Ton van der Wouden: *Negative Contexts: Collocation, Polarity and Multiple Negation* (Routledge Studies in Germanic Linguistics).


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The book under review is an important work in the semantic study of negation, especially in the analysis of negative environments where negative polarity items (henceforth NPIs), like *any* or *ever*, appear. It is well known that the distribution of NPIs is limited to the scopes of what is called NPI-licensing expressions, such as *not*, *no one*, *if*, *before*, *at most + numeral*, *few*, *doubt*, *be surprised*, *without*, and *scarcely*. The (syntactic) diversity of these licensing expressions led Klima (1964) to assume that some semantic property unifies this class and to postulate the feature [affective], which was left undefined, though. Ladusaw (1979) argued that in the absence of a
definition of [affective], there was no alternative but to list arbitrarily the lexical items in question, such as *not, before, or if, as semantically [+ affective] and that such an approach was inadequate. He consequently replaced the feature [affective] with a definition employing the notion of Downward Entailment/Monotonicity (DM).

However, the environments which these DM expressions provide are not homogeneous, as shown in (1)–(3). Bold marks NPI-licensing expressions, and italics NPIs.

(1) a. Chomsky wasn’t a *bit happy about these facts.
   b. Chomsky didn’t talk about these facts *yet.
   c. Chomsky didn’t talk about any of these facts.

(2) a. *No one was a *bit happy about these facts.
   b. No one has talked about these facts *yet.
   c. No one talked about any of these facts.

(3) a. *At most three linguists were a *bit happy about these facts.
   b. *At most three linguists have talked about these facts *yet.
   c. At most three linguists have talked about any of these facts.

(van der Wouden 1997: 141)

There seems to be some difference in the strength of negation among the above three contexts, though all of them are DM. This heterogeneity of DM environments is also well known to many researchers, but no one could ever give an appropriate theoretical explanation to the idiosyncratic behaviors of NPIs and their licensors. The greatest contribution of this book is that it presents the way of distinguishing different levels of negativity of various DM contexts and defines each level by independently motivated notions, originally used in a field of mathematics, i.e. Boolean Algebra.1

This book consists of three parts. Part I introduces the definition of collocation and claims that polarity phenomenon should be subsumed under collocations, which in turn should receive a ‘respectable’ place in language theory. Part II, based mainly on Dutch data, proposes the hierarchy of negative contexts (three levels) with the definitions of properties governing each of them, and classifies NPIs (and positive polarity items (PPIs)) according to which type of the negative contexts they co-occur with. He claims that his analysis is equally applicable to other languages. Part III puts stress on the fruitfulness of the notion Downward Monotonicity (DM) by showing that it is at work not only with negative polarity licensing, but also with multiple negations, such as negative concord, litotes, denial, and emphatic negation. The rest of this paper will give a brief summary of each part in

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1 Its seminal idea can be seen in Zwarts (1981).
order and examine the availability of his main proposal, i.e., the hierarchy of negation, to other languages.

Part I introduces the following definition of collocation.

(4) Definition

**Collocation**: idiosyncratic restriction on the combinability of lexical items.

(van der Wouden 1997: 5)

Regretting that collocation is mostly neglected, in spite of its importance, by language theoreticians, the author claims that collocation should receive a 'respectable' place in language theory. For example, as long as one doesn’t have any ideas about phonology, the co-occurrence of *an* and *apple* in *an apple* is a mystery, also known as a collocation. But once one has a phonological theory, the collocational behavior of this combination can be explained away by means of notions such as vowels and consonants. He maintains it means that collocation deserves a theoretical research of linguistics. Here, collocation is regarded as the general phenomenon of lexical items having a restricted distribution, and polarity items as a specific class of such lexical items.

Part II concentrates on polarity phenomena in Dutch and distinguishes three levels of strength in negative contexts. Here the term 'negative contexts' is used in the widest sense, including all the environments where NPIs appear, such as the scopes of *if*, *few*, *without*, or *before*. The definitions of the three levels are given as Boolean properties, *monotone decreasing*, *anti-additive*, *antimorphic*, as shown in (5), with some English and Dutch examples. The Ben diagram (5) also illustrates the relation of the three properties.

