
Different routes to NPI licensing?

ERP evidence from emotive predicates in German

Anna Czymionka^{1,3}, Doris Penka² & Maribel Romero¹

¹Universität Konstanz, ²Universität Tübingen, ³Universität Fribourg
[anna.czymionka, doris.penka, maribel.romero]@uni-konstanz.de

Several accounts in the literature hold that NPI licensing is not a uniform phenomenon. One distinction that has been made is whether licensing is due to (some form of) negativity in (i) the logical entailment or (ii) the pragmatically mediated entailment. In (1a), for example, the NPI *ever* is licensed by an expression contributing negation to the semantics (*no one*), whereas in (2b) licensing by the emotive predicate *be surprised* involves a pragmatic step which corresponds either to an inference (Linebarger 1987, Giannakidou 2006) or is related to context dependency (von Stechow 1999, see also Crnic 2014).

- (1) a. **No one** had ever been to Trier before.
b. Sue was **surprised** that Bill had ever been to Trier before.

Xiang et al. (2016) found evidence for these different licensing routes by looking at the neural correlates of processing English sentences like (1). Replicating and improving on this study, we conducted an ERP study investigating the licensing of the weak NPI *jemals* 'ever' in German in clauses that contain either a negative DP (NEGATION), an emotive predicate (EMOTIVE), or no licenser (UNLICENSED).

Main results: (a) an N400 increase for UNLICENSED relative to NEGATION and EMOTIVE; (b) in the early P600 time window, positivities for EMOTIVE and UNLICENSED relative to NEGATION, which are stronger for EMOTIVE than for UNLICENSED and differ in topography; (c) in the later P600 time window, positivities for EMOTIVE and UNLICENSED relative to NEGATION, which do not differ from each other. Our experimental results suggest that licensing of NPIs with emotive predicates involves higher processing costs than licensing by expressions contributing negation to the semantics. They thus support analyses of NPI licensing that distinguish between licensing via logical entailment and licensing via pragmatically enriched entailment. In the talk, we will interpret these results in relation to the different theoretical accounts of spelling out the pragmatic step involved in NPI licensing by emotive predicates (negative inference vs. context dependency).

References: • Crnic, L. (2014). Non-monotonicity in NPI licensing. *Natural Language Semantics* 22, 169–217. • von Stechow, K. (1999). NPI licensing, Strawson entailment, and context dependency. *Journal of Semantics* 16(2), 97–148. • Giannakidou, A. (2006). Only, emotive factives and the dual nature of polarity dependency. *Language* 82(3), 575–603. • Linebarger, M. (1987). Negative polarity and grammatical representation. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 10, 325–387. • Xiang, M., Grove, J. & A. Giannakidou (2016). Semantic and pragmatic processes in the comprehension of negation: An event related potential study of negative polarity sensitivity. *Journal of Neurolinguistics* 38, 71–88.