
Discourse negativity: Counterfactual content and at-issueness

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Negativity-tags (neg-tags) occur naturally after negative clausal antecedents, but not affirmative ones (1). They include: (2a) English *neither*-tags, (2b) ‘*not even*’ tags (Klima 1964), and (2c) factive uses of ‘*why not*’ interrogatives.

- (1) *The defense lawyer’s statement {didn’t make / # made} an impact in this case.*
- (2)
 - a. *Yeah, and **neither** did the testimonies.*
 - b. *Yeah, **not even** on the public perception.*
 - c. *Yeah, and the jury foreperson explained **why not**.*

This work presents evidence for a discourse-level view of neg-tag licensing. While prior accounts link neg-tags to clausal negation (*sentential negativity hypothesis*, e.g., Klima 1964; Kramer and Rawlins 2009), I argue that they are sensitive to counterfactual propositionals in a discourse-level representation (*discourse negativity hypothesis*, Hofmann 2022). Exp. 1 collected naturalness ratings for neg-tags, manipulating how the antecedent conveyed counterfactuality. Neg-tags were rated as natural (compared to an affirmative baseline) with counterfactual antecedents even without explicit negation, e.g., with neg-raising (NR; *I don’t get the feeling...*), anti-veridical (AV) embeddings (*It’s a lie...*) or explicit irony cues (*as if...*), supporting a discourse-level account. However, there was also gradient variability among antecedent types, where AV and ironic licensors received lower ratings, suggesting additional pragmatic factors.

Exp. 2 tested whether the variability could be explained by at-issueness, based on Tonhauser et al. (2018). To test how easily the embedded counterfactual content is construed as addressing the Question Under Discussion (QUD), participants rated how naturally the antecedents from Exp. 1 could respond to a question targeting the embedded proposition. There was a strong positive correlation: higher at-issueness measures for the counterfactual content corresponded to higher neg-tag naturalness ratings, lending further support to discourse-negativity, and raising questions about the role of propositional salience relative to the QUD in modulating anaphoric availability.

References: • Anand et al. (2021). The Santa Cruz sluicing data set. *Language* 97(1), e68–e88. • Brasoveanu et al. (2013). N-words and sentential negation: Evidence from polarity particles and VP-ellipsis. *S&P* 6(7), 1–33. • Klima (1964). Negation in English. *The structure of language*, 246–32. • Krifka (2013). Response Particles as Propositional Anaphors. *SALT* 23, 1–18. • Tonhauser et al. (2018). How projective is projective content? *JoS*, 35(3), 495–542.