

Licensing of Negative Polarity Particles in English

Dmitry Levinson

In this paper I discuss a class of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) in English that I will call Negative Polarity Particles (NPPs). The items are the following: negative aspectual particles *yet*, *anymore*, and the negative additive focus particle *either*. The NPPs are only licensed by a subset of downward entailing (DE) environments. To distinguish the DE environments that can license NPPs I propose an additional condition of assertivity. I show that only environments that are both DE and assertive can license the NPPs.

While DE *is* a necessary condition for the licensing of the NPPs, it is not a sufficient condition. The following DE environments license NPPs: Negation, *few* (1), *doubt* (2), *barely* (3), *rarely*, negative implicative verbs such as *fail* and *refuse*, *without*.

- (1) Few tourists are here *yet*.
- (2) It didn't rain yesterday, and I doubt it will rain today, *either*.
- (3) They barely talk *anymore*.

On the other hand, the following DE environments do not license NPPs: antecedents of conditionals (4), complements of factives (5), restrictors of universals (6), comparatives, superlatives, emotive factives, *before*.

- (4) I have never been to Amsterdam. *If I go to Brussels *either*, I will buy you some Belgian chocolates.
- (5) *I regret that I'm in Spain *anymore*.
- (6) *Everyone who is here *anymore* will receive a prize.

Assertivity is defined as follows: the environment of a predicate/proposition is *assertive* if the sentence makes a claim regarding the extent of the realization of the predicate/proposition. An environment is *semantically negative* iff it is both downward entailing and assertive.

I propose the following as a combined licensing condition for the Negative Polarity Particles:

- (7) The NPPs are licensed by an environment which is **semantically negative, that is, both downward entailing and assertive**.

Compare the following two sentences, both containing the phrase *participated in the marathon* in a DE environment:

- (8) Few people *participated in the marathon*. [DE and assertive]
- (9) Everyone who *participated in the marathon* received a certificate. [DE, not assertive]

Example (8) makes a claim regarding the realization of the predicate *participated in the marathon*, namely, that the predicate holds of few people. Example (9) refers to the individuals for which the predicate holds, but makes no claim regarding the realization of the predicate. Therefore, the environment in (8) is assertive, but the one in (9) is not.

Similarly, (10) makes an epistemic claim regarding the extent of realization of the italicized clause, so the environment of that clause is assertive. The environment in (11) is not assertive, since no such claim is made.

- (10) I doubt *it will rain today*. [DE and assertive]
- (11) *If it rains today*, the hike will be canceled. [DE, not assertive]

The condition of assertivity introduces a new classification of DE environments into those that are assertive, and those that are not. The NPPs do not fit the most widespread classification of 'strength' of NPIs (van der Wouden 1997; Zwarts 1995). The condition of *semantic negativity* also explicates the notions of approximate negation (Jespersen 1917) and negative argumentative orientation (Ducrot 1973; Horn 2002).