

Negative Polarity Items and Compound Negatives

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Negative Polarity Items and Compound Negatives¹

Masatake Muraki

Lift a finger, a red cent, etc. in English mean *yubi ippon ugokasu, bita itimon*, etc. in Japanese, while *mettani, kessite*, etc. do not correspond to any English words. *Mettani-nai, kessite-nai*, etc. are equivalent to English *rarely, never*, etc. This paper tries to clarify the behavior of these two types of negatives.

[Keywords] Compound Negative, negation, negative, NPI

1. NPI's in English

Examples like (1) (2) show that *lift a finger, a red cent*, etc. are Negative Polarity Items (NPI). They cannot occur in affirmative statements like (1b) (2b). (3) is the normal constraint on NPI's.

- (1) a. I do not think Bill will lift a finger to help John.
b. * I think Bill will lift a finger to help John.
- (2) a. Mary would not give a red cent to John.
b. * Mary would give a red cent to John.
- (3) NPI's must occur in the scope of a negative.

NPI's can occur in non-negative questions as in (4a) (5a). The speaker, however, expects a negative answer like (4b) (5b), in which *a red cent, lift a finger* are in the scope of a negative. (6a) is unacceptable because it expects an affirmative answer like (6b). (4a) (5a) contrast with questions like (7ab), which do not imply a negative expectation.

- (4) a. Would Mary give a red cent to John?
b. No, Mary would not give a red cent to John.

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- (5) a. Do you think Bill will lift a finger to help John?
- b. No, Bill will not lift a finger to help John.
- (6) a. * Don't you think Bill will lift a finger to help John?
- b. * Yes, I think he will lift a finger to help John.
- (7) a. Would Mary give money to John?
- b. Do you think Bill will help John?

Affirmative *wh*-questions with an NPI like (a) of (8) (9) are also acceptable and expect a negative answer like (b).

- (8) a. Who would give a red cent to John?
- b. Nobody would give a red cent to John.
- (9) a. Who do you think will lift a finger to help John?
- b. I think nobody will lift a finger to help John.

If-clauses may contain an NPI without a negative as in (10a) (11a). This is because an *if*-clause implies that its complement clause may be false. (a) of (10) (11) implies (b).

- (10) a. If you lift a finger to help Bill, Sally would be very happy.
- b. You may not lift a finger to help Bill.
- (11) a. If you give a red cent to Bill, Sally would be very happy.
- b. You may not give a red cent to Bill.

Restrictive relative clauses may contain an NPI without a negative as in (12a) (13a). This is expected since a restrictive relative clause is logically equivalent to an *if*-clause. A restrictive relative clause can normally be rewritten as an *if*-clause as in (12b) (13b). (12ab) imply (12c). (13c) is the logical structure of (13ab).

- (12) a. Sally will admire any boy who will lift a finger to help Bill.
- b. Sally will admire any boy if he will lift a finger to help Bill.
- c. Most boys are not likely to lift a finger to help Bill.

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- (13) a. Everything that was worth a single cent was sent to this charity organization.
b. Everything was sent to this charity organization if it was worth a single cent.
c. everything-x [(x was worth a single cent) → (x was sent to this organization)]

At all cannot occur in affirmative statements as in (14cd), but can occur in *yes-no* questions, *wh*-questions, *if*-clauses and relative clauses as in (15) (16) (17).²

- (14) a. They did not answer our questions at all.
b. I could not sleep at all last night.
c. * They answered our questions at all.
d. * I could sleep at all last night.
- (15) a. Does this deserve any punishment at all?
b. I wonder whether the president will respond to such suggestions at all.
- (16) a. Who would listen to our suggestions at all?
b. What kind of apology do you think he would accept at all?
- (17) a. We would be happy if the president responds to any of these suggestions at all.
b. The students will admire teachers who will respond to these suggestions at all.

It is clear that (3) is not enough to explain the behavior of NPI's. The explanation has to go beyond the sentence that contains the NPI. It has to refer to the context in which the sentence is used.

²: Some speakers do not seem to accept *at all* in non-negative *wh*-questions.

