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Negative Polarity Items in English and Arabic: A Contrastive Study

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A B S T R A C T

It is the syntactic or the semantic rules which determine where to use certain item or what is the context in which it is allowable to be used. Thus, items cannot be haphazardly used. This fact is true with the items under study which are called 'Negative Polarity Items', henceforth NPIs. In any case, the rule that governs these items constrains their existence to negative context, i.e., they are used in negative constructions..

This paper aims to conduct a contrastive study of the negative polarity items in both English and Arabic. This aim is built on the basis of the hypothesis that claims the existence of such items in both languages (English and Arabic). It also aims to shed light on the similarities and the differences between these languages concerning these items. Concerning the problem of this study, there are extremely few studies that look into the similarities and differences between these items in both English and Arabic .

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الالفاظ الملازمة للنفي في العربية والانكليزية: دراسة تقابلية

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المستخلص:

إن القواعد النحوية أو الدلالية هي التي تحدد المكان او السياق الذي يجوز فيه استخدام عنصر ما. وهكذا لا يمكن استخدام العناصر بشكل عشوائي. هذه الحقيقة صحيحة مع العناصر قيد الدراسة والتي تسمى " الالفاظ الملازمةللنفي"، والتي سيرمز لها NPIs. وعلى أية حال، فإن القاعدة التي تحكم هذه الالفاظ تقيد وجودها في سياقات النفي، أي أنها تستخدم في تراكيب النفي.

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى إجراء دراسة مقارنة الالفاظ الملازمةللنفي في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية. تم بناء هذا الهدف على أساس الفرضية التي تدعي وجود مثل هذه الالفاظ باللغتين (الإنجليزية والعربية). كما يهدف إلى تسليط الضوء على أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين هذه اللغات فيما يتعلق بهذه العناصر. فيما يتعلق بمشكلة هذه الدراسة، هناك عدد قليل جدًا من الدراسات التي تبحث في أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين هذه العناصر في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: عناصر القطبية، السلبية، اللغة الإنجليزية، اللغة العربية، القيود.

Literature Review

Negative polarity items in Arabic are the subject of numerous research; however, not all of them focus on standard Arabic, but rather on the various dialects of the language. Alsarayreh (2012) investigates the licensing conditions on Negative Sensitive Items in Jordanian Arabic. The study reveals that the semantic concept of non-veridicality best describes how these things are distributed.

In Alftayeh's (2021) comprehensive inventory study, he analyzes and describes the syntax of negative polarity items in the Arabic dialect of Deir Ezzor, a city in Syria. He covers negative polarity auxiliary verbs, negative polarity lexical verbs, and the idiomatic NPIs (minimisers and maximisers). The primary focus of the research is on the licensing contexts, such as the specifics of comparison structures and what qualifies them as licensing

environments for NPIs. The conclusions of this study assert that researchers shouldn't restrict their investigation to evaluating the theories that explain the licencing issue.

Studies of negative polarity items in English concentrate on examining the licensing conditions of these items. Sohng (2014) modifies Giannakidou's condition and adds Chung's (2010) Free Choice condition to determine the licensing requirements for polarity item (any).

For Denić, et al., (2022), the inferential judgments stated for a certain environment are changed in the presence of polarity-sensitive items. Therefore, language and reasoning skills have a reciprocal influence: reasoning facts determine whether polarity items are linguistically acceptable, and the mere addition of ostensibly innocuous polarity items can change reasoning conclusions.

1. Definitions of Negative Polarity Items

Radford (2009: 60) proposes that certain types of lexical items have an inherent polarity due to the fact that their occurrence is exclusively limited to specific environments, thus they must be licensed by an effective negative, interrogative or conditional constituents. Huddleston, et al., (2002:822) defines NPIs in terms of sensitivity stating that specific words, fixed or variable phrases and idiomatic expressions “are sensitive to the polarity of the environment in which they occur”. They (ibid) further add that “items which prefer negative context over positive once (such as any longer) are negatively-oriented polarity–sensitive items, or NPIs”. In the same way, Baker (1970: 179) states that “negative polarity items are appropriate in structures within the scope of negations”. Similarly, Penka (2011: 102) defines them as “words or expressions that can only occur in contexts that are in some in some sense negative”.

The subject of the current investigation is to identify the class of NPIs in English and Arabic. It also specifies the context for licensing these items. To conduct this aim, it adapts Huddleston, et al. (2002) model of categorizing NPIs in English. The model proposed by Giannakidou (2002) is also adapted to examine the licensing context of these items in English. For Arabic NPI identification, Alanazi (2013) model is adapted. In addition, Alsarayreh (2019) model is adapted to investigate the Arabic contexts permitting NPIs.

