

Register-sensitivity of quantifier use: *no* vs. *any* in English

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1 Introduction

Negative quantifiers, such as *no*, can co-occur with sentential negation with a single negative meaning in contemporary varieties of American (AE) and British (BE) English [2, 3], known as the phenomenon of Negative concord (NC) [4, 2, 5]. However, NC is considered ungrammatical in standard English, whereas negative polarity items (NPIs) such as *any* are preferred, e.g., *I didn't get {no / any} sleep last night*. We are interested in the question whether and to what extent concept use such as that of quantifiers (*no* and *any*) are sensitive to registers, i.e., linguistic variations influenced by certain situational characteristics, e.g., social relation of interlocutors [1]. Moreover, as sentences with more than one negation allow for a NC (negative) or double negation (DN - affirmative) reading [4, 2], certain contexts might trigger specific interpretations. We report on two rating studies conducted in the USA and UK, where we used social relation manipulations to create formal vs. informal situations. Hypotheses were: **(1)** NC would be rated less appropriate than NPIs. **(1a)** NC would be rated less appropriate in formal than informal contexts. **(1b)** NPIs would be rated equally appropriate in formal vs. informal contexts. **(2)** NC is rated less negative than NPI negations. **(2a)** NC might be rated less negative in formal than informal contexts. **(2b)** NPIs would be interpreted equally in formal vs. informal contexts.

2 Method

The studies used a 2x2 factorial design with the factors FORMALITY (formal vs. informal) and NEGATION (NC vs. NPI); we also included single negation variants as control conditions. The critical sentences were short stories and two questions which were answered with a 7-point Likert scale (1: "Certainly not"; 7: "Certainly yes"). (S1-S2) set a context, (S3) contains the formality manipulation via social relations, and (S4) contains the negation manipulation. (Q1) asks about the appropriateness of (S4) in the given context, and (Q2) asks about the interpretation of (S4), see (1). **Exp.1.** (Country=USA, SubjectN=120, ItemN=36, FillerN=66, Online data collection at Prolific) and **Exp.2.** (Country=UK) used the same method and materials.

- (1) (S1) George Henderson works in a shop.
 (S2) The shop is deserted.
 (S3) He says to {his manager/his mother}:
 (S4) “I didn’t see {no clients/any clients/clients} here.”
 (Q1) Is the sentence appropriate within the given context?
 (Q2) Did George Henderson see clients here?

3 Results

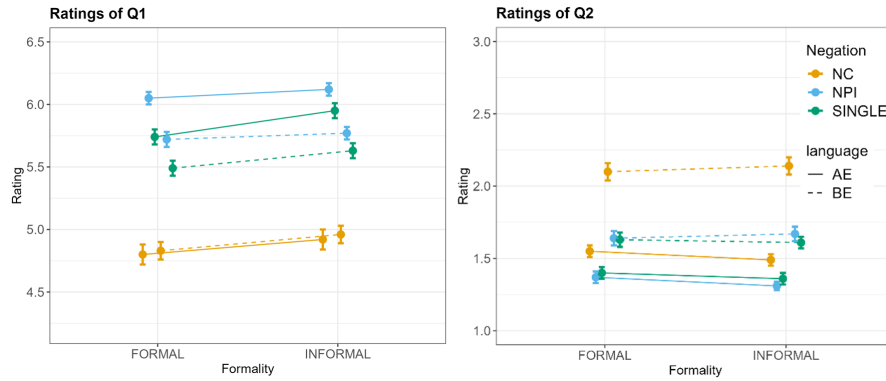


Fig. 1. Mean and error bars of appropriateness rating (Q1, left) and negativity rating (Q2, right). The context manipulation formal vs. informal is plotted on the left vs. right side of each figure. Solid lines represent results of the AE data set, dashed lines the results of the BE data set. The colors indicate the negation type.

We computed separate ordinal models for the ratings of Q1 and Q2 in both experiments (see Figure 1.); p-values were obtained using likelihood ratio tests. **(1)** NC was rated significantly less appropriate than NPI (Exp.1: $p < 0.0001$; Exp.2: $p < 0.0001$); **(1a)** NC was rated significantly less appropriate in formal than in informal contexts, but only in the AE data (Exp.1: $p = 0.006$; Exp.2: $p = 0.65$); **(1b)** NPI was rated equally appropriate in formal vs. informal contexts (Exp.1: $p = 0.59$; Exp.2: $p = 0.32$). **(2)** NC was rated significantly less negative than NPI (Exp.1: $p = 0.0001$, Exp.2: $p = 0.0002$) hinting at the DN interpretation; **(2a)** there was no register effect on the interpretation of NC (Exp.1: $p = 0.95$, Exp.2: $p = 0.27$) or **(2b)** that of NPI (Exp.1: $p = 0.06$, Exp.2: $p = 0.75$).

4 Conclusion

Results show that across both samples, NC was rated less appropriate than NPI, with a register effect in the AE data. In terms of interpretations, we did not find

any register effect in either case, but a difference in negativity between NC vs. NPI in the BE data, hinting that DN is available to a higher extent (cf. [6]). Our study shows, among the first, the register-sensitivity of NC constructions.

Selected references

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