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2. NPI's in Japanese

Japanese NPI's *bita itimon* 'a red cent', *yubi ippon ugokasu* 'move one finger', etc. can occur in negative statements, but not in non-negative statements as in (18b) (19b). They may occur in affirmative questions like (18c) (19c), which expect a negative answer like (18d) (19d).³

- (18) a. Mary wa watashi ni bita itimon kure nakatta.
 Mary Top me to a red cent give not Past
 'Mary did not give me a red cent.'
- b. * Mary wa watashi ni bita itimon kure-ta.
- c. Mary wa John ni bita itimon (demo) yatta ka?
 Mary Top John to a red cent even gave Q
 'Did Mary give a red cent to John?'
- d. Mary wa John ni bita itimon yara nakatta yo.
 Mary Top John to a red cent give not Past
 'Mary did not give John a red cent.'
- (19) a. Watashi wa Bill ga John no tame ni yubi ippon ugokasu to omow-anai.
 I Top Bill Nom John for one finger move Cmp think not
 'I do not think Bill will lift a finger to help John.'
- b. * Watashi wa Bill ga John no tame ni yubi ippon ugokasu to omou.
 I Top Bill Nom John for one finger move Cmp think
- c. Bill wa John no tame ni yubi ippon ugokasu to omou no?
 Bill Top John for one finger move Cmp think Q
 'Do you think Bill will lift a finger to help John?'
- d. Bill wa John no tame ni yubi ippon ugokasu anai yo.
 Bill Top John for the sake of one finger move not
 'Bill will not lift a finger to help John.'

Negative questions like (20a) are not acceptable because they would expect an affirmative answer like (20b) with an NPI (cf. (6)).

³: Top: topic marker. Q: Question marker. Cmp: Complementizer. Nom: Nominative case-marker. Ng: Negative. Imp: Imperative marker.

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- (20) a. * Bill wa John no tame ni yubi ippon ugokasu to omow-anai no?
 Bill Top John for one finger move Cmp think not Q
 b. * Bill wa John no tame ni yubi ippon ugokasu to omou yo.
 Bill Top John for one finger move Cmp think

(21a) (22a) are affirmative *wh*-questions with an NPI, and expect a negative answer like (21b) (22b).

- (21) a. Dare ga John ni bita itimon yaru daroo ka?
 who Nom John to a red cent give will Q
 ‘Who will give a red cent to John?’
 b. Dare mo John ni wa bita itimon yar anai yo.
 anyone John to a red cent give not
 ‘Nobody will give a red cent to John.’
 (22) a. John wa dare no tame ni yubi ippon ugokasu to omou ka?
 John Top who for one finger move Cmp think Q
 ‘For whom do you think John will lift a finger?’
 b. John wa dare no tame ni mo yubi ippon ugokas anai to omou.
 ‘I think John will not lift a finger for anybody.’

(23a) (24a) have a restrictive relative clause that contains an NPI without a negative. Unacceptability (or low acceptability) of (23b) (24b) indicates that an NPI in a relative clause requires that the matrix clause imply a negative context.

- (23) a. Boku no tame ni yubi ippon ugokasite kure soona hito wa minna itte simatta.
 I for one finger move likely person top all gone
 ‘Those who are likely to lift a finger to help me are all gone.’
 b. ?* Watasi no tame ni yubi ippon ugokasite kureru hito ga nan-nin-ka
 me for one finger move person Nom some
 ki-te-kureru daroo.
 come will
 ‘Some of those who would lift a finger to help me will be here.’

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- (24) a. Kono keikaku no tame ni bita itimon (demo) kihusuru hito
 this project for a single cent donate persons
 wa minna zennin da.
 Top all good people
 'Those who would contribute a single cent for this project are all
 good people.'
- b. ?* Kono keikaku no tame ni bita itimon (demo) kihusite kureru hito
 this project for a single cent donate person
 ga kitto iru.
 Nom surely exist
 'I am sure there are people who would contribute a single cent for
 this project.'

We cannot require such NPI's to be *c*-commanded by a negative, *Q* (question marker), conditional *if*, etc. It is true that an NPI must be in the scope of a negative at some level of representation, but such a representation does not belong to the Sentence Grammar.

3. Compound Negatives

(25) are examples with *kessite*. (26) show that *kessite* cannot occur without a negative even in questions. *Kessite* is not a word (a syntactic unit), but a part of the word *kessite-nai* 'never'.

- (25) a. John wa osake wo kessite nom-anai.
 John Top wine Acc drink Ng
 'John never drinks.'
- b. John wa kessite osake wo nom-anai.
 'John never drinks.'
- (26) a. * John wa osake wo kessite nomu.
 John Top wine Acc drink
- b. * John wa osake wo kessite nomu no?

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- c. * Dare ga osake wo kessite nomu no?
 who Nom wine Acc drink Q
- d. * John wa nani wo kessite nomu no?
 John Top what Acc drink Q

The focus of negation is normally between the two parts of the compound negative. *John to Bill wa* and *kono mise de wa* of (27a) (27b) are topicalized, and are not in the scope of *kessite-nai*.