2. Negative Polarity Items in English

2.1 The Class of Negative Polarity Items in English

The class of the NPIs is quite large, therefore it is impossible to provide an exhaustive and definitive account of these items. However, below are an account of the most important ones and others of less importance:

1. The 'any' class: any, anybody, any longer, any more, anyone, anything, anywhere.
2. Miscellaneous grammatical items (mostly function as adjuncts): at all, either, ever, long, much, till/until, too, what(so)ever, yet.
3. The model auxiliaries 'dare' and 'need.
4. Few lexical verbs: bother (+ infinitival), budge, faze.
5. A large and probably open array of idioms including: can abide/bear/stand, can be bothered, could care less, cost a bean, do a (single) thing (about…), drink/ touch a drop, eat a bite/thing, give a damn/fig, have a clue, have a penny (to one's name) (BrE), have a red cent (AmE), hear/say a word/sound, hold a candle to, in ages, in donkey's years, lift a finger (to help), mind a bit, move a muscle, say a word, see a thing, see a (living) soul, so much as (+verb), take a (blind) bit of notice, would hurt a fly.

The following show how some selected samples from the above items behave when occurring in negative and/or positive constructions:

(1) a. Lee didn't budge an inch. b. *Lee budged an inch.
(2) a. They can't abide aniseed. b. *They can abide aniseed.
(3) a. You needn't come with us. b. *You need come with us.
(4) a. He didn't wait so much as a week. b. *He waited so much as a week.
(5) a. She hasn't woken up yet. b. *She has woken up yet.
(6) a. I didn't see a living soul. b. # I saw a Jiving soul.
(7) a. Joe hasn't lifted a finger to help. b. #Joe has lifted a finger to help.

The existence of these items in negative constructions make the meaning of the sentences sound natural, whereas their existence in positive constructions resulted in ill-formed sentences. As for the last two items, their existence in the negative constructions make the literal meaning seem bizarre (Huddleston, et al., 2002:823).

2.2 Restrictions of Negative Polarity Items in English

Doubtlessly, the existence of a sentence like (8) below can cause confusion if the above discussion is taken into consideration. The word 'any' is considered to be an NPI, but in the sentence (8) below it is not as the construction of the sentence is a positive one.

(8) Any changes must be approved by the broad.

Huddleston, et al., (2002:823) explain this confusion stating that some items have more than one sense therefore the restrictions is applied to one sense of an item but not to another. Therefore, the non-affirmative sense is treated as an NPI while the other sense is a 'free choice sense' which is not polarity-sensitive. Vendler (1967) called this use of 'any' as ***freedom of choice,*** or a Free Choice Item, henceforth FCI.

2.3 Contexts Licensing Negative Polarity Items in English

Giannakidou (2002: 5-9) list the contexts licensing NPIs, these are:

1. Direct negative 'not':

(9) He hadn't seen anybody.

2. Non-monotone quantifiers: Some quantifiers such as: *exactly three students, neither student, nobody but John, and almost nobody* are non-monotone, yet they allow 'any' to occur in their context. For example,

(10) Exactly three students saw anything.
(11) Neither student saw anything.
(12) Nobody but John saw anything.
(13) Almost nobody saw anything.

3. Hardly/barely: these adverbs allow for any

(14) John {hardly/barely} talked to anybody.
(15) John barely studied linguistics.

4. Questions: NPIs are frequently used in questions:

(16) Who did anything to help her?
(17) Why would you lift a finger to help like George?

5. The future: NPIs appear in sentences of future tense, as in,

(18) The children will leave as soon as they discover anything.

6. The habitual: Some adverbs that indicate habitual such as usually, as soon as, etc. admit the existence of NPIs.
7. Generic sentences: Non-monotone generic sentences accept NPIs, as in,

(19) Any cat hunts mice.

8. Modal verbs: These elements are also among the constituents that admit the occurrence of NPIs in their contexts.

(20) John may talk to anybody.

9. Imperatives: NPIs apparently used in imperative sentences, as in,

(21) Take any apple.

10. Overt and covert conditionals: A clause embedded as complement of *if* generally allows NPIs. The same thing is true with clauses in various other constructions that have conditional interpretations, as in,

(22) If you want anything, just call.
(23) If I'd ever seen anything like that, I'd have reported it.
(24) Would read your review, if I gave a damn about your opinion.

11. Directive intensional verbs: NPIs are admitted with directive propositional attitudes but not with epistemic ones.

(25) John would like to invite any student.
(26) John asked us to invite any student.

12. Comparative and superlative constructions: These constructions are commonly used with NPIs.

(27) She ran faster than she had ever run before.
(28) The performance was as good as any you could hope to see.

13. Prepositions {against, before, without): Certain prepositions come in sequence with NPIs, as in,

(29) She did it without any difficulty.
(30) He left before anyone noticed it.

