

Polarity and Negative Concord: The case of Basque

M.T. Espinal (UAB), U. Etxeberria (CNRS-IKER), S. Tubau (UAB)

The main goal of this paper is to broaden our understanding of the limits between Polarity Licensing (PL) and Negative Concord (NC), a long-standing problem in the linguistics literature.

INTRODUCTION: In broad terms PL is the expression of a semantic dependency (Giannakidou 1997), whereas NC is the expression of a syntactic dependency (Zeijlstra 2004) between two constituents. Previous approaches to the identification of contexts that license linguistic expressions known as Polarity Items (PIs) introduce notions such as *affectiveness* (Klima 1964), *downward entailingness* (Ladusaw 1979), and *polarity sensitivity* (Giannakidou 1997). The intuition behind this definition is that PIs are sensitive expressions that are dependent on semantic features of the context for grammaticality, that is, they are expressions that have a semantic deficiency and are thus unable to be properly interpreted unless their semantic requirements are satisfied (Giannakidou 1997, et seq). On the other hand, the label NC is used in the literature to describe the possibility that two or more apparently negative elements co-occur in the same clause, yielding only one semantic negation (Labov 1972). NC can show up in natural languages either by means of negative spread, negative doubling, or negative spread and doubling (den Besten 1986, van der Wouden & Zwarts 1993, Zeijlstra 2004:61). Giannakidou (1997, 2000) further distinguished between Strict NC and Non-Strict NC. Crucial to these technical definitions is the term *n-word* (coined by Laka 1990), to which we refer as Negative Concord Items (NCIs). NCIs have been originally conceived as NPIs, interpreted as existential quantifiers, which appear in structures containing a sentential negative marker or a similar expression and yield one single logical negation.

Concerning Basque, two claims have been made in the literature, namely (i) that this language has NPIs, since *inork* in (1a) is not in the domain of an NPI-licensor and thus is ungrammatical (Laka 1990:38); and (ii) that, typologically, Basque is a Negative Concord (NC) language, due to the need of the overt sentential negative marker *ez* ‘not’ to negate a sentence, (1b,c) (Etxepare 2003:523).

- (1) a. **Inork* hori erosi du. b. *Ez* du *inork* hori erosi.
anybody.ERG that.ABS buy AUX not AUX anybody.ERG that.ABS buy
c. *Inork ez* du hori erosi.
Anybody.ERG not AUX that.ABS buy
‘Nobody bought that.’

The above two claims do not appear to be theoretically compatible with one another. A central characteristic of NC is that NCIs can be used as negative fragment answers (without the presence of an overt sentential negative marker) and can create Double Negation (DN) readings when two NCIs combine with a sentential negative marker and are pronounced with some particular intonation contour, while PIs cannot. In Basque, *i*-indefinites cannot be used as fragment answers in without the negative marker *ez* (2) and cannot create DN readings (3).

- (2) Q: Nor etorri da? A: **Inor* A’: \sqrt{Inor} *ez*
who come aux anybody anybody not

- (3) *Inork ez* du *ezer inon* erosi.
Anybody.ERG not AUX anything.ABS anywhere.IN buy
‘Nobody bought anything anywhere.’ *‘Everybody bought something somewhere.’

Thus, the questions that arise are: what are the formal differences between PL and NC? Under what condition can an indefinite be said to be a PI or an NCI? Are Basque PIs to be actually considered NCIs? And, is Basque to be considered a (Strict) NC language?

ARGUMENTS. In order to provide a reply to these questions we will focus on: (i) the distribution of *i*-indefinite and *ere*-indefinite PIs in Basque, showing that they are superweak PIs (Hoeksema 2012) licensed by non-veridical operators, which include downward entailing, anti-additive, and anti-morphic operators (Etxepare 2003). Furthermore, they cannot be used as fragment answers (see (2)) and they cannot yield DN readings (see Etxeberria et al 2018; see (3)); (ii) the

differences between Basque PIs, which behave similarly to Hindi PIs concerning all the properties just mentioned (Lahiri 1998), and English PI *any*; (iii) the contrasts between Basque PIs and NCIs in Strict NC languages (Fălăuș 2007, Fălăuș & Nicolae 2016, Giannakidou 1997, et seq., Tóth 1999, Surányi 2002, 2006, Szabolcsi 2016).

