A semantic argument for a syntactic account of NPI licensing and Negative Concord

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This talk relates three claims: (i) NPIs are semantically predisposed expressions that came to be marked [u-neg], where [u-neg] is syntactically checked through Local Polarity (Dowty 1994, Ludlow 2002). (ii) Negative Concord involves the coexistence of [u-neg] and [i-neg] versions (cf. Herburger 2001). (iii) The [u-neg] version can be lost, leaving only the [i-neg] version (Herburger forthcoming).

Background: For Klima (1964), NPIs are [+affective], where [+affective] is checked under a version of command. Yet, as Ladusaw (1979) noted, this runs afoul of (1c) vs. (1d):

(1) a. [Everyone who heard anything] remembered it.
b. [No one who heard anything] remembered it.
c. *[Everyone] remembered anything.
d. [No one] remembered anything.

The crucial factor Ladusaw notes is that *anything* finds itself in Downward Entailment (DE) context in (1a,b,d) but not (1c) (cf. also Fauconnier 1975).

As to why NPIs are restricted to DE-contexts, it has been noted that they tend to have an existential-like semantics that leads to semantically strong claims in DE contexts. But, while their distribution is likely related to their semantics, it cannot be derived from it: like *any*(-), *some*(-) and *a* are also existential but not NPIs. Positing an additional ingredient to distinguish *any*(-) from *some*(-) and *a* threatens to beg the question in the absence of independent support for that ingredient (cf. e.g. Kadmon and Landman 1993, Krifka 1995, Chierchia 2013).

(i) I propose that semantically predisposed expressions that lead to strong statements in DE contexts or to attenuated ones (e.g. adverbial *long,* cf. Israel (2011)) *can* come to be parsed as being [u-neg]. Which ones do is to some degree up to chance; *any*(-) did, *some*(-), *a* didn't. Assuming further that lexical entries are marked for monotonicity (2), [u-neg] is syntactically licensed as in (3)-(4) (Sánchez Valencia 1991, Dowty 1994, Ludlow 2002):

(2) a. [[*every*]] = $\lambda f^{-}_{<e,t>}.\, \lambda g^{+}_{<e,t>}.\{x: f(x) = 1\} \subseteq \{y\ g(y) = 1\}$
b. [[*no*]] = $\lambda f^{-}_{<e,t>}.\, \lambda g^{-}_{<e,t>}.|\{x: f(x) = 1\} \cap \{y: g(y) = 1\}| = 0$

(3) a. An expression bearing [u-neg] is licensed iff it is dominated by a phrase bearing "-".
b. Local Polarity determines the propagation of the lexically marked "-" in the syntax.

(4) Local Polarity:
a. A lexical item whose argument is lexically marked "-" marks its syntactic sister "-".
A lexical item whose argument is lexically marked "+" marks its syntactic sister "+".
b. All syntactic mothers are assigned "+" except when they themselves are sisters of an expression that assigns "-" to its argument.

(ii) A [u-neg] marked expression, aka NPI, can subsequently come to have an [i-neg] homophone that appears in roughly complementary distribution, beginning as elliptical answer and later possibly in preverbal position. The result is Negative Concord of the type seen in Spanish (cf. Herburger 2001).

(iii) When the NC-term acquires the capacity to mark sentential negation from postverbal position, a process that can be paved by the development of 'not', the [u-neg] homophone falls into disuse and only the [i-neg] version persists. This process is argued to currently be happening in French, and to be already completed in standard English.