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ON THE RESCUING OF PPIs: *SOME*-NPs VS. *SOME*-PRONOUNS IN ENGLISH

Carmen Dobrovie-Sorin* & Tabea Ihsane**

Abstract: In this paper, we observe that although all positive indefinites, in particular *some*-pronouns and *some*-NPs, qualify as Positive Polarity Items (PPIs), they do not exhibit a uniform behavior when occurring in the so-called 'rescuing contexts' as only the former are possible. In order to solve this puzzle, we will propose that anti-licensing and rescuing contexts respectively pertain to narrative/descriptive and argumentative discourse, and correlate with different ways in which sentential negation translates: in narrative/descriptive contexts, sentential negation is interpreted as quantificational negation and in argumentative contexts as propositional negation. Given this hypothesis, the contrast between *some*-pronouns and *some*-NPs in rescuing contexts can be explained by observing that the former are weak indefinites, whereas the latter are strong indefinites. Weak positive indefinites can take scope within propositional negation, whereas strong positive indefinites cannot do so. In anti-licensing contexts, on the other hand, sentential negation is interpreted as quantificational negation, which bans any kind of positive indefinite (due to an extended version of Collins & Postal's (2004) Determiner Sharing condition on polyadic quantification).

Keywords: positive polarity items, *any*, *some*, rescuing, negation

1. The puzzle

Positive Polarity Items (PPIs) are 'anti-licensed' by negation, i.e., they cannot occur in its local scope (Horn 1989, 2001), whereas Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) have to be in its scope (see Baker 1970, Szabolcsi 2004, Giannakidou 2011, a.o.). Accordingly, *anything* in (1a) is an NPI and *something* in (1b) a PPI (Szabolcsi 2004 (1)-(2)):

- (1) a. I *(don't) see anything.
b. I (*don't) see something. *unless *some* scopes over *not*, or *not* is an emphatic denial

Examples like (2) and (3) show that *some*-NPs behave on a par with *some*-pronouns when they occur in the immediate scope of negation, and as such they qualify as PPIs:

- (2) a. I haven't read some books. (*some* > NEG; *NEG > *some*) PPI
b. I haven't read any books. (**any* > NEG; NEG > *any*) NPI

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There are however certain contexts (observed as early as Jespersen 1917) in which PPIs can appear in the scope of negation in the surface structure (Szabolcsi 2004, Spector 2014). Consider the examples in (3) from Szabolcsi (2004, (24) and (23)):

- (3) a. I don't think that John called someone.
b. John didn't show every boy something.

(3a) and (3b) respectively illustrate non-local negation (the PPI and the negation do not belong to the same minimal clause) and 'shielding' of the PPI by an intervening operator, in this case *every*. These examples do not constitute a problem for the PPI status of *some*-indefinites if we assume the following generalization, where AA stands for anti-additive (for our present purposes, it is sufficient to know that negation is AA):

- (4) PPIs cannot occur in the immediate scope of a clausemate anti-additive operator AA-Op.

In some contexts, however, PPIs *can* appear in the immediate scope of the negation. The English examples below come from Szabolcsi (2004 (33)-(35), (37)-(41); see also Baker 1970):

- (5) a. I don't think that John didn't call someone.
b. No one thinks that John didn't call someone.
c. I am surprised that John didn't call someone.
d. If we don't call someone, we are doomed.
e. Every boy who didn't call someone...
f. Only John didn't call someone.
g. Few boys didn't call someone.
h. Few boys thought that you didn't call someone.

In order to capture examples of this type, Szabolcsi (2004) adds an *unless* proviso to the generalization stated above:

- (6) "PPIs cannot occur in the immediate scope of a clausemate anti-additive operator AA-Op, unless [AAOp>PPI] itself is in an NPI-licensing context" (Szabolcsi 2004: 419).

To illustrate, (5a) is acceptable because the higher negation (*don't*) is an NPI-licenser which (due to the assumption stated in the 'unless' clause) is able to license the string [...*didn't*... *someone*], which is an [AAOp>PPI] configuration. In the same vein, the other examples in (5) are grammatical because various other operators (*no one*, *surprise*, *if*, *every*, *only*, *few*) license the same type of string. In Szabolcsi's own words, 'adding any NPI-licenser rescues the illegitimate constellation'. As a reminder of this characterization, examples of this type are currently referred to as 'rescuing' contexts. Since NPI-licensers roughly correspond to Downward Entailing (DE) operators, Szabolcsi's generalization was restated by Spector (2014):

- (7) “Rescuing: if the anti-licenser is itself in the scope of a DE-operator, then the PPI is *rescued* [...] i.e., can be interpreted within the scope of the anti-licenser...” (Spector 2014: 3).