PROPOSAL. We base our analysis of the difference between PL and NC on (i) the existence of a variety of semantically related items (i.e., different types of indefinites that conform the polarity landscape of a given language) vs. lack of it at the time of lexical insertion; and (ii) the feature specification that different PI types have vs. the feature specification of NCIs.

There are grammars with *only one type of polarity-sensitive lexical items* (e.g., PIs in Hindi), and these are distributed symmetrically in different positions. That is, when it comes to expressing a negative dependency, no matter where PIs occur (in pre-negative, post-negative, or in fragment answers), they must always co-occur with an overt negative marker. Other grammars have *two types of polarity-sensitive lexical items* that despite being semantically different have a symmetric syntactic distribution (e.g., Basque *i*-indefinites and *ere*-indefinites): no matter where they occur, they always have to co-occur with an overt negative marker in negative sentences. There are also grammars with PIs and NCIs distributed asymmetrically in different syntactic positions. In Strict NC languages such as Greek and Romanian there are PIs (e.g. *tipota* and *cine știe ce, vreun* respectively) and NCIs (e.g. *TIPOTA* and *nimeni*), with only the latter used exclusively in negative contexts (Giannakidou 1997, 2000, Fălăuș 2013). In a Non-Strict NC language such as Catalan, by contrast, there are dedicated PIs (*gaire*), and items that can be both PIs/NCIs (*ningú, res*; minimizers without/with *ni*). Again, in these languages, only NCIs can occur preverbally and as fragment answers in the absence of the negative marker. Thus, in general, PIs differ from NCIs in that only the latter may occur in isolation, as fragment answers, and may be involved in DN readings. Basque *i*-indefinites and *ere*-indefinites align with PIs rather than NCIs, and have been experimentally found to be unable to contribute negation on their own (Etxeberria et al. 2021).

In terms of feature specification, the picture of the polarity landscape that emerges from the data that we consider is the following: all PIs are semantically-dependant on non-veridical operators. In addition, some PIs are further specified as activating ordered alternatives along a scale due to an extra Focus-related functional layer that hosts the particle *even*, which is responsible for their scalar meaning (e.g. Basque *bat ere* indefinites, Catalan minimizers). A further question is whether NCIs are a subset of PIs. If they are, then they are characterized as semantically-dependant lexical items with a syntactic formal feature [uNeg] that, unlike the semantic properties that PIs have been shown to have, must be checked by Agree.

CONCLUSION. Basque *i*-/*bat ere* indefinites are PIs, and do not coexist with NCIs or lexical items comparable to English *nobody, nothing*. Therefore, they need to combine with an overt negative marker to occur in fragment answers, they may occur in pre-negative/post-negative position, and they may appear in sentence initial position iff *ez* is overt. Basque *i*-/*bat ere* indefinites are existentials under the scope of an operator (either the negative operator or some other non-veridical operator). Since PL is a semantic operation that does not involve syntactic Agree, in Basque no Last Resort negative operator is activated to license a negative reading for *i*-/*bat ere* indefinites without sentential negation (Etxeberria et al. 2021). The negative marker in Basque is an operator encoding logical negation (¬). By contrast, what characterizes the neg marker in NC languages is an operator carrying, in addition, a negative syntactic feature ([iNEG]) that participates in an Agree syntactic relation. As Basque PIs do not behave like NCIs, Basque cannot be claimed to be a (Strict) NC language (contra Etxepare 2003; Etxeberria et al. 2018).

SELECTED REFERENCES: Etxeberria et al 2021. Polarity items in Basque. NLLT. Etxepare 2003. 'Negation', *A Grammar of Basque*, de Gruyter. Fălăuș & Nicolae 2016. Fragment answers and double negation in strict negative concord languages. *Semant. Linguist. Theory* 26. Giannakidou 2000. Negative...concord? NLLT 18. Hoeksema 2012. On the Natural History of NPIs. *Linguistic Analysis* 38. Lahiri 1998. Focus and negative polarity in Hindu. NLS 6. Laka 1990. *Negation in Syntax: On the Nature of Functional Categories and Projections*. Ph.D, MIT. Surányi 2006. Quantification and focus in Negative Concord. *Lingua* 116. Zeijlstra 2004. *Sentential Negation and Negative Concord*. Ph.D. U.Amsterdam.