

Licensing Conditions for Different Types of PPIs in Romanian

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Abstract

In a previous paper (Zamfirescu, 2012) we analyzed experimental evidence which showed 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'. In this paper we present a classification of PPIs with respect to the class of negative contexts, contexts which license negative polarity items.

Key words

licencing conditions, sensitivity of PPIs, occurrence of PPIs

1. Introduction

As known, polarity items are compatible with various semantically definable types of non-assertive contexts/ operators, like: downward entailing operators, anti-additive operators and anti-morphic operators. Zwarts (1998) shows that the three licensing conditions, i.e. the compatibility with the various semantically types of negation mentioned above, are downwards applicable, in the sense that they hold for PIs that are members of a class with a weaker condition. This falls out from the algebraic definitions of these negations, given here in (1) – (3). The underlined items in the following examples represent typical NPIs in English and Romanian.

Downward Entailing: $X \subseteq Y \rightarrow f(Y) \subseteq f(X)$ – few, seldom, hardly, at most N etc.

(1) a. **Few** students ever said anything.

(Gajewski, <http://www.gajewski.uconn.edu/papers/NLSNPI.pdf>)

b. **At most** 5 students ever said anything.

(Gajewski, <http://www.gajewski.uconn.edu/papers/NLSNPI.pdf>)

c. **Puțini** *studenți* dau doi bani *pe noul*
regulament.

Few student-pl. give-3rd.p.pl. two money-pl. on new-the.
regulations

‘Few students give a damn on the new regulations.’

d. *Cel mult 5 colegi cred o iotă din ce
spune Maria.*

At most 5 colleague-pl. believe-3rd.p.pl. an iota from what
say-2nd.p.sg. Maria.

‘At most 5 colleagues believe an iota from what Maria is
saying.’

Anti-additive: $f(XUY) = f(X) \cap f(Y)$ (in other words: $(X \text{ or } Y) = f(X) \text{ and } f(Y)$) – nobody, never, nothing, deny/ refuse/ be amazed, surprised; without etc.

(2) a. Sandy is *amazed/ surprised* that Robin ever ate kale. (Kai von Fintel, 1999)

b. Sandy is *sorry/ regrets* that Robin bought any car. (Kai von Fintel, 1999)

c. *Sunt surprins că Maria a pus geană pe geană azi.*

Am surprised that Maria have-3rd.p.sg. put eyelash on eyelash today.

‘I am surprised that Mary has ever brought flowers.’

d. *A plecat fără a spune o iotă.*

Have-3rd.p.sg. left without to say an iota.

‘S/he left without saying an iota.’

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

$f(XUY) = f(X) \cap f(Y)$ – not, not the teacher,
allermint

in other words:

$f(X \text{ or } Y) = f(X) \text{ and } f(Y)$

$f(X \text{ and } Y) = f(X) \text{ or } f(Y)$

(3) a. Bill *isn't* here yet. (Giannakidou, 2006)

b. I haven't seen Bill in years. (Giannakidou, 2006)

c. B ill does *n't* like pasta either. (Giannakidou, 2006)

d. *Nu înțeleg deloc această problemă.*

Not understand-1st.p.sg. at all this problem.

‘I don't understand this problem at all.’

e. *Vasile Blaga nu dă doi bani pe sondaje.*
 Vasile Blaga not give-3rd.p.sg. two money-pl. on survey-pl.
 ‘Vasile Blaga doesn’t give a red cent on the polls.’
 (<http://www.ziuanews.ro/stiri/vasile-bлага-nu-da-doi-bani-pe-sondaje-16302>)

Given the previously mentioned typology, we shall see that all PPIs in Romanian are compatible with downward entailing operators (*puțini*, *cel mult N* – ‘few’, ‘at mostN’ etc.), and thus Romanian does not exhibit any strong PPIs and we also suggest that PPIs like ‘*într-o clipită/cât ai clipi* (in the blink of an eye) and *cam* (‘sorta’) cannot scope below anti-additive operators (*fără*, *neagă* – ‘without’, ‘deny’ etc.), which makes them PPIs of medium strength.