Note however that some of the rescuing examples tend to become unacceptable when *someone* is replaced by a *some*-NP, an observation that seems to have gone unnoticed¹ prior to Dobrovie-Sorin (2020), who mentions but does not investigate it. Compare the examples in (8) with their counterparts in (5):²

- (8) a. ?*I don’t think that John didn’t call some people/some children.
 b. ?*No one thinks that John didn’t call some people/some children.
 c. ?*I am surprised that John didn’t call some people/some children.
 d. ?*If we don’t call some people/some children, we are doomed.
 e. ?* Every boy who didn’t call some people/some children, ...
 f. ?* Only John didn’t call some people/some children.
 g. ?* Few boys didn’t call some people/some children.
 h. ?* Few boys thought that you didn’t call some people/some children.

Most, maybe all of the current analyses of rescuing contexts (Szabolcsi 2004, Homer 2011, Nicolae 2012) rely on the hypothesis that rescuing amounts to polarity reversal. In other words, the overall context in rescuing contexts is upward entailing, which would explain why the anti-licensing condition on PPIs is absent. The problem is that this view predicts that all PPIs should be acceptable in rescuing contexts. However, the data brought up above show that this prediction is wrong. According to Larrivé (2012), PPIs are rescued because, although they occur in the scope of negation at surface structure, a positive proposition is activated by virtue of pragmatic processes. Our own proposal builds on a similar intuition. For reasons of space, we cannot present here summaries of the previous literature on rescuing.

2. Quantificational negation versus propositional negation

The data presented above show a contrast between the unrescuability of *some*-NPs vs. the rescuability of *some*-pronouns, which is puzzling given the fact that in ‘anti-

¹ Szabolcsi (2004) notes in passing: “On the other hand, Korean *utun haksang-ul* ‘some student-acc’ (Seungwan Yoon, p.c.) and Dutch *of ‘or’* phrases (M. den Dikken, p.c.) seem to be non-rescuable PPIs. I will need to better understand the polarity systems of the latter languages before addressing these facts. Nonrescuable PPIs may be analyzable along the lines of Progovac 2000.”

² Some exceptions to the unacceptability of *some*-NPs in rescuing contexts exist, but the grammaticality judgments are not clear-cut. We will leave it for further research to find out what distinguishes the examples below from those in which *some*-NPs are not allowed:

- (i) I don’t think that John didn’t call some friends.
 (ii) No one thinks that John didn’t call some friends.
 (iii) I am surprised that John didn’t call some friends.
 (iv) If we don’t call some friends, we are doomed.

licensing' contexts (e.g., when occurring inside an unembedded negative sentence) *some*-NPs and *some*-pronouns show a uniform PPI behavior. We therefore need to explain (i) why *all* positive indefinites are anti-licensed, (ii) why *some*-pronouns are rescuable and (iii) why *some*-NPs are not rescuable. Central to our answers to these questions will be the hypothesis that the LF representations of sentential negation are crucially different in anti-licensing and in rescuing contexts.

Following Dobrovie-Sorin (2020), our main theoretical claim will be that sentential negation can be represented either as relying on a unary negative operator that applies to a proposition that asserts the existence of a positive event or as a negative existential quantifier over events:

(9) John didn't come.

(10) $\neg[\exists e(\text{come}(e) \wedge \text{Participant}(e, \text{John}))]$

(11) $\neg\exists e(\text{come}(e) \wedge \text{Participant}(e, \text{John}))$

In (10) the negative operator applies to a positive proposition (signaled by the bolded square brackets), which contains a positive existential quantifier over events. In (11), in contrast, $\neg\exists$ notates a complex negative existential quantifier.³ In what follows we will refer to these two LFs as 'propositional negation' and 'quantificational negation', respectively.

These two LFs are logically and truth-conditionally indistinguishable and theoreticians of negation adopt variants of one or the other, without mentioning the other possible alternative. Dobrovie-Sorin (2020) proposes that both of these LFs are needed in order to capture the difference between local anti-licensing and rescuing.

We will assume that the *choice* between propositional and quantificational negation depends on pragmatic principles. Our hypothesis is that it is only in argumentative contexts, i.e., in those contexts in which we use language in order to argue, engage in a debate with each other (and sometimes even with ourselves) that sentential negation translates as propositional negation, see (10). When instead language is used for purely descriptive, narrative purposes, sentential negation is to be represented as in (11), i.e., as involving quantificational negation.

