

Negative indefinites: data for 40 languages from Appendix A in Haspelmath (2001)

General information

The data reported here were used to index the indefinite pronouns from the 40 languages from Appendix A in Haspelmath (2001) with whether or not they can be interpreted as negated existentials for the purposes of the project ‘Indefinite pronouns optimize simplicity/informativeness trade-off’ by Milica Denić, Shane Steinert-Threlkeld and Jakub Szymanik.

Method

Haspelmath’s ‘direct negation’ function collapses items such as English *nobody* that can be interpreted as negated existentials in the absence of other negative elements, and other kinds of indefinites, such as English *anybody*, that can be interpreted in the scope of negation. We gathered data that allows us to establish for each item series that can take Haspelmath’s ‘direct negation’ function whether or not it can be interpreted as a negated existential in the absence of other negative elements, that we report here. The data comes from multiple sources: we mainly relied on elliptical negative fragment answers (e.g. ‘Who did you see? Nobody.’, cf. Bernini and Ramat 2012) and on negative quantifier-like uses (i.e. when the indefinite is interpreted as a negated existential without there being another negative element in the sentence). When relevant examples were found in existing scientific literature, those examples are reproduced and the original source of the example is cited. Occasionally, we refer to claims made in the literature that were not accompanied by linguistic examples. When no source is cited, linguistic judgments reported have been verified directly with competent (native or near-native) speakers of languages in question. In three cases, none of the above was feasible (Quechua, Yakut, Kannada): in those three cases, we referred to dictionary entries for the relevant items and drew suggestive conclusions from there.

Note that the unacceptability judgment (*) should be interpreted as signaling that the indefinite pronoun is unacceptable under the intended (negated existential) interpretation: it may or may not be acceptable under other interpretations.

1 German

N-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (1) Wer ist da? Niemand.
Who is there? Nobody.
'Who is there? Nobody.'

2 Dutch

Niets-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (2) Wie is daar? Niemand.
Who is there? Nobody.
'Who is there? Nobody.'

3 English

No-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (3) Who is there? Nobody.

4 Swedish

Ingen-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (4) Vem är där? Ingen.
Who is there? Nobody.
'Who is there? Nobody.'

Någon-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (5) Vem är där? *Någon.
Who is there? Somebody.
'intended: Who is there? Nobody.'

5 Icelandic

Enginn-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (6) Hver er þar? Enginn.
Who is there? Nobody.
‘Who is there? Nobody.’

Neinn-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.¹

- (7) Hver er er við dyrnar? *Neinn.
Who is there at door:the? Anybody.
‘intended: Who is there? Nobody.’

6 Latin

N-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.²

- (8) Quis est ibi? Nemo.
Who is there? Nobody.
‘Who is there? Nobody.’

7 Portuguese

N-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (9) Quem está aí? Ninguém.
Who is there? Nobody.
‘Who is there? Nobody.’

Qualquer-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (10) Quem está aí? *Qualquer pessoa.
Who is there? *Anybody.
‘intended: Who is there? Nobody.’

8 Catalan

Cap-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (11) Qui hi ha? Ningú.
Who there is? Nobody.
‘Who is there? Nobody.’

¹(7) corresponds to the example (425c) in Haspelmath 2001.

²Vukašin Miljković, Latin language professor, p.c.

9 French

Personne-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (12) Qui est là? Personne.
Who is there? Nobody.
'Who is there? Nobody.'

Que ce soit-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (13) Qui est là? *Qui que ce soit.
Who is there? Anybody.
'intended: Who is there? Nobody.'

10 Italian

Ni-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (14) Chi è là? Nessuno.
Who is there? Nobody.
'Who is there? Nobody.'

11 Romanian

Ni-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.³

- (15) Cine a venit? Nimeni.
Who has come? Nobody.
'Who came? Nobody.'

12 Modern Greek

Típota-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.⁴

- (16) Tí tis ípes? Típota.
What her you:told? Nothing.
'What did you tell her? Nothing.'

³(15) corresponds to example (4a) in Fălăus and Nicolae 2016.

⁴(16) corresponds to example (424b) in Haspelmath 2001.

13 Bulgarian

***Ni*-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (17) Koj e tam? Nikoj.
Who is there? Nobody.
'Who is there? Nobody.'

14 Serbian/Croatian

***Ni*-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (18) Ko je tamo? Niko.
Who is there? Nobody.
'Who is there? Nobody.'

15 Polish

***Ni*-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (19) Kto tam? Nikt.
Who there? Nobody.
'Who is there? Nobody.'

16 Russian

***Ni*-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (20) Kto tam? Nikto.
Who there? Nobody.
'Who is there? Nobody.'

