

The constellation of polarity sensitive items

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Workshop organizers: Chiara Gianollo & Pierre Larrivé

Chiara Gianollo
Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna
Dipartimento di Filologia Classica e Italianistica
Via Zamboni 32
40126 Bologna
chiara.gianollo@unibo.it

Pierre Larrivé
Université de Caen Normandie
Département de Sciences du Langage
Esplanade de la Paix,
14032 Caen Cedex
pierre.larrivee@unicaen.fr

Description of the topic and research questions

The constellation of polarity sensitive items has been an object of theoretical debates for the last fifty years (at least since Klima 1964). These debates have centered around the nature of the polarity sensitive items, their interpretations, their diachronic relations and their relation to other grammatical paradigms (cf., among book-length treatments, Ladusaw 1979, Giannakidou 1998, Zeijlstra 2004, Penka 2011, Chierchia 2013). Especially in the last decade, the discussion has been substantially enriched and deepened thanks to the contribution of cross-linguistic data (*i.a.* Progovac 1994, Vallduví 1994, Déprez 1997, 2000, Haspelmath 1997, Lahiri 1998, Herburger 2001, Kratzer & Shimoyama 2002, Pereltsvaig 2004, Fălăuș 2010, Szabolcsi 2013) and diachronic studies (*i.a.* Hoeksema 1994, 1998, 2010, Ramat 1998, Jäger 2010, Gianollo 2016 and various contributions in Larrivé & Ingham 2012, Willis et al. 2013, Hansen & Visconti 2014).

The aim of this workshop is to bring together experts from different areas of study (theoretical, typological and diachronic linguistics) in order to take stock of the progress made and to address unresolved foundational issues and new questions, against the background of novel empirical datasets.

One central debate is the extent to which, as opposed to Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) like *anyone*, n-words that can be glossed by English *no-one* have a negative meaning in and of themselves, or whether they inherit that value from a clausal operator. Subcategories have been introduced in the degree of strength for NPIs (weak, strong and superstrong), and for concurring relations that characterize ordinary n-words in Italian and French as opposed to Negative Indefinites / Quantifiers in English and German. The underlying line of reasoning is generally that degrees of lexical or featural negativity should relate to the ability of an item to communicate negation on its own, and to be used with other overt clause-mate negatives. The assessment of this supposes the availability of reliable diagnostic to define membership of each category. While locality, modification by *almost* and fragment answer have all been alleged, counterexamples have been adduced.

Relation between n-words and NPIs, and their various sub-types, is also expressed in interpretative terms. Continuing a line of analysis going back to Fauconnier (1975), Kadmon & Landman (1993), Lee & Horn (1994) and Krifka (1995), the approach developed by Chierchia (2004, 2013 *i.a.*) accounts for the existence of polarity phenomena on the basis of their semantic and pragmatic contribution. It insists on the degree and type of exhaustification compatible with different classes of NPIs, that is, on the interpretive effects emerging through

the interaction of NPIs with overt or covert clausal operators. The approach predicts syntactic reflexes such as locality constraints, unlike the productive line of research that separates pragmatic licensing of NPIs and syntactic licensing of n-words (Zeijlstra 2004, Penka 2011). An exhaustification-based approach has the potential to apply to Free-Choice items, but whether it equally does to n-words, and beyond to positive polarity items, remains to be articulated.

Several of these issues can be illuminated by diachronic research. A stable pathway of variation and change characterizes polarity sensitive items. How and why are negative polarity items and n-words synchronically and diachronically connected? Why do some polarity contexts subsist to the evolution of a NPI into a n-word? The critical role of strong polarity contexts and super-strong negative polarity items has been recently emphasized as a transitional point between polarity and n-word.

Polarity sensitive items thus present a set of subcases and related categories that raise the question of whether grammatical paradigms relating to veridicality are similarly structured. Cases in point are *wh*-items and quantification. Questions concerning the extent to which these have referential force or are dependent on external operators arise, and whether these operators make syntactic, semantic and pragmatic predictions. An improved understanding of these aspects may elucidate parallels with distinctions among polarity sensitive items, as well as clarify the relation between negative and positive polarity items (Szabolcsi 2004, Larrivé 2012).

Novel contributions furthering the understanding of polarity sensitivity are invited, whether from a synchronic, diachronic or typological perspective. Analyses from all theoretical persuasion are welcome, and are expected to rely on a substantial base of empirical data. A comparative (cross-linguistic and / or diachronic) dimension is deemed essential to apportion the current debates on the issue raised by polarity sensitive items.

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