2. Experimental Evidence – The sensitivity of PPIs to other types of negative contexts

In order to provide an accurate classification of PPIs in Romanian with respect to their occurrence in the scope of non-assertive contexts (as such a classification was never proposed for PPIs in Romanian) we will test the occurrence of PPIs in the scope of the following operators: downward entailing operators (*puțini*, *cel mult N* – ‘few’, ‘at mostN’ etc.) and anti-additive operators (*fără*, *neagă* – ‘without’, ‘deny’ etc.). The expectation is that in **Romanian lexical PPIs are not of the strong type**, in the sense that there aren’t any lexical PPIs that cannot occur in the scope of downward entailing operators (*puțini*, *cel mult N* – ‘few’, ‘at mostN’ etc.). Another prediction is that there are some lexical PPIs that cannot occur in the scope of anti-additive operators (*fără*, *neagă* – ‘without’, ‘deny’ etc.), which makes them **PPIs of medium strength**.⁵

The following examples show that *puțini* (‘few’) and *cel mult n* (‘at most N’) are downward entailing operators. As expected, they license inferences from sets to subsets.

- (4) a. *Puțini copii mănâncă legume.* →
 Few child-pl. eat vegetable-pl.

⁵ As was shown in Zamfirescu (2012), lexical PPIs in Romanian cannot scope below the clausemate antimorphic operators: *nu* (‘not’), and thus we suggested that **mostly, Romanian lexical PPIs are of the weak type**.

- ‘Few children eat vegetables.’
 → **Putini** copii mănâncă broccoli.
 Few child-pl. eat broccoli.
 ‘Few children eat broccoli.’
- b. **Cel mult** 5 invitați au băut alcool. →
 At most 5 guest-pl. have-3rd.p.pl. drunk alcohol.
 ‘At most 5 guests drank alcohol.’
- **Cel mult** 5 invitați au băut vin.
 At most 5 guest-pl. have-3rd.p.pl. drunk wine
 ‘At most 5 guests drank alcohol.’

The following example shows that *refuză* (‘refuse’) and *fără* (‘without’) are antiadditive operators.

- (5) a. **Refuză** să mănânce sau să doarmă. ↔
 Refuse-3rd.p.sg. SA eat or SA sleep
 ‘He refuses to eat or sleep.’
- ↔ **Refuză** să mănânce și **refuză** să doarmă. ↔
 Refuse-3rd.p.sg. SA eat and refuse-3rd.p.sg. SA sleep
 ‘He refuses to eat and he refuses to sleep.’
- b. Maria a plecat **fără** bani sau acte.
 ↔
 Maria have-3rd.p.sg. left without money-pl. or document-pl.
 ‘Maria left without money or documents.’
- ↔ Maria a plecat **fără** bani și Maria a
 a
 Maria have-3rd.p.sg. left without money-pl. and Maria have-3rd.p.sg.
 plecat **fără** acte
 left without document-pl.
 ‘Maria left without money and Maria left without documents.’

The aim of the following experiment is to see if speakers of Romanian rule out or judge as grammatical sentences where PPIs scope below antiadditive operators like *fără* (‘without’) and *refuză* (‘refuse’). The hypothesis is that if PPIs can scope below antiadditive

operators like *fără* ('without') and *refuză* ('refuse') we talk about PPIs of medium strength and by contrast if the PPIs we test cannot scope below antiadditive operators like *fără* ('without') and *refuză* ('refuse') we talk about weak PPIs.

With respect to the PPIs' sensitivity to antiadditive operators like *fără* ('without') we tested items/ phrases like '*într-o clipită* ('in a jiffy'), *cât ai clipi* (before you could say Jack Robinson'), *ca dracu*' ('as hell') on 90 participants – 40 students of English philology (Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest) and 50 other native speakers (friends, family). We established the threshold of acceptability at 70% for the following examples. The footnotes show the percentages we obtained in the experiment and thus we ordered the examples ranging from the highest percentage we obtained to the lowest.