14. The degree adverb too: when this adverb means "excessively", it licenses an indirect complement with the form of an infinitival clause or NPIs.

(31) It was too difficult for anyone else.
15. Downward entailing quantified NPs: quantifiers are other constituents that allow NPIs, as in,

(32) Few of the bees stung anyone.
(33) At most ten students did any work.
Huddleston, et al., (2002: 835-37) add that NPIs can be licensed to occur in the:
16. Covertly negative lexical items with clausal or clause-like complements: Verbs and adjectives that require clauses as complements are covertly negative as their entailments or implicatures involve the negation of the subordinate clause. These are of six classes:

(a) Failure, avoidance, and omission: NPIs are said to be found in the complement of "(usually infinitival or gerund-participial complements) of lexical items (mostly verbs) expressing failure to do something or similar acts of avoidance or omission. Relevant verbs include avoid, decline, fail, forget, neglect, refrain, and a few others, e.g. omit in BrE".

(34)The authorities failed to do a thing to ensure the child's safety.
(35) Lee forgot to take a blind bit of notice when they were giving directions.

(b) Prevention and prohibition: NPIs are sanctioned in the complements of the lexical items expressing prevention, prohibition, banning, excluding, or otherwise stopping actions which generally take gerund-participle complements. Examples of the verbs of this type include ban, hinder, keep, prevent, prohibit, and stop.

(36) We kept him from telephoning anyone before the police arrived.
(37) I am prohibited from so much as naming any of the principals in this case.

(c) Denial: The verb 'deny' and what constitute the meaning of 'denial' regardless of the lexical content or the syntactic structure, allow the existence of NPIs, as in,

(38) My client denies any involvement in the matter.
(39) My client completely rejects the notion that he ever said any such thing.

(d) Doubt: Dubitative items including verbs {doubt being the clearest case), adjectives {doubtful, dubious, skeptical), and nouns {doubt, skepticism) trigger the existence of NPIs.

(40) I doubt that Lee has been to the theater in ages.
(41) That they will ever have a better opportunity is very much to be doubted.
(42) I'm doubtful about the value of pursuing the matter any further.
(43) She expressed skepticism about there being any point in continuing.

(e) Counter-expectation: Statements that show contradiction to what has been expected are enough to sanction NPIs in complements. Examples of these verbs or verbal idioms as amaze, astonish, astound, bowl over, flabbergast, shock, surprise, take aback, and corresponding adjectives:

(44) It astounds me that they took any notice of him.
(45) It's surprising he lifted a finger, considering that he's a total stranger.

(f) Unfavorable evaluation: Some lexical items that express unfavorable evaluations, e.g. absurd, excessive, foolish, monstrous, ridiculous, silly, stupid, unacceptable, unwise, and many others, provide contexts for NPIs:

(46) It would be foolish to take any unnecessary risks.
(47) Any more pudding would be quite excessive.

3. Negative Polarity Items in Arabic

3.1 The Class of Negative Polarity Items in Arabic

Almasaruha (2006: 97) states that the reason why NPIs are attached to negated constructions is that they denote absolute paucity, the general human race, continuity in the time of negation, or surrounding the negation. In short, instead of repeating a lot of negative constructions, one can resort to deny a meaningful word that refer to all these negatives.
He (ibid) further suggest to classify NPIs into three classes:

1. Those denoting absolute paucity which are all referring to the nominal 'ʃayʔ'.

(49) وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَٰلِكَ غَدًا (23) الكهف

2. Those denote the general human race which are all referring to the nominal ʔaħad

(48) فَأَسْـرِ بِأَهْلِـكَ بِقِطْـعٍ مِـنَ اللَّيْـلِ وَاتَّبِـعْ أَدْبَـارَهُمْ وَلَا يَلْتَفِـتْ مِـنْكُمْ أَحَـدٌ وَامْضُـوا حَيْـثُ تُؤْمَرُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾ الحجر

3. Adverbial NPIs: Bedawi, et al. (2004:476-77) suggest that Arabic adverbial NPIs are ʔabadan ‘ever’, muṭlaqan ‘at all, ever’, qaṭṭu ‘(not) at all’, and ʔal-batta ‘at all’.

(50) قَـالُوا يَامُوسَـى إِنَّـا لَـنْ نَـدْخُلَهَا أَبَـدًا مَـا دَامُـوا فِيهَـا ۖ فَاذْهَـبْ أَنْـتَ وَرَبُّـكَ فَقَـاتِلَا إِنَّـا هَاهُنَـا قَاعِدُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

سمعوا ولم يبصروا قط(51) .

لا فضل لي البتة(52).

4. The determiner ʔay: This determiner can be found in a sentence like:

(53) زيد لم يشتري اي سيارة.

