
Establishing the limits between Polarity Sensitivity, Negative Polarity and Negative Concord

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By focusing on the behaviour of polarity elements from a variety of languages, we study the relationship between Polarity Sensitive Items (PSIs), Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) and Negative Concord items (NCIs) on the other.

We first focus on Basque, a language that has been claimed in the literature to have NPI licensing [15] but also to be a Strict NC language [4], [1]. We show (see [2]), that the Basque polarity elements are PSIs, not NCIs, and that as a consequence Basque has to be considered a PS language, not a NC one. We use Basque PSIs to set the standard of what the properties of PSIs are expected to be cross-linguistically and we contrast the behaviour of Basque PSIs with that of (negative) indefinites of Hindi, which [14] described as NPIs. We conclude that they are PSIs in that they are licensed in non-veridical contexts. Then we compare Basque (and Hindi) PSIs to English *any*-PSIs, and we show that they also have a similar behaviour in negative contexts. The distributional differences are argued to be the result of the existence of NQs in English, non-existent in Basque or Hindi. Finally, we compare PSIs to NCIs in so-called Strict NC languages (Romanian, Greek (see [3])). These two languages have been shown in the literature to possess NPIs as well as NCIs, which enables us to scrutinise the properties of PSIs and to observe their relevant structural differences with NPIs, and NCIs cross-linguistically. Then we investigate contrasts between NCIs and NPIs in Strict NC languages (Czech, Russian, or Modern Greek), and various so-called Non-Strict NC languages (Non-Standard English, French or Catalan) to show that NC is not a subtype of NPol but a subtype of PS and, as a consequence, NCIs derive from PSIs, not from NPIs [11].

The picture that emerges is one where PS is a general phenomenon across languages [9], with NPol and NC being subtypes of PS but independent phenomena from one another. Thus, languages may have (i) PS, NPol and NC as part of their grammar (Non-Standard English, Czech, Modern Greek, Catalan, Spanish and French), but some languages only show PS, with very few cases of NPol, and no NC (Basque, Hindi, or Standard English); (ii) NQs and not have other polarity elements; (iii) NCIs and not have other polarity items; (iv) only NPIs and not PSIs in general; (v) NCIs without having NPIs.

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