(6)

a. **Concurenții* *au* *așteptat în culise* *fără*
a se

Contestant-pl.-the have-3rd.p.pl. waited in backstage
without to

emoționa *într-o clipită*.

get nervous in a moment. ⁶

'*The contestants waited backstage without getting nervous in a jiffy.'

b. **Soldații* *vor* *răspunde la apelul*
comandantului *fără*

Soldier-pl.the will-3rd.p.pl. answer at call-the commander-
Gen. without

să se *gândească* *cât* *ai* *clipi*.

SA CL-refl. think how much/ many would-2nd.p.sg. blink. ⁷

c. *Elevii* *iau* *note* *mici* *fără* *a fi* *ca dracu*
de proști.

Student-pl.the take mark-pl. small without to be like hell
DE stupid⁸

⁶ 10% of the participants considered this example grammatical and 90% judged it as ungrammatical.

⁷ 17,7% of the participants considered the example grammatical and 82,2% judged it as ungrammatical.

‘The students take low marks without being stupid as hell.’

d. *O conspirație fără o fărâmbă de romantism e ca o zeamă fără oleacă de piper.*⁹

A conspiracy without a crumb DE romance is like a soup without a little DE pepper

‘A conspiracy without a little bit of romance is like soup without a little pepper.’

e. ? *Politicienii refuză să voteze într-o clipită.*

Politician-pl.the. refuse SA vote in a blink.

‘The politicians refuse to vote in the blink of an eye.’

f. ? *Copiii refuză să mănânce ciorba cât ai clipi.*

Child-pl.the. refuse SA eat soup-the how much/ many would-2nd.p.sg. blink.

‘The children refuse to eat in the blink of an eye.’

g. *Ion refuză să arate o fărâmbă de bun simț.*

Ion refuses SA show a crumb DE good sense.

‘Ion refuses to show a bit of decency.’

h. *Profesorii refuză să fie ca dracu’ de umiliți.*

Teacher-pl.the. refuse SA be like hell DE humiliated.

‘The teachers refuse to be humiliated as hell.’

The percentage shows that around 70% of the participants considered that *ca dracu’* (‘as hell’) is acceptable in the scope of *fără* (‘without’). Although we haven’t tested *o fărâmbă/ oleacă* (‘a little’) and *o droaie* (‘a lot’) in the scope of *fără* (‘without’), we suggest that (6d) should be considered grammatical by Romanian speakers.

The percentages show that *‘într-o clipită* (‘in a jiffy’), *cât ai clipi* (before you could say Jack Robinson’) were judged as ungrammatical by many participants. Although we haven’t tested the occurrence of these items/ phrases in the scope of *refuză* (‘refuse’) the examples in (6e, f) sound as unacceptable to me as (6a, b). Thus, the inability of *‘într-o clipită* (‘in a jiffy’), *cât ai clipi* (before you could say Jack Robinson’), to scope below *fără* (‘without’) and *refuză* (‘refuse’) makes them, for now, **PPIs of medium strength**. As (6g, h) sound just as acceptable to me as (6c, d) we suggest that *ca dracu’*

⁸ 63,3% of the participants considered the example grammatical and 36,6% judged it as ungrammatical.

⁹ <http://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/razi-tu-razi-harap-alb-scrisorile-lui-buraga-218624/>

(‘as hell’), *o fărâmbă* (‘a bit’) are acceptable in the scope of *fără* (‘without’) and *refuză* (‘refuse’), which makes them **weak PPIs**.

In conclusion, we suggest that ‘*într-o clipită/ cât ai clipi* (in the blink of an eye) and *cam* (‘sorta’) qualify as PPIs of medium strength.