It said that Arabic dialects have another class of NPIs namely the ‘idiomatic NPIs’, however they are not from the standard Arabic.
Alanazi (2013: 2) makes the following list that include the NPIs of Arabic language:

The Arabic Script	The lexical item	Parts of speech	Translation
مطلقا	Mutlaqan	Adv	Never
ابدا	Abadan	Adv	Never
البتة	Albattah	Adv	Never
بعد	baʕd	Adv	Not yet
اي	ʔay	D	Any
احد	ʔaħad	N	A person
شئ	ʃayʔ	N	A thing

Table (1) Alanazi's list of NPIs

Moreover, Alsarayreh (2015: 68) adds to this list the words ʕiwadh 'عوض', kit 'قط' and laa 'لا'.

3.2 Restrictions of Negative Polarity Items in Arabic

Arabic linguists haven't made much studies about Arabic NPIs. They don't set rules for determining these items, on the contrary, they leave the issue without proposing a clear-cut rule. However, certain attempts are made recently to trace the issue and they adopt the theories made by western theorists to encounter the NPIs in Arabic.

Consequently, these studies reveals that items which are tested to check their belongingness to NPIs can be found in both negative and affirmative constructions. Therefore, they follow the theory which tells that for any item of various senses, only the senses that require negative environment are involved within NPIs (Hoyt: 6).

4.3 Contexts Licensing Negative Polarity Items in Arabic

The distribution of the NPIs in Arabic is restricted to the following:

1. Yes/no questions:

(54)أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ (12) الحجرات

2. The antecedent of conditionals:

(55) يَقُولُونَ لَوْ كَانَ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَمْرِ شَيْءٌ مَا قُتِلْنَا هَاهُنَا ﴿١٥٤﴾ آل عمران

3. Negative context: Arabic has five distinct negative particles, namely laa, lan, laysa, maa and lam. Negative constructions that carry such particles permit the existence of NPIs.

(57) وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَٰلِكَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ فِي شَيْءٍ إِلَّا أَنْ تَتَّقُوا مِنْهُمْ تُقَاةً ﴿٢٨﴾ آل عمران

(58) مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ وَلَٰكِنْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﴿٤٠﴾ الأحزاب

4. Implicit negation: Implicit negation has different manifestations. It can be manifested through:

a. Contradiction:

(59) خرجت مريم قبل ان تكلم احدا/ ايا من الحاضرين.

b. Some verbs: Verbs like deny ‘انكر’, refuse ‘أبى’, become less ‘قلّ’ and deny ‘جحد’ are reported to imply NPIs.

(60) أَبَى الْقَلْبُ لَا يَنْسَى طُلَيْحَةَ مُطْلَقًا ... وَلَا فِي أُسَارٍ إِنَّ ذَا لِغَرَامِ

c. Exception: Exception in Arabic can be applied through the use of certain tools, such as ila ‘الا’, gheir ‘غير’, xala ‘خلا’, etc.

(61) خرجت مريم من غير ان تكلم احدا.

d. Morphological formulas:

(62) كان الامتحان اصعب من ان تجيب مريمُ على أيٍّ/ٍّاحدٍ من اسئلتهِ.

The word ‘اصعب’ is a hyperbolic pattern, one of the morphological formulas in Arabic. Its existence in the sentence makes the meaning of the sentence negative.

e. Optative mood: is the case when we have leita ‘ليت’ and law ‘لو’.

(63) لو ان مريم اجابت على اي من الاسئلة ما عاقبها المعلم.

f. Conditional clause: The word law ‘لـو’ in this case is a conditional one.

(64) لو جائني احد أكرمته.

g. Analogy:

(65) يمشي علي كأنه احد ملوك الارض.

Confirmation: .h

(66) كل طالب ضرب احداً من زملائه نال العقاب.

It is important to mention that these manifestations of implicit negation permit the existence of ʔay and ʔaħad only and not to any other NPIs (Alsarayreh, 2019: 55-66).

5. The Similarity

1. In both languages, NPIs are restricted to those items that require negative environments.

2. There are shared context that licensed the NPIs in both languages, though their structural manifestations are different. These are the direct negative, the questions and the conditional clause.

3. In both languages, the context that licensed the NPIs are either covertly or overtly negative.

6. The Difference

1. English is more explicit in having a good deal of NPIs than Arabic does.
2. In English the context licensed the NPIs is more exhaustive and detailed than that of Arabic, i.e., Arabic NPIs are licensed in a very limited context.
3. In Arabic, certain context requires certain NP item(s) rather than the other (exception خلا), unlike English which has no such restriction.

7. Conclusion

It can be concluded that NPIs are not exclusive to the English language; Arabic also has a significant number of these items. Furthermore, these items are licensed, whether explicitly or implicitly, by negative expressions in both languages. NPIs in both languages are permitted for usage in specific common constructions.

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