’re left-wing radicals.
- (So, let me get this straight,) *he needs any more money.
- Kim seems to believe that just because we live in Berkeley means we’re left wing radicals.

No NPI!
Morphologically fixed NPIs

- French: *je peux* (I can); in inversion questions: *puis-je . . . ?*
- only in singular: *a word*
- no third singular form: *need*
- only in passive(?):
  - I can’t be bothered to look for it just now.
  - * I will be bothered to look for it just now.
  - * My mother keeps bothering me to look for it just now.
Parasitic licensing

- Parasitic gaps in syntax:
  - Which books did you read _?
  - Which books did Pat go to university without taking _ with him?
  - Which books did Pat buy _ without reading _?

- Parasitic NPI licensing:
  - I don’t claim that Sandy lifted a finger to help me.
  - I don’t claim that Sandy ever lifted a finger to help me.

- Not frequent in corpora!

- Theoretical status unclear:
  - real parasitic licensing?
  - weak NPI helps to construct a context in which the strong NPI is licensed?
Double negation (Baker, 1970)

Data:
- Nobody lifted a finger to help Pat.
- Chris wouldn’t lift a finger to help Pat.
- * Nobody wouldn’t lift a finger to help Pat.

Qualitative corpus research: look for NPIs in sentences with double negation. (Hardly present in corpora!)

Intonation? “Metalinguistic” negation?

Theoretical implications unclear.
Intermediate Summary

- Rejecting NPI-status based on quantitative profile.
- Unexpected ("illogical") licensing behavior.
- More constellations of data that require empirical research.
polysemy and ambiguity
- the verb *matter* is an NPI, the noun is not.
- *bother* (= *annoy*) is an NPI, *bother* (= *take the trouble*) is not
- German *brauche* (*need*) is an NPI if it selects an infinitival complement, but not as a transitive verb.

reading-dependent licensing
- You say anything, and I’ll kill you.
- * You said anything, and I killed you.

inherently negative predicates (circularity!)
- The proposal lacks any plausibility.
- It was impossible to ever return.
Hoeksema’s Questions

**Lexicographical questions**

1. For any language, what are its NPIs?
2. Are there cross-linguistic regularities in the NPI-vocabulary?
3. What meanings are expressed by NPIs?
Hoeksema’s Questions

Distributional questions

1. What is the distribution of a given polarity item?
2. What, if any, distributional features do polarity items have in common?
3. Does the distribution of polarity items vary on a language-to-language basis, or from item to item?
Hoeksema’s Questions

The explanatory questions

1. Why are there polarity items?
2. Why is a particular item polarity sensitive?

Hoeksema (2000, pp. 116–117)