We expect that the following experimental study will show that ‘*ca dracu*’ (‘as hell’), *o fărâmbă* (‘a little’) can also happily scope below downward entailing operators like *puțini* (‘few’) and *cel mult N* (‘at most N’).¹⁰

With respect to the sensitivity of PPIs to operators like *puțini* (‘few’) and *cel mult N* (‘at most N’), we tested items/ phrases like ‘*într-o clipită* (‘in a jiffy’), *ca dracu*’ on 90 participants – 40 students of English philology (Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest) and 50 other native speakers (friends, family). 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. The footnotes show the percentages we obtained in the experiment and thus we ordered the examples ranging from the lowest percentage we obtained to the highest.

(7)

- a. *Puțini politicieni* au *o fărâmbă* de bun simț.
Few politician-pl. have-3rd.p.pl. a crumb DE good sense.¹¹
‘Few politicians have a bit of decency.’
- b. *Puțini elevi* sunt *ca dracu* de proști.
Few student-pl. are like hell DE stupid.¹²
‘Few students are stupid as hell.’
- c. *Puține secretare* dactilografiază 100 de cuvinte *într-o clipită*.

¹⁰ Remember that the three licensing conditions within the **hierarchy of monotone decreasing functors** are downwards applicable in the sense that they hold for PIs that are members of a class with a weaker condition.

¹¹ 71% of the participants considered this sentence grammatical and 29% judged it as ungrammatical.

¹² 74,4% of the participants considered this sentence grammatical and 25,5% judged it as ungrammatical.

Few secretary-pl. type 100 DE word-pl. in a moment.¹³

‘Few secretaries type 100 words in a New York minute.’

d. ***Cel mult 5 profesori*** semnează protestul *într-o clipită*.¹⁴
At most 5 teacher-pl. sign protest-the in a moment.

‘At most 5 teenagers sign the protest in a jiffy.’

e. ***Cel mult 5 elevi*** sunt *ca dracu* de proști.¹⁵
At most 5 student-pl. are like hell DE stupid.

‘At most 5 students are stupid as hell.’

f. ***Cel mult 5 locatari*** au *o fărâmbă* de bun simț.¹⁶
At most 5 tenant-pl. have-3rd.p.pl. a crumb DE good sense.

‘At most 5 tenants have got a bit of decency.’

The percentages show that over 70% of the participants judged as grammatical the occurrence of PPIs like ‘*ca dracu*’ (‘as hell’), *o fărâmbă* (‘a little’) below downward entailing operators like *puțini* (‘few’) and *cel mult N* (‘at most N’). Following the requirements imposed by the hierarchy of negative strength ‘*ca dracu*’ (‘as hell’), *o fărâmbă* (‘a little’) are **weak PPIs**. Also, the percentages show that *într-o clipită/ cât ai clipi* (in the blink of an eye) can scope below downward entailing operators like *puțini* (‘few’) and *cel mult N* (‘at most N’) we must conclude that they are **PPIs of medium strength** and not strong PPIs.

3. General conclusion:

The aim of the experiments we presented above was to see if speakers of Romanian judge as grammatical or rule out the occurrence of PPIs in the scope of the antiadditive operators like *fără* (‘without’) and *refuză* (‘refuse’) and in the scope of downward entailing operators

¹³ 96,6% of the participants considered this sentence grammatical and 3,3% judged it as ungrammatical.

¹⁴ 76,6% of the participants considered this sentence grammatical and 23,3% judged it as ungrammatical.

¹⁵ 76,6% of the participants considered this sentence grammatical and 23,3% judged it as ungrammatical.

¹⁶ 93,3% of the participants considered this sentence grammatical and 6,6% judged it as ungrammatical.

like *puțini* ('few') and *cel mult N* ('at most N'). In other words, the aim of the experiments was to see what differences there are between typical NPI licensing contexts.

As this is the first experimental study that aimed at classifying PPIs in Romanian with respect to non-assertive contexts, which typically license NPIs, we can conclude that, according to the experimental results obtained, Romanian does not exhibit any strong PPIs, '*ca dracu*' ('as hell'), *o fărâmbă* ('a little') and their synonyms are **PPIs of the weak type**, while '*într-o clipită/cât ai clipi*' (in the blink of an eye) and *cam* ('sorta') and their synonyms are **PPIs of medium strength**.

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