The weak negation is monotone decreasing (= downward monotonic, DM), the negation of medium strength is anti-additive (AA), and the strong negation is antimorphic (AM). As predictable from the above definitions, AM is a proper

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\begin{array}{c|c|c}
\text{monotone decreasing} & \text{anti-additive (AA)} & \text{Antimorphic (AM)} \\
(= \text{downward monotonic, DM}) & f(X) \cup f(Y) \leftrightarrow f(X) \cap f(Y) & f(X) \cup f(Y) \leftrightarrow f(X) \cap f(Y) \\
X \subseteq Y \rightarrow f(Y) \subseteq f(X) & \text{no one, if, before,} & f(X) \cup f(Y) \leftrightarrow f(X) \cap f(Y) \\
at \text{most} n N, \text{few (E),} & \text{refuse (E),} & \text{not (E),} \\
bhoogstens n N (D) & \text{niemand (D)} & \text{niet (D)}
\end{array}
\]

\[2\] Exactly speaking, there is another property called antimultiplicative which is of the same level of negativity as anti-additive, i.e., stronger than DM and weaker than AM. It is defined as \(f(X \cap Y) \leftrightarrow f(X) \cup f(Y)\). So antimorphic is the intersection of anti-additive and antimultiplicative: \(f(X \cup Y) \leftrightarrow f(X) \cap f(Y)\) and \(f(X \cap Y) \leftrightarrow f(X) \cup f(Y)\). I ignore this property because it doesn't play any role in licensing polarity items.
subset of AA, which is in turn a proper subset of DM. This idea of the hierarchy of negation explains the seemingly strange distribution of NPIs in Dutch, as in (6)–(8), where niet (= not) is AM, geen kind/oordeel (= no child/judgement) is AA, hoogstens drie monniken/nonnen/lezingen (= at most three monks/nuns) is DM.

(6) a. De kinderen kunnen de schoolmeester niet uistaan.
   ‘The children can the schoolmaster not stand.’
   ‘The children can’t stand the teacher.’

b. De abt heeft het geheim niet aan ook maar iemand verteld.
   ‘The abbot has the secret not to anybody told.
   ‘The abbot didn’t tell the secret to anybody.’

c. Zijn oordeel was niet mals.
   ‘His judgement was not tender.’
   ‘He was very harsh in his judgement’. (van der Wouden 1997: 112)

(7) a. Geen kind kan de schoolmeester uistaan.
   ‘No child can stand the teacher.’

b. Geen kind zal ook maar iets bereiken.
   ‘No child will reach anything.’

c. *Geen oordeel was mals.
   ‘No judgement was tender.’ (van der Wouden 1997: 120)

(8) a. Hoogstens drie monniken kunnen de abt uistaan.
   ‘At most three monks can stand the abbot.’

b. *Hoogstens drie nonnen kennen ook maar één paar woorden Fries.
   ‘At most three nuns know any a few words Frisian.’

c. *Na hoogstens drie lezingen was de kritiek mals.
   ‘After at most three lectures was criticism tender.’
   (van der Wouden 1997: 116)

(6) shows that AM niet (= not) licenses all kinds of NPIs, including kunnen uistaan (= can stand), ook maar (= at all), and mals (= tender, idiom). In (7), AA geen kind/oordeel (= no child/judgement) licenses kunnen uistaan and ook maar but not mals. In (8), DM hoogstens drie monniken (= at most three monks) licenses kunnen uistaan but not the other two.

3 The author says (p. 105) that Zwarts (1986: 238) proves that DM corresponds to (ib) and (ic), AA to (ib), (ic) and (id), AM to (ia), (ib) and (ic).

(i) Generalized De Morgan’s laws, split

a. \( f(X \cap Y) \rightarrow f(X) \cup f(Y) \)

b. \( f(X) \cup f(Y) \rightarrow f(X \cap Y) \)

c. \( f(X \cup Y) \rightarrow f(X) \cap f(Y) \)

d. \( f(X) \cap f(Y) \rightarrow f(X \cup Y) \)
According to the compatibility with these three negative contexts, NPIs are classified into three types (weak, medium, strong): *kunnen uitslaan* is a weak NPI, *ook maar* is a medium NPI, and *maals* is a strong NPI. The author claims that the compatibility of most Dutch NPIs with their licensing expressions fit into the same patterns. PPIs are similarly (but in the reverse direction) classified into three groups. The compatibility of NPIs and PPIs with the three types of negative contexts in Dutch is illustrated as in (9).

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Negation} & \text{PPI} & \text{NPI} \\
\hline
\text{Monotone} & \text{strong} & \text{weak} & \text{strong} & \text{medium} & \text{weak} \\
\text{Decreasing (DM)} & - & + & - & - & + \\
\text{Anti-additive (AA)} & - & - & + & - & + \\
\text{Antimorphic (AM)} & - & - & - & + & + \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

(van der Wouden 1997: 131)

(9) (where '+' denotes grammaticality and '-' ungrammaticality) illustrates the fact that PPIs and NPIs are not in complementary distribution, as generally stated, but rather show a sort of mirror image structure. It explains that both NPI *any* and PPI *some* appear in AA *if*-clauses, for example. The author argues that this analysis is applicable to other languages.