17 Lithuanian

***Nie*-series** Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.⁵

- (21) Ko ieškai? Nieko.
What search:you? Nothing.
'What are you looking for? Nothing.'

⁵(21) corresponds to the example (16) in Kozhanov (2011).

Determiner *joks* cannot be used in negative fragment answers.⁶

18 Latvian

Ne-series It is classified as a negative concord series in Willis et al. (2013) (cf. the discussion of their example (93)). We thus conclude that it can be interpreted as a negated existential (negative concord items are known to be used in negative fragment answers with a negated existential interpretation, cf. Zeijlstra 2004).

19 Irish

Ar bith-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.⁷

- (22) An bhfaca tú duine ar bith? — Ni flacas, ni flaca mé
INT saw you person on world — NEG saw NEG saw I
duine ar bith.
person on world
Did you see anyone? No, I didn't see anyone.
- (23) An bhfaca tú duine ar bith? — *Duine ar bith.
INT saw you person on world — person on world
Intended: Did you see anyone? No one.

Aon-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative elliptical contexts.⁸

- (24) Cén tainm atá or-t? — a dúirt Polaiféamas. Aon duine — a
what name is your — REL said Polyphemus no one — REL
dúirt Uiliséas.
said Ulysses
What is your name? — asked Polyphemus. No one — replied Ulysses.

Dada *Dada* can be interpreted as a negated existential, as evidenced by its interpretation in negative fragment answers.⁹

- (25) Céard a fleiceann tú? — a dúirt Sean. Dada — a dúirt
What REL see you — REL said John. Nothing — REL said
a chomrádaí.
his companion

⁶Alexandre Cremers, p.c.

⁷(22) corresponds to the example (22) in Chapter 6 of Bernini and Ramat 2012.

⁸(24) corresponds to the example (24) in Chapter 6 of Bernini and Ramat 2012.

⁹(25) corresponds to the example (25) in Chapter 6 of Bernini and Ramat 2012.

What can you see? — asked John. Nothing — replied his companion.

20 Ossetic

Ni-series Items from *ni*-series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by (26), in which *ni*-pronoun is the only negative element.¹⁰

- (26) Aez uym nikoej uydton.
I there nobody saw
I didn't see anybody there.

Ma-series Items from *ni*-series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by (27), in which *ma*-pronoun is the only negative element.¹¹

- (27) Makoedam acu.
Nowhere go
Don't go anywhere.

21 Persian

Hič-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (28) Ki unja-st? Hič-kas.
Who there is? Nobody.
'Who is there? Nobody.'

I-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (29) Ki unja-st? *Kasi.
Who there is? Anybody.
'Intended: Who is there? Nobody.'

22 Hindi/Urdu

Bhii-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.¹²

- (30) Aaj kaun aayaa? *Koi bhii.
today who came someone
'Intended: Who came today? Nobody.'

¹⁰(26) corresponds to the example (A159a) in Haspelmath (2001).

¹¹(27) corresponds to the example (A159b) in Haspelmath (2001).

¹²(30) corresponds to (417b) in Haspelmath 2001.

Koii-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (31) Aaj kaun aayaa? *Koi.
today who came someone
‘Intended: Who came today? Nobody.’

23 Turkish

Bir-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.¹³

- (32) Ne duydun? *Bir sey.
what heard-you? One thing.
‘Intended: What did you hear? Nothing.’

Hic-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.¹⁴

- (33) Kim geldi? Hic kimse.
who came nobody
‘Who came? Nobody.’

Herhangi-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (34) Kim geldi? *Herhangi biri.
who came anybody
‘Intended: Who came? Nobody.’

24 Kazakh

Eſ-series It is classified as a negative concord series by Werle (2002). We thus conclude that it can be interpreted as a negated existential.

25 Yakut

Da-series An entry from the Glosbe English-Yakut dictionary on ‘nothing’ is ‘tuox da’.¹⁵ This suggests that *da-series* on its own can be interpreted as a negated existential.

¹³(32) corresponds to (417a) in Haspelmath (2001).

¹⁴(33) corresponds to (420b) in Haspelmath (2001).

¹⁵Cf. <https://glosbe.com/en/sah/nothing>.

26 Hungarian

Sem-series It is classified as a negative concord series by Surányi 2006 and Szabolcsi 2018. We thus conclude that it can be interpreted as a negated existential.

27 Finnish

Kaan-series According to Bernini and Ramat (2012), it can only appear in negative fragment answers if accompanied by a negated auxiliary. This series therefore appears to be neither a negative concord nor a negative quantifier series. We thus conclude that it cannot be interpreted as a negated existential.¹⁶

- (35) Oletko nähnyt mitään? En mitään.
be see anything neg-1SG anything
'Have you seen anything? I haven't anything.'

