

## Positive uses of NPIs and logical duality

Jeremy Kuhn

Institut Jean Nicod (CNRS), Ecole Normale Supérieure, PSL Research University

The NPIs *any*, *ever*, *yet*, and *anymore* have polarity-sensitive uses that are restricted to downward entailing environments. Each of them also has a positive use, often restricted by linguistic environment, register, or dialect. Here, I show that these positive uses are systematically related to the negative uses: they are logical duals. This has been observed in passing for *any* and *ever*, but hasn't been extended to *yet* and *anymore*. The strong generalization that emerges has diachronic ramifications: when the distribution of a particular operator is restricted to a particular logical environment, this produces an ambiguity of analysis that is conducive for diachronic semantic change.

(1) - (4) provide positive uses of the four NPIs. *Any* can famously be used as a free choice item, equivalent to a wide-scoping universal (Horn 1972, Ladusaw 1979, Carlson 1981, Dayal 1998, *i.a.*). *Ever* has been studied less systematically, but it, too, has a positive use as a universal. In modern English, the positive use is syntactically restricted and sometimes feels archaic, but Leuschner (1996) shows that Middle English *efre* had both NPI and positive universal uses (see also Hoekstra et al. 2012). Positive uses of *yet* feel similar in modern English: syntactically restricted with a sometimes archaic flavor (cf. Myler & Harves 2014). Finally, positive *anymore* has been described for many Midland American English dialects (Hindle & Sag 1975, *i.a.*).

(1) *any* = *every*

- a. I talked to anybody who was interested.
- b. Anybody can come.

(2) *ever* = *always*

- a. I've been here ever since you called.
- b. The crowd grew ever more raucous.
- c. the ever watchful guard
- d. *forever*, *everlasting*, *evergreen*, *happily ever after*

(3) *yet* = *still*

- a. The winner {is/has} yet to be determined.
- b. The night is yet young.
- c. There is yet more snow tonight.
- d. The gymnast may yet fall.

(4) *anymore* = *nowadays*

- a. Gas is expensive anymore.

What do these positive uses have in common? Strikingly, in each case, the logical relation between the positive and negative uses is the same: they are logical duals.

(5) a. not any = every not

b. not ever = always not

c. not yet = still not

d. not anymore = nowadays not

Given an NPI licensed by (and scoping under) simple negation, the positive counterpart of the NPI is the meaning the NPI would need to receive if it were interpreted as scoping above the negation, in order to get an identical meaning for the sentence. For *any* and *ever*, existential force becomes universal force. For *yet* and *anymore*, presupposed content is inverted, reflecting the semantic projection of a negated prejacent (cf. Löbner 1989 for German *schon*, 'already' and *noch*, 'still').

Synchronically, one should be cautious. The differences between positive and negative uses regarding both syntactic distribution and social factors makes a unified analysis unlikely. It is also not true that the two uses are equivalent for all NPI licensors. Notably, NPIs may be licensed by downward entailing operators that are not anti-additive for which the equivalence no longer holds.

- (6) Few professors passed any students.  
≠ Every student was passed by few professors.

On the other hand, the generalization provides a compelling story from a diachronic perspective. A child learning language has to hypothesize possible meanings for the words she encounters. When a given word is restricted to a specific logical environment, this invites an ambiguity of analysis. On the plausible assumption that most environments in which a child encounters an NPI are anti-additive (and in particular, involve sentential negation), the child can equally well posit an NPI meaning, or its dual.

## References

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