

Comparative Ellipsis - Licensing Negative Concord and NPIs without Negation

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Romanian "niciodată" (never) and "vreodată" (ever) can be identified as a negative concord item (NCI) and a negative polarity item (NPI), respectively. While the NCI must always appear with an overt clausemate negation, the NPI can appear in other non-negative contexts, such as the yes/no questions in (1a) or the sentential comparative in (1b). When clausemate with negation, the NCI and the NPI are interchangeable (see (2)). The puzzle is that in another comparative structure, illustrated in (3a), the NCI appears without overt negation. Moreover, this comparative structure precludes the use of an NPI (3b).

The analysis I propose relies on Watanabe's (2004) theory of negative concord, which uses feature copying to rule out the double negation reading. The first step toward an explanation is to recognize that (3a) is derived by PF-ellipsis from a structure very much like (4). As Watanabe observes, an affirmative sentence (here the main clause) can only provide an antecedent for an elided negative sentence if the condition on identity is semantic rather than syntactic. The elided negation must become semantically null, which follows directly from his account. In a nutshell, the NCI and the negation both bear interpretable negative features, and the NCI bears an additional uninterpretable Focus feature ("nici" in Romanian), which activates it. The mechanism involved is Agree followed by feature copying, as in (6). As a result of feature copying, the negation bears two negative features which cancel each other out. Now, the main clause can provide an appropriate antecedent for the semantically affirmative elided material, which explains the grammaticality of (3a). This also directly explains why (3b) is bad on the same structure. The NPI does not bear a negative feature to cancel out that of negation, and no appropriate antecedent is found for ellipsis.

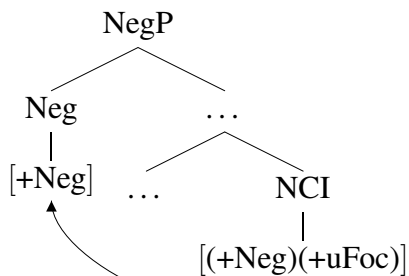
The analysis explains the data in (3a) and (3b) as long as the elided structure contains negation. However, (1b) shows that comparatives can license NPIs even in the absence of negation. Therefore, the ungrammaticality of (3b) raises the problem of why NPIs are not licensed in a context that appears to be comparative as well. Following Progovac (1994), I assume that the complementizer is responsible for the NPI licensing properties of a clause. Here, the complementizer "ca" does not head clauses that license NPIs, while "decât" does. Moreover, the NPI "ever" gets a universal reading in English comparatives like (7). The same reading is obtained in Romanian with "decât" and "vreodată" or "oricând" (anytime). Moreover, comparatives with "ca" allow the clearly universal "oricând", as in (8). However, "oricând" can appear in non-NPI contexts as well (9), and has the interpretation of a free choice item. This gives further support to the idea that NPIs are simply not licensed in "ca" comparatives.

I have shown that a PF-ellipsis analysis of Romanian "ca" comparatives explains the puzzle raised for NCI and NPI licensing. To explain why NCIs are licensed in some comparatives in the absence of negation, I follow Watanabe (2004) and assume that the elided material in the comparative can become semantically affirmative as a result of feature copying. Moreover, an NPI in the same structure is banned for a related reason - the NPI does not bear a negative feature to be copied on the negation. The inability of "ca" to license NPIs in a structure without an underlying negation is blamed on the nature of the complementizer.

The Data

- (1) a. Ai fost vreodată/*niciodată la Paris?
 have-aux.2.sg been ever/never to Paris
 Have (you) ever been to Paris? (yes/no questions)
- b. E mai vesel decât a fost vreodată/*niciodată.
 Is more happy than has-aux been ever/never
 (He) is happier than he has ever been. (comparatives)
- (2) Nu am jignit niciodată/vreodată pe nimeni.
 not have-aux-1.sg. offended never/ever PE-accmrk nobody
 (I) have never offended anyone.
- (3) a. E mai vesel ca niciodată
 is.3rd.sg more happy than never
- b. *E mai vesel ca vreodată
 is.3rd.sg more happy than ever
 (He) is happier than ever.
- (4) E mai vesel [...] nu a fost vesel niciodată/vreodată
 is more happy [...] not has-aux.3rd.sg been happy never/ever

(5)



- (7) John is happier than ever. =
 For all times t when John was happy, he is happier now than at t.
- (8) E mai vesel ca oricând.
 is more happy like anytime
 (He) is happier than ever.
- (9) Poți veni oricând.
 can.2nd.sg come anytime
 (You) can come anytime/whenever.

References

- Progovac, Liljana. 1994. *Negative and Positive Polarity. A Binding Approach*. Cambridge University Press
- Watanabe, Akira 2004. The Genesis of Negative Concord: Syntax and Morphology of Negative Doubling. *Linguistic Inquiry* 35:4, 559-612.