NPI INTERVENTION: CROSSLINGUISTIC JUDGMENTS
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Motivation

Claim: Factive predicates block NPIs in French & Italian, but not English:

- (1) I regret that this [NPI] happened.
- (2) If I later [subjv] that he had left [NPI].
- (3) Only John had [NPI] cake.
- (4) Only John had [NPI] birthday cake.

We investigate the nature of this variation across three languages.

Experimental Design

Setup: Subjects recruited on Mechanical Turk from US+Canada (n = 46); Italy (n = 29); and France+Canada (n = 34). Lists created using TurkTools (turktools.net).

Sentences presented in discourse contexts; subjects asked to rank “naturalness” of response from 1–5. Lists parallel across languages; e.g., list 1/item 1:

En. 1: Shane is surprised that Rachel has at some point eaten carrots.
En. 2: No, he isn’t surprised that she has [NPI] eaten carrots.
Fr. 1: Auguste est surpris qu’Élhelie ait mangé des carottes plusieurs fois.
Fr. 2: Ce n’est pas vrai, il n’est pas surpris qu’elle ait mangé quelque carottes que ce soit.

Conditions: Within subjects Between subjects

<table>
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<th>2 polarities</th>
<th>4 matrix verbs</th>
<th>5 NPIs = 24 items/subj. x 3 Languages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>affirmative</td>
<td>non-neg-raising</td>
<td>no NPI</td>
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<tr>
<td>negative</td>
<td>neg-raising</td>
<td>weak NPI</td>
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<td>cognitive factive</td>
<td>strong NPI</td>
<td>emotive factive</td>
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Plurality: All food words used as object nouns were count nouns.

Mood: Subjective used for items like pensare whose negated indicative is factive.

Results

Conclusions

What we learned:

English has no factive intervention (expected).

Future questions:

What is the locus of variation?

Italian has factive intervention (expected).

Is this intervention presuppositional?

French seems intermediate (unexpected!)

References

Chemla, E. et al. 2011. Modularity and intuitions in formal semantics. LP 34
Homer, V. 2008. Disruption of NPI licensing: the case of presuppositions. SALT 18

Presented at Linguistic Evidence, Universität Tübingen, Feb. 15–17 2018

Background

Theory: Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) like ever, at all, bother to are licensed in Strawson Downward Entailing (SDE) environments (von Fintel, 1999) in which entailment is: to more specific cases and never defined due to presupposition failure.

Problem: Some presuppositions intervene in NPI licensing, so are not accommodated:

- (5) [Mary read an interesting book] • [John, didn’t read anything] interesting.
- (6) [Mary read no interesting books] # [John, didn’t read anything] interesting.

Chemla et al. (2011): French speakers’ downward inferences predict their acceptance of the NPI le moins une ‘a single’. (45 undergrads, within-subjects, continuous scale)

Our question: If factives really intervene, what is the cross-linguistic difference? Is it due to the factive presupposition (a challenge for the SDE theory)?

Experimental Conditions

Cognitive vs. Emotive Factives

- Cognitive factives are soft triggers, and can be cancelled:
  - (7) If I later [subjv] that I’ve lied, I’ll confess.
  - (8) Where was Harriet yesterday?
    - Henry [discovered] that she had an interview at Princeton.
    - ? Henry [happy] that she had an interview at Princeton.

Djärv et al. (to appear): people more readily accept affirmatives that contradict emotive factives than cognitive factives. (62 undergrads, within-subjects, Likert scale)

- Cognitive factives do not license NPIs:
  - (9) John [discovered] that he had left [NPI] food in the fridge.
  - John [regretted] that he had left [NPI] food in the fridge.

Weak vs. Strong NPIs

Certain NPIs are strong, and cannot appear in certain environments including:

- (10) Emotive factives:
  a. I regret [ever] meeting you.
  b. I regret meeting you in [years]

- (11) Non-neg-raising predicates:
  a. I didn’t claim I’d [ever] seen her.
  b. I didn’t claim I’d seen her in [years].

Italian has factive intervention (expected). Is this intervention presuppositional?

Control

Expected: Actual:

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  - (7) If I later [subjv] that I’ve lied, I’ll confess.
  - If I later [regret] that I’ve lied, I’ll confess.

- Cognitive factives have at-issue complements that can be used to answer questions:
  - (8) Where was Harriet yesterday?
    - Henry [discovered] that she had an interview at Princeton.
    - ? Henry [happy] that she had an interview at Princeton.

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