The above is the essence of Part II, the main part of this book. Negative polarity phenomenon is notorious for the complicated behaviors both of NPIs and of their licensing expressions. The diversity of the classes has made it rather hard to give a comprehensive analysis to the whole range of data. This book seems to be successful, at least, in the attempt to make clear what is the heterogeneity of negative contexts in Dutch. It is a great progress since Ladusaw (1979). However, I cast doubt on the straightforward applicability of his claim to other languages. I will present some data from English and Japanese which suggest that some other property should play a role in constituting the hierarchy of negation in these languages.

In English, *at most* *+* numeral(n) *+* Noun(N) is DM, *if* and *no one* are AA, and *not* is AM.\(^4\) Given this fact, the above analysis predicts that the same NPIs will behave similarly in the same type of negative contexts, for example, the scopes of *if* and

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\(^4\) See Yoshimura (1999) for the detailed tests of these English NPI-licensing expressions.
no one. However, it is not the case. Consider the following examples.

(10) a. *At most 3 of my classmates have attended the reunion in years.
b. *At most 3 students need take the make-up examination.

(11) a. *We would have met with him if he had bothered to get in contact with us in years.
b. *He is welcome to call me anytime if he need see me.

(12) a. No one has seen her in years.
b. No one need come to school so early in the morning.

(13) a. He has not seen her in years.
b. Students need not come to school so early in the morning.

(10) shows that NPls in years and need are medium or strong NPls since they are not licensed in the scope of at most n N, i.e., weak DM context. These NPls are licensed in the scope of no one, as shown in (12), but not in the scope of if, as in (11). Following the definition in (5), both of no one and if are AA. The above analysis incorrectly predicts that the grammatical judgements of (11) and (12) will be the same. Rather, (11) is similar to (10), and (12) to (13). In the strong AM contexts, both in years and need are acceptable, as shown in (13).

The same seems to be true of Japanese data (14)-(17). Japanese NPI-licensing expression seizei–da is DM, moshi–n ara and ~ o kyozetu-suru (shita) are AA, ~ nai (na-katta) is AM. Dare-ni-mo and doko-e-mo are known as NPIs.5

   ‘At most 3 people of the victims consulted anybody.’
   ‘At most 3 people went out anywhere during the training camp.’

   ‘If you consult anybody, you may hit upon a good.’
   ‘If you go out anywhere, please leave me a memo.’

   ‘Hanako refuses to talk about the matter to anybody.’
b. Hillary wa, sono-hi taichou ga waru-katta-node, doko-e-mo dekakeru-koto o kyozetu-shita.
   ‘Hillary refused to go out anywhere since she felt sick on the day.’

(17) a. Sakujitu wa ie-ni ite dare-ni-mo awa-na-katta.

5 See Yoshimura (forthcoming) for more of the analysis of Japanese negative contexts and NPIs.
'I stayed home and didn’t see anybody yesterday.'

b. Hanako wa sakujitu doko-e-mo dekake-na-katta.

‘Hanako didn’t go out anywhere yesterday.’

There must be another property which split AA into two groups: one including English *if* in (11) and Japanese *moshi ~ n(h)ara* in (15), and the other including English *no one* in (12) and Japanese *~ o kyozetu-suru* in (16). I suggest that it is something like double-negative property. It is also doubtful whether English and Japanese NPIs are sensitive to the distinction between DM and AA, and AA and AM. To claim the universality of van der Wouden’s hierarchy of negative contexts, closer examination will be needed.

Part III is a collection of data from many languages, of multiple negations, such as negative concord, litotes, denial, and emphatic negation. It is intended to serve as a support for the claim that the notion of downward monotonicity is very fruitful not only in the analyses of polarity items but also in other phenomena like multiple negations. The data are interesting, but the target range of data is too broad for him to prove the claim within the limited space. It can, however, be regarded as the starting point for the study of the effective notion ‘downward monotonicity’ in many other linguistic phenomena.

To conclude this review, I would like to repeat that the book is an excellent work in the semantic analysis of negative contexts. It elucidates what was the heterogeneity of negative environments. It can be regarded as a refined version of Ladusaw (1979). Like all the other excellent works, it also clarifies what remains to be solved.

References


