

Positive Polarity Items (PPIs) in Romanian – Experimental Evidence

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Abstract

In a previous paper (Zamfirescu, 2011) we argued that the distribution of PPIs can be explained in terms of their inherent meaning/ lexical semantics – analyzing PPIs as scalar operators, showing that PPIs are scale preserving, allowing inferences from high values to low values. The aim of this paper is to argue that lexical positive polarity items (PPIs) like ‘olecuta’, ‘o sumedenie’, ‘cat ai clipi’ are sensitive to the semantic property antimorphy – classical negation ‘not’, ‘deloc’ and ‘nicidecum’

Keywords

Positive polarity, antimorphy, downward entailment, inference

1. General/ Main Concerns:

In this section we present previous accounts of PPIs and claim that we need to differentiate between various types of PPIs, just as we differentiate between NPIs.

Baker (1970) claimed that PPIs cannot occur in the scope of clausemate negation, or, in other words, PPIs are said to be anti-licensed by negation, unless the sentence can be interpreted as an emphatic denial of a similarly phrased statement.

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|--|--------------|
| (1) He found something. | [6] |
| Wrong! He DIDn’t / DID NOT find something. | √ not > some |

As shown in Szabolcsi (2004) the denial reading can be suppressed when we judge the negated clause in the context of a ‘why’ – question.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| (2) Why did John look so disappointed? | |
| Because he didn’t find something. | * not > some |

“NPIs are appropriate in structures in the scope of a downward-entailing expression. PPIs are appropriate elsewhere” [5, 168]. Nevertheless, ‘some’ and ‘already’ seem to be fine in the following contexts.

(3) a. No more than three guests have eaten *some* of the soup.

b. No more than seven customers have *already* paid their bills.

van der Wouden (1997) proposes the following '*laws of polarity*' to differentiate between various types of Dutch PPIs.

- **strong PPIs** are incompatible with all monotone decreasing contexts ('few, at most' etc.)
- **PPIs of medium strength** are compatible with downward monotone contexts but incompatible with anti-additive ones ('deny, refuse, nobody' etc.)
- **weak PPIs** are compatible with downward monotonic and anti-additive contexts, but incompatible with antimorphic ones ('not, not-at-all')¹

The following examples [5,134] suggest that the situation of English PPIs is not that clear either.

(4) a. *Someone hasn't eaten some of his soup.

b. *John hasn't already finished the exam.

c. *John wouldn't rather be in Cleveland.

(5) a. *No one ate some of the soup.

b. *No one has already finished the exam.

c. *No one would rather be in Cleveland.

(6) a. ?Few people ate some of the soup.

b. Few people have already finished the exam.

c. Few people would rather be in Cleveland.

(7) a. ?Hardly anyone ate some of the soup.

b. ?Hardly anyone has already finished the exam.

c. Hardly anyone would rather be in Cleveland.

The following examples, show that PPIs like 'someone/ something' cannot be in the immediate scope of a negative quantifier or 'without' – antiadditive operators, but it can occur below 'at most five' – downward entailing operators.

¹ A hierarchy of monotone decreasing functors: (cf. [7])

Monotone decreasing: $f(X \subseteq Y) \rightarrow f(Y) \subseteq f(X)$ – few, seldom, hardly

Antimultiplicative: $f(X \cap Y) = f(X) \cup f(Y)$ – not every, not always

Anti-additive: $f(X \cup Y) = f(X) \cap f(Y)$ – nobody, never, nothing

Antimorphic: $f(X \cap Y) = f(X) \cup f(Y)$

$f(X \cup Y) = f(X) \cap f(Y)$ – not, not the teacher, allerminst

- (8) a. John didn't call someone. * not > some [6]
 b. No one called someone. * no one > some
 c. John came to the party without someone. * without > some
 (9) At most five boys called someone. √ at most 5 > some

What we want to retain from this section, as a conclusion, is that we can find a way to differentiate between various types of PPIs by looking at the way PPIs scope below different types of NPI – licensers – building on the logical properties of these ‘negative contexts’, on the compatibility of polarity items with various semantically definable types of negation. The claim that ‘PPIs resist overt negation’ (5:135), requires some modification because it is easily falsified.

2. Experimental evidence - PPIs and clausemate negation

The aim of this section is to bring experimental evidence for the claim that PPIs do not occur in the immediate scope of a clausemate anti-morphic Op – ‘*nu*’, ‘*deloc*’, ‘*nicidecum*’.

