Neg-words, NPIs and speaker variation: experimental evidence from Czech
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Recent research on NPIs and neg-words followed the experimental turn, and many valuable observations were made concerning the relationship between monotonicity in the NPIs licensing and scalar implicatures (Chemla et al., 2011); the success of different types of NPI theories in their prediction of non-monotonic licensing (Alexandropoulou et al., 2020); but also concerning the division of labor between truth-conditions and not the at-issue meaning of the environment where NPIs occur (theoretical and experimental works as Gajewski 2011; Gajewski and Hsieh 2014; Gajewski 2016 and Chierchia 2019). Compared to that, little is known about synchronic variation of NPIs (even if for neg-words substantial work was done in syntax: Burnett et al. 2018, e.g.).

In this talk, I bring new experimental evidence from Czech. In Czech, both NPIs and neg-words appear, but since Czech (like all other Slavic languages) is a strict negative concord language, the distribution of strong NPIs and neg-words overlaps greatly. Nevertheless, some constructions distinguish between strong NPIs and neg-words even in strict negative concord languages, Neg-Raising being one of them, as illustrated in (1). In (1) strong NPIs (*ani jeden student* 'not even one student') are strongly preferred to neg-words (*žádný student* 'any student') as was experimentally confirmed in Dočekal and Dotlačil (2018).

(1) Nový vedoucí katedry   nechce,   aby   {ani   jeden student / #žádný
     new   head   department neg-wants COMP not-even one   student / any

     student} vyletěl u   státnic.
     student failed   by exams

'The new head of the department doesn't want a single student/any student to fail the exams.'

In my talk, I will report the results of three experiments targeting Czech strong NPIs and neg-words. Both expressions were tested for acceptability in Neg-Raising clauses, contexts with manipulated likelihood/noteworthiness scales, equatives, fragment answers, and others. The experimental results are: (i) strong NPIs are preferred to neg-words if modifying expressions on low end-points of a scale, but neg-words win over strong NPIs if they modify high end-point of a scale; (ii) in equatives, neg-words are much more acceptable than strong NPIs; (iii) most importantly: there are (by speaker) negative correlations between acceptability of strong NPIs in one context and its rejection in another. By way of example, in all three experiments, a substantial number of subjects accepted *ani jeden N* 'not even one N' with top of a scale but rejected it in Neg-Raising contexts. Similarly, some speakers accept *ani jeden N* in the standard of equatives, but these speakers then reject it in a Neg-Raising context like in (1). It is plausible to interpret such behavior as a speaker variance. For the discussed subjects, *ani jeden N* is a neg word. However, it is a strong NPI for other speakers (these speakers reject *ani jeden N* in equatives and accept it in Neg-Raising clauses a.o.).

The rest of the talk will discuss the consequences of the experiments on our current theories of neg-words. I propose that the speaker variation (and some other puzzling patterns) is most easily handled by semantic theories of negative-concord (original formulation: Ovalle

and Guerzoni 2004, modern reincarnation: Kuhn 2022) where (next to the standard indefinite description truth conditions) there is a postulated not at-issue meaning part of neg-words semantics (which can be formalized as a post-supposition requirement for no discourse referents of neg-words). This theoretical stance then allows us to analyze neg-words close to strong NPIs, which in theories like Crnič (2011) must be licensed by association with covert *even* triggering a likelihood presupposition. Therefore, the speaker variation and other problematic data patterns can be elegantly handled. Moreover, despite some open empirical questions (compared to the standard syntactic theory of negative concord, see Zeijlstra 2004 a.o.), the semantic theories of neg-words also give more promising answers to some old puzzles concerning the acceptability of neg-words in equatives, elliptical answers, etc.

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