

NEGATIVE POLARITY: LICENSING CONDITIONS AND CONNECTIONS TO SCALAR IMPLICATURES

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Negative polarity items (NPIs) are a class of lexical items or phrases (including, ‘ever’, ‘any’, ‘lift a finger’) whose grammatical acceptability is sensitive to semantic features of their linguistic environment. It has long been claimed that NPIs are licensed exclusively in downward-entailing environments (Fauconnier, 1975; Ladusaw, 1979), where downward-entailingness (DE) is a generalized semantic notion of negativity. This generalization explains, for instance, the following contrasts in the acceptability of the NPI ‘ever’:

- (1) a. John won’t ever eat that. (2) a. Every student who ever ate that got ill.
b. *John will ever eat that. b. *Some student who ever ate that got ill.

Many researchers argue that the licensing of NPIs is pragmatic in nature, and closely related to the calculation of scalar implicatures (SIs) a paradigmatic pragmatic phenomenon.

The goal of this project was twofold. First, we wanted to use experimental techniques to collect robust grammaticality judgments about NPIs. To adjudicate between various theories of NPIs, we tested the acceptability of NPIs in DE environments but crucially also in non-monotonic environments and so-called Strawson DE environments for which different theories make different predictions *and* introspective judgments diverge (see Krifka, 1995; von Stechow, 1999; Chierchia, 2004; Homer, 2007). Second, we collected inferential judgments about scalar implicatures triggered in the same environments (see Chemla, 2009; Chemla and Spector, 2009).

We have conducted most of these experiments. The correlations we were looking for turned out to be very high, but the interpretation of the results required careful statistical analyses. We have written up a draft of the journal article. Rothschild went to Paris and met with Chemla and Homer and discussed a new series of experiments on the acquisition of NPIs.

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