The participants – 50 students of English philology (Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest) and 50 other native speakers (friends, family) whose L1 is Romanian – were asked to perform grammaticality judgement tasks, evaluating 78 contexts, out of which 39 were assertive contexts and 39 were negative contexts. The aim of the experiments was to see if native speakers of Romanian can rule out the negative contexts that contained examples of PPIs and can attest that the assertive contexts are grammatical. We established the ratio of speakers that has to consider a sentence well-formed at 70% in order to count as proof of its grammaticality. The instructions for the grammaticality judgement tasks were provided on the questionnaire, thus the participants had to mark *Yes* or *No*, if the sentences seem correct or not in Romanian, as in the following examples.

(10)

- a. [...] am convingerea că trebuie să mai așteptam până
 [...] have-1st.p,sg. conviction that must SA more wait-1st.p, pl. until
când va face plopul pere și răchita mișunele...
 when will-3rd.p,sg. make poplar-the pear-pl. and willow-the ten-week stock-pl.²

² <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:9Ng0SYNunREJ:legea290-2003.jurnalultau.ro/intrebari-si-raspunsuri-f5/aplicarea-legii-t2.html+cand+o+face+plopul+pere+si+rachita+micsunele&cd=28&hl=ro&ct=clnk&gl=ro>

- ‘I am convinced we need to wait until hell freezes over/ till the cows come home.’
- b. Poate printre toate răutățile, mai găsim și **o**
 Maybe among all malice-pl still find-1st.p.pl also a
fărâmbă de bunătate”.
 crumb/shred DE kindness.³
- ‘Maybe, among all the bad things around us, we can find a bit of good kindness.’
- c. Există **un pic** de Lizuca în fiecare...
 Exist a bit of Lizuca in each ...⁴
- ‘There is a bit of Lizuca in each of us.’
- d. [...] iar vulpea linse totul **într-o clipită**.⁵
 [...] and fox-the licked everything in a moment
 ‘[...] and the fox licked everything in a flash.’
- e. Au dat **o groază** de bani ca să
 Have-3rd. p, pl give-past.part a heap of money-pl CA SA
 arate identic!
 look identical!⁶
- ‘They paid lots of money to look the same.’
- f. Hmmm, astăzi pot spune că am avut
 Hmmm, today can-1st. p.sg. say that have-1st.p.sg have-past.part.
 o zi **cam** dificilă și plină de emoții.
 a day sorta difficult and full of excitement
- ‘Hmmm, I can say that today was somewhat difficult and full of excitement.’⁷

The results show that:

(10a) – The idiomatic expression ‘când va face plopul pere și răchita micșunele’ was tested in the following assertive context: ‘Va recunoaște că a greșit când va face plopul pere și răchita micșunele’, and 95% of the participants consider this sentence grammatical and 5% judged it as ungrammatical. The same expression was tested in the following negative context: ‘**Nu** voi ajunge președinte **când va face plopul pere și răchita micșunele**’, and 92% of the participants consider this sentence ungrammatical and 8% judged it as grammatical.

³ www.princeradublog.ro/atitudini/o-farama-de-bunatate/

⁴ http://www.iqads.ro/Analize_Reclame_read_9175/exista_un_picde_lizuca_in_fiecare.html

⁵ <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:VhG8rbZzQBgJ:www.mamica.ro/povesti/+intr-o+clipita&cd=58&hl=ro&ct=clnk&gl=ro>

⁶ http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:cM_Gu1zG2W0J:bravonet.ro/blog/au-cheltuit-pest-60-000-de-lire-sterline-ca-sa-arate-la-fel/2009/07/14/comment-page-1/+o+groaza+de&cd=21&hl=ro&ct=clnk&gl=ro - Marți, 14 Iulie, 2009

⁷ <http://robciucionut.info/2010/06/09/o-zi-cam-dificila/>

(10b) – 94% of the participants consider this sentence grammatical and 6% judged it as ungrammatical. The same item, ‘o farama’, was tested in the negative context: ‘Denisa Jebeleanu **nu** aduce **o fărâmbă** de arta în locuințele timișorenilor.’, and 70% of the participants consider this sentence ungrammatical and 30% judged it as grammatical.

(10c) – This sentence was tested in its negative form: ‘**Nu** există **un pic** de Lizuca în fiecare.’, and 85% of the participants consider it ungrammatical and 15% judged it as grammatical. The same item, ‘un pic’ was tested in the following assertive context, ‘Merită, cred eu, să ne gândim un pic la acest exemplu de curaj și hotărâre.’, and 94% of the participants consider this sentence grammatical and 6% judged it as ungrammatical.

(10d) – The PP ‘într-o clipită’ was tested in the following assertive context: ‘Infuleca tot într-o clipită’, and 92% of the participants consider this sentence grammatical and 8% judged it as ungrammatical. The same item was tested in the negative context: ‘**Nu** ajunge **într-o clipită**’, and 45% of the participants consider the sentence grammatical and 55% judged it as ungrammatical.