The first building block of our answers to the questions formulated in the introductory paragraph of the present section 2 will be the hypothesis that the anti-licensing and rescuing contexts respectively pertain to narrative/descriptive and argumentative discourse,⁴ and correlatively differ in the way in which sentential negation translates at LF:

³ At this stage of our investigation, it is not clear whether the LF involving a negative existential quantifier corresponds to the notion of 'negative event' (see Bernard & Champollion 2018 and references quoted there) or whether the latter can also be represented as the negation of a positive proposition.

⁴ The intuition behind this proposal is that unembedded negative sentences that moreover are not part of a dialogue are purely descriptive, i.e., are used to convey the non-occurrence of an event, and as such they are to be represented as negative quantifications over events. In rescuing contexts, on the other hand, various kinds of operators introduce argumentation, which can be viewed as amounting to introducing positive propositions that are evaluated, and in particular negated. A similar intuition can be found in Larrivée (2012), who points out that rescuing can be found in contexts that do not involve DE operators, which means that

- (12) a. In anti-licensing contexts, sentential negation translates as quantificational negation.
 b. In rescuing contexts, sentential negation translates as propositional negation.

To get an intuitive grasp of the difference between propositional and quantificational negation we can use the following two glosses, which would correspond to (10) and (11), respectively:

- (13) a. It is not the case that {John came/there was an event of John coming}.
 b. There was no event of John coming.

3. Quantificational negation bans positive indefinites in its scope

Let us then assume that simple unembedded negative sentences rely on quantificational negation. Let us further assume, following Collins & Postal (2014), that quantificational negation is necessarily polyadic⁵ whenever some argument or adjunct DP is interpreted in the scope of negation:

- (14) (In unmarked contexts)⁶ local narrow scope with respect to negation (i.e., with respect to a negated main predicate) is read off an LF relying on polyadic quantification in which a unique negative existential $\neg\exists$ binds an n-tuple that contains one event-variable and one or more individual variables. (Dobrovie-Sorin 2020: 215 (57)).

To illustrate, let us consider the English example in (15):

- (15) John didn't read any books.

Following Collins & Postal (2014) and Dobrovie-Sorin (2020) we assume that NPIs in the local scope of negation (sentential negation or Negative QP in argument position) are underlyingly Negative QPs that enter polyadic quantification with the higher Negative QP. Roughly speaking, this amounts to a configuration in which $\neg\exists$ represents a complex negative quantifier that binds an n-tuple that contains the event-variable and the individual-variable introduced by the NPI:

- (16) $\neg\exists_{\langle e, z \rangle} (*\text{book}(z) \wedge \text{read}(e) \wedge \text{Theme}(e)=z \wedge \text{Agent}(e) = \text{Jean})$

polarity reversal cannot be the explanation of rescuing. Instead, the activation of propositional alternatives would be common to the rescuing contexts.

⁵ Polyadic quantification is a configuration in which an n-tuple of variables is bound by a single quantifier (Keenan 1987, May 1989).

⁶ For our present purposes, the restriction to 'unmarked' contexts can be read as 'non-argumentative' contexts.

Let us further follow Collins & Postal (2014: 51) in assuming that polyadic quantification is constrained by a syntactic condition that we will refer to as Determiner Sharing:

- (17) “The syntactic basis of polyadic quantification structures [...] involves syntactic determiner sharing between the different DPs [...]”

According to Dobrovie-Sorin, Determiner Sharing can be extended to “examples with polyadic quantification in which one of the negative elements is first merged on the VP” (2020: 217). Therefore, such negative quantifiers qualify as “Determiners”, on a par with negative quantifiers first merged DP-internally. As a result, the PPI phenomenon, i.e., the ban on positive indefinites in the local scope of Negation, is due to the fact that such a configuration does not satisfy this extended version of Determiner Sharing (there is no sharing between the negative quantifier in *didn't* and *some* in (18)):

- (18) *John didn't read some books.

In sum, the proposal made here (which essentially follows Collins & Postal 2014 and Dobrovie-Sorin 2020) is that the anti-licensing of positive indefinites is due to an extended version of Determiner Sharing, which amounts to requiring that an indefinite in the scope of quantificational negation be a DP headed by a negative determiner. Granting that *any books* is underlyingly a negative Q of the form [NEG SOME], Determiner Sharing is met in (15), and this allows the LF in (16) to be derived. The example in (18), on the other hand, is unacceptable because *some* (in *some books*) is *not* a negative(-marked) Determiner. As we will see immediately, negative Determiners are not required when sentential negation is interpreted as propositional negation.

