Negative adjectives as licensors of NPIs in English and Serbian

Ana Bosnić
University of Groningen/ University of Novi Sad

INTRODUCTION

**Negative Concord**: more than one negative element is allowed in order to convey a single negative concept - Serbian (1)
**Double Negation**: two negative elements cancel each other out and result in an affirmative sentence - English (2)

(1) *Nećemo te više nikad ništa pitati.*
   neg.will.3rd.p.pl you.acc more never nothing ask

(2) *We don’t need *no/any help.*

**Similarity**: with respect to negative adjectives and their licensing of NPIs they both yield Double Negation in constituent negation (3):

(3) a. *Nesvesna *nikakvih/ikakvih opasnosti, otišla je na put.*
   unaware no-kind/any-kind.gen dangers went is on trip
   b. *Unaware of *no/any dangers, she went on vacation.*

TERMINOLOGY

NPIs are lexical units that can appear mainly in negative contexts and have to be licensed (allowed) by negative elements in a sentence. Fro Serbian there are two types of NPIs:

- i-NPIs - long-distance licensing items:
  - iko, išta, igde, ikad
- ni-NPIs (n-words) - clause-mate licensing items:
  - niko, ništa, nigde, nikad

**N-words** are negative elements which can or cannot express negation which depends on their syntactic position.

An expression a is an n-word iff (Giannakidou, 2002:2):

- a can be used in structures containing sentential negation or another a-expression yielding a reading equivalent to one logical negation; and
- a can provide a negative fragment answer.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How come negative adjectives cannot license ni-NPIs locally and allow a Negative Concord reading?

METHOD

**Research method**: questionnaire (two tasks); 40 informants (students of English language and literature in Novi Sad, native speakers of Serbian)

**Results**: more than 90% of participants disallow constructions with negative adjectives and ni-NPIs in Serbian.

ANALYSIS


- interpretable and uninterpretable [Neg] feature on negative heads, NPIs and negative adjectives in NC languages:
  - Negative heads: [uNeg], [iK]<sup>c</sup>
  - N-words: [iNeg], [uK]<sup>c</sup> - inherently negative
  - Negative adjectives: [iNeg] - semi-negatives, carrying negation
  - i-NPIs: [uNeg] - not inherently negative but licensed by negative markers

**Problem**: Negated prepositional phrases with “split” n-words in environments with negative adjectives:

  unprepared for no.kind/for any.kind.acc adventures, turned-down is offer

- b. *Nespremna ni za kakve/ *i za kakve poduhvate, odbila je ponudu.*
  unprepared no for kind/any for kind.acc adventures, turned-down is offer

  “Unprepared for any adventures, she turned down the offer.”

Solid ground for further research!

CONCLUSION

- Contexts with negative adjectives are negative, but not Negative Concord environments.
  They are **Double Negation environments**.

- Proposition:
  Sentences with negative adjectives represent
  a DN licensing context of true NPIs (i-NPIs and any-NPIs) that allow clause-mate i-NPIs.
  (and in these terms they share a similarity with English).

REFERENCES


CONTACT

E-mail: ana.bosnic88@gmail.com