(10e) – 91% of the participants considered the example grammatical and 9% judged it as ungrammatical. The same item, ‘o groaza’, was tested in the following negative context: ‘Familia de la Zoo **nu** a avut **o groază** de musafiri’, where 39% of the participants considered the example grammatical and 61% judged it as ungrammatical.

(10f) – 90% of the participants in our experiment consider this sentence grammatical and 10% judged it as ungrammatical. The same item, ‘cam’, was also tested in the negative context ‘Astăzi **nu** sunt **cam** trist’ and the results show that 96% of the participants consider this sentence ungrammatical, and 4% judged it as grammatical.

The following items/ expressions ‘într-o clipită, o droaie, cât ai clipi, când va face popul pere și răchita micșunele, ca dracu’, o fărâmbă, cam’, were tested in a second experiment with 90 participants – 40 students of English philology (Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest) and 50 other native speakers (friends, family). The questionnaire comprised of 14 sentences, where 7 of the sentences tested the occurrence of the previously mentioned items in the scope of ‘*nicidecum*’ and the other 7 sentences tested the occurrence of the same items in the scope of ‘*deloc*’. The instructions were provided on the questionnaire, and the participants had to mark Yes or No, if the sentences seem correct/ acceptable or not in Romanian. As was previously mentioned we established the threshold of acceptability at 70% for the following examples. For reasons of space I will only present

(11)

- a. *Citesc în ziare **nicidecum o droaie** de minciuni.
Read-1st.p,sg. in newspaper-pl. not-at-all a pack of lie-pl.
'*I read in newspapers tons of lies not-at-all.'
- b. *Ion are **nicidecum o fărâmbă** de credință.
Ion have-3rd.p,sg. not-at-all a crumb DE faith.
'*Ion has a little faith not-at-all.'
- c. *Ajung la serviciu **nicidecum într-o clipită**.
Get-1st.p,sg. at work not-at-all in a moment.
'*I get to work in a jiffy not-at-all.'
- d. *Trimit scrisorile **deloc într- o clipită**.
Send-1st.p,sg. letter-pl.-the at all in a moment.
'* I will send the letters in a jiffy at all.'
- e. *Aud la radio **deloc o droaie** de prostii.
Hear-1st.p, sg. at radio at all a pack of idiocy-pl.
'* I hear tons of idiocies on the radio at all.'
- f. *Mi- a ramas **deloc o fărâmbă** de inteligență.
CL-1st.p, sg.Gen. have-3rd.p, sg. left at all a crumb of intelligence.
'*I have a little intelligence left at all.'

The results show that:

(11a) – 1,1% of the participants considered this example grammatical and 98,8% judged it as ungrammatical.

(11b) – 3,3% of the participants considered this example grammatical and 96,6% judged it as ungrammatical.

(11c) – 23,3% of the participants considered this example grammatical and 76,6% judged it as ungrammatical.

(11d) – 1,1% of the participants considered the example grammatical and 98,8% judged it as ungrammatical.

(11e) – 1,1% of the participants considered the example grammatical and 98,8% judged it as ungrammatical.

(11f) – 3,3% of the participants considered the example grammatical and 96,6% judged it as ungrammatical.

In conclusion, the prediction we started out from is valid – native speakers of Romanian attested the fact that the expressions/ items used in the examples

qualify as PPIs that cannot scope below immediate antimorphic operators like ‘*nu*’, ‘*deloc*’, ‘*nicidecum*’. The occurrence of items/ expressions similar to ‘in a jiffy/ in the twinkling of an eye’ or ‘tons’ in (10d, e) – were lower than we would have liked them to be maybe because the participants read the sentences as an emphatic denial of a similarly phrased statement (some PPIs can appear in the scope of clausemate negation if focused).

3. Further Issues: In a future paper we will explain the distribution of PPIs in licensing terms, built on the NPI – PPI parallelism and we will argue that lexical PPIs in Romanian are double NPIs that have two NPI – features: one is a strong – NPI feature like that of ‘yet’ or ‘squat’, which requires a clausemate anti-additive licenser, without intervention. The other feature is a weak – NPI feature like that of ‘ever’, which requires a monotone – decreasing licenser, not necessarily clausemate but without intervention.

In a future paper we will bring evidence for the following: PPIs can scope below superordinate negation; PPIs can take scope below DE operators; the PPI is not simply prohibited from appearing in the scope of negation – the relation between the PPI and negation is subject to intervention effects – PPIs can scope below negation if there is another operator intervening = shielding phenomenon

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