4. Propositional negation allows positive indefinites in its scope

As announced in §2 above, we assume that rescuing contexts correlate with argumentative discourse in which sentential negation translates as propositional negation. Thus, the LF of the embedded clause of the example in (19) would be as in (20):

- (19) Mary does not think that John did not read something.
 (20) Mary does not think that $\neg[\exists_{\langle e,z \rangle}(\text{something}(z) \wedge \text{read}(e) \wedge \text{Theme}(e)=z \wedge \text{Agent}(e) = \text{John})]$

The bolded part of (20) represents the propositional negation and the clause in its scope. Unlike quantificational negation, propositional negation is not constrained by Determiner Sharing, hence the acceptability of *something*.

5. Propositional negation and weak vs. strong indefinites

What we have said so far sheds some light on the rescuing of positive indefinites, but does *not* explain the observation that motivates the present paper, namely the fact that only certain positive indefinites can be rescued:

- (21) a. I don't think that John didn't help someone.
b. ?*I don't think that John didn't help some people.

In what follows we will present evidence that indicates that *some*-pronouns and *some*-NPs are preferentially⁷ weak and strong indefinites (in the sense of Milsark 1977), respectively.

The context illustrated in (22) typically requires weak nominals, e.g., bare nouns, in the object position (see (22)d). As (22)c shows, *something* is acceptable, in contrast to *some sandwiches* and *that sandwich*, suggesting that only the former can be weak:⁸

- (22) a. *John ate some sandwiches for 10 minutes.
b. *John ate that sandwich for 10 minutes.
c. John ate something for 10 minutes.
d. John ate sandwiches for 10 minutes.

Note also that *something* is acceptable in (23) whereas *some novels* is not:

- (23) John frequently reads novels/something/*some novels.

Example (23) illustrates a habitual context, in which weak indefinites are expected to be allowed in the object position and strong indefinites disallowed.

Finally, and most importantly for our present concerns, strong indefinites can take wide scope over sentential negation (in contrast to weak indefinites, which cannot do so):

- (24) a. John didn't read a certain/particular book. (a certain > not)
b. John didn't read several books. (several > not)

The contrast below confirms that *something* and *some books* are weak and strong, respectively:

- (25) a. ?*John didn't read something.
b. John didn't read some books.
(OK with wide scope over negation; *with narrow scope)

⁷ Various factors may allow *some*-NPs to be interpreted as weak, which is why we weaken our generalization by using 'preferentially'. The possibility of *some*-NPs being weak lets us expect that in certain well-chosen contexts *some*-NPs can be rescued. We leave these refinements for further experimental research.

⁸ See Ihsane (2020) for a discussion of (a)telicity in connection to specificity.

We may thus conclude that *some*-pronouns are weak, whereas *some*-NPs are strong indefinites. Given our hypothesis according to which rescuing contexts rely on propositional negation, the contrasting behavior of positive indefinites in rescuing contexts can be described as follows:

- (26) a. Weak positive indefinites can take narrow scope wrt propositional negation.
b. Strong positive indefinites cannot take narrow scope wrt propositional negation.

Space limitations do not allow us to explain why this should be so.⁹ To be pursued.

6. Conclusion

We have tried to propose an explanation for why *some*-pronouns are acceptable whereas *some*-NPs are degraded in rescuing contexts. The theoretical novelty is the distinction between propositional negation and quantificational negation. An interesting outcome of our proposal is that we do not need to assume any PPI feature for indefinites. Both weak and strong positive indefinites are anti-licensed in the scope of a local negation because they violate the Determiner Sharing constraint (extended version), in contrast to NPIs and N-words. Weak indefinites can be rescued because rescuing contexts involve propositional negation, which does not directly interact with the indefinite. Strong indefinites cannot be rescued because they necessarily take scope not only over quantificational negation, but also over propositional negation. We have however *not* explained why strong indefinites must scope over any kind of negation.

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⁹ Ideally, the obligatory wide scope with respect to negation that characterizes strong indefinites should be derived as a consequence of the type of denotation that strong indefinites have (free variables bound by discourse-level existential closure (Heim 1982), choice function variables (Reinhart 1997, Winter 1997), Skolem functions (Kratzer 1998), Skolem terms (Steedman 2006)).

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