28 Nanay

Daa-series Items from *daa*-series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by (36), in which *daa*-pronoun is the only negative element.¹⁷

- (36) Tuj manga puksindu hamačaa-daa aliasini goani.
thus strong storm anybody bears pt
'Of course, nobody can bear such a strong storm.'

29 Lezgian

Sa X-ni series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.¹⁸

- (37) Axpax daxdi wuč luhuda? Zatni.
then dad what say nothing
'What will dad say then? Nothing.'

30 Maltese

Ebda-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.¹⁹

¹⁶(35) corresponds to (9b) in Chapter 6 of Bernini and Ramat (2012).

¹⁷(36) corresponds to the example (134) in Haspelmath 2001.

¹⁸(37) corresponds to the example (468) in Haspelmath 2011.

¹⁹(38) corresponds to the example (43a) in Chapter 6 of Bernini and Ramat 2012.

- (38) Rajt xi haga? Le, xeijn.
 saw something no nothing
 ‘Have you seen something? No, nothing.’

31 Hebrew

Af/šum series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers in colloquial Hebrew.²⁰

- (39) Mi ba? Af exad.
 who came nobody
 ‘Who came? Nobody.’

Iš-series Iš series cannot be interpreted as a negated existential, as evidenced by its interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (40) Mi ba? *Iš.
 who came somebody
 ‘Intended: Who came? Nobody.’

32 Hausa

Koo-series Zimmermann (2008) notes in Section 3.2 that this series can only convey a negated existential interpretation when combined with negation.

33 Swahili

Generic nouns and CL-o CL-ote-series They do not get a negated existential interpretation: Zerbian and Krifka (2008) observe that Swahili and Northern Soto do not have negative quantifiers in nominal domain, and that negation is always verbal.

34 Georgian

Ara-series Items from *ara*-series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by (41), in which *ara*-pronoun is the only negative element.²¹

- (41) Mas aravistis utkvams.
 he nobody has-told
 ‘He hasn’t told anybody.’

²⁰(39) corresponds to the example (427) in Haspelmath 2001.

²¹(41) corresponds to the example (A256b) in Haspelmath (2001).

35 Kannada

Uu-series An entry from the Glosbe English-Kannada dictionary on ‘nothing’ is ‘enuu illa’, and not only ‘enuu’ (‘illa’ incorporates negation).²² This suggests that *uu-series* on its own cannot be interpreted as a negated existential.

36 Chinese

Ye/dou-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (42) Shei meiyǒu qù youyǒng? *Shei ye./*Shei dou.
who not-have go swim anyone/anyone
‘Intended: Who didn’t go swimming? No one.’

Bare QU-series Items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (43) Shei meiyǒu qù youyǒng? *Shei.
who not-have go swim anyone
‘Intended: Who didn’t go swimming? No one.’

Renhe *Renhe* cannot be interpreted as a negated existential, as evidenced by its interpretation in negative fragment answers.

- (44) Shei meiyǒu qù youyǒng? *Renhe ren.
who not-have go swim anyone
‘Intended: Who didn’t go swimming? No one.’

As a side note, in order to express a negated existential meaning in fragment answers, negation ‘mei’ is needed, as in (45).²³

- (45) Shei meiyǒu qù youyǒng? Mei(you)ren.
who not-have go swim not-have-people
‘Who didn’t go swimming? No one.’

37 Ancash Quechua

Pis-series An entry from the English-Quechua dictionary on ‘nothing’ is ‘mana imapis’, and not only ‘imapis’ (‘mana’ incorporates negation).²⁴ This suggests that *pis-series* on its own cannot be interpreted as a negated existential.

²²Cf. <https://en.glosbe.com/en/kn/nothing>.

²³(45) corresponds to the example (9) in Li et al. 2019.

²⁴Cf. entry 261 under letter *m* in Mosquera 2012.

38 Japanese

Mo-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.²⁵

- (46) Nanio katta no? Nanimo.
what bought Q nothing
'What did you buy? Nothing.'

39 Korean

To-series Items from this series can be interpreted as negated existentials, as evidenced by their interpretation in negative fragment answers.²⁶

- (47) Nwuka wassni? Amwuto.
who came nobody
Who came? Nobody.

40 Basque

I-series Haspelmath 2001 reports that *i-series* cannot be used elliptically in negative fragment answers (page 198). We thus conclude that items from this series cannot be interpreted as negated existentials.

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²⁵(46) corresponds to the example (19) in Nishioka 2017.

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