Negative adjectives as licensors of NPIs in English and Serbian
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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.

From 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], [iKneg]
  N-words: [Neg], [uKneg] - inherently negative
  Negative adjectives: [Neg] - 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:
- a. Nespremna za *nikakve/ikakve poduhvate, odbila je ponudu. 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


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