- (27) a. Kessite John to Bill wa osake wo nom-anai.
 John and Bill Top wine Acc drink-not
 ‘John and Bill never drink wine,’
 John to Bill wa [kessite-nai (osake wo nomu)]
- b. Kono mise de wa kessite onna ga syaku wo si-nai.
 this bar at Top women Nom pour wine do not
 ‘At this bar, women never serve wine for you.’
 kono mise de wa [kessite-nai (onna ga syaku wo suru)]

(28a) has the logical structure (28b). Negative imperative *runa* of (28a) is not a syntactic unit. *Imp* in (28b) is the imperative marker, equivalent to *I tell you to*.

- (28) a. Kessite zikan ni okure runa.
 time for be late not Imp
 ‘Do not be late for the appointed time.’
- b. [kessite-nai (zikan ni okure)] Imp → [kessite zikan ni okure nai] Imp
 nai Imp → *runa*

(29) (30) are examples with *mettani*, *sukoshimo*, which behave the same way as *kessite*. They are part of compound negatives *mettani-nai* ‘rarely’, *sukoshimo-nai* ‘not at all’.

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- (29) a. John wa mettani gakkoo wo yasum-anai.
 John Top school Acc be absent
 'John is rarely absent from school.'
 John wa [mettani-nai (gakkoo wo yasumu)]
- b. * John wa mettani gakkoo wo yasumu no?
 John Top rarely school Acc be absent Q
- (30) a. Bill wa sakuban sukoshimo nemur e nakatta.
 Bill Top last night sleep can not Past
 'Bill could not sleep at all last night.'
 Bill wa sakuban [sukoshimo-nai (nemur e ta)]
- b. * Bill wa sakuban sukoshimo nemur e ta no?
 Bill Top last night sleep can Past Q

Though the two parts of a compound negative are clausemates in (31) (32), (33ab) violate the clausemate condition.

- (31) a. Mary wa John ga mettani zibun wo sasotte-kure nakatta to itta.
 Mary Top John Nom self Acc invite Cmp said
 'Mary said that John rarely invited her.'
- b. Mary wa [John ga (mettani-nai <zibun wo sasotte kureta>)] to itta.
- (32) a. Watasi wa Mary ga kessite nusumi wo si nakat ta to sinziteiru.
 I Top Mary Nom theft Acc do not Past Cmp believe
 'I believe that Mary never committed theft.'
- b. Watasi wa [Mary ga (kessite-nai <nusumi wo sita>)] to sinziteiru.
- (33) a. * Mary wa [John ga mettani zibun wo sasotte kure ta] to iw-anakatta.
 Mary Top John Nom self Acc invite Past Cmp say not Past
- b. * Watasi wa [Mary ga kessite nusumi wo si ta] to sinzi nai.
 I Top Mary Nom theft Acc do Past Cmp believe not

English does not seem to have compound negatives. *Kessite-nai*, *mettani-nai*, for example, correspond to single words *never*, *rarely* in English. *Sika-nai* is a compound negative equivalent to *dake* in Japanese and *only* in English.

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(34a) derives from (34b), and is logically equivalent to (34c).⁴ *Sika* cannot occur without *nai* even in questions as in (35ab).

- (34) a. Mary sika ko nak atta.
 Mary come not Past
 ‘Only Mary came.’
 b. sika-nai-x [Mary-x ga ki ta]
 c. Mary dake ga ki ta.
 Mary only Nom come Past
 ‘Only Mary came,’
- (35) a. * Mary sika ki ta no?
 Mary come Past Q
 b. * Mary sika doko e itta no?
 Mary where to went Q

(36a) derives from (36b), and is logically equivalent to (36c). Nominative *ga* is deleted before *sika*.

- (36) a. John wa Mary ga sono daigaku ni sika gookakusi nakatta to itta.
 John Top Mary Nom that university to was admitted said
 ‘John said that Mary was admitted only into that university.’
 b. J wa [sika-nai-x (M ga <sono daigaku ni> -x gookakusita)] to itta.
 c. John wa [Mary ga sono daigaku ni dake gookakusita] to itta.
 John Top Mary Nom that univ. to only was admitted Cmp said

Sika and *nai* are not clausemates in (37). However, though (a) of (38) to (40) violate the clausemate condition, they are acceptable. Such examples show that *sika* in the embedded clause can be related with *nai* in the matrix clause unless a non-topicalized constituent precedes the *sika-phrase* in the embedded clause. The same can be said of other compound negatives *kessite-nai*, *mettani-nai*, etc. as in (41).

⁴: There is some semantic (or pragmatic) difference between *sika-nai* and *dake* (cf. Takahashi 1990, Hasegawa 1992).

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- (37) * John wa [Mary ga sono daigaku ni sika gookakusuru] to omow anakatta.
 John Top Mary Nom the univ. to be admitted Cmp think not Past
- (38) a. John wa [sono daigaku ni sika Mary ga gookakusuru] to omow anakatta.
 John Top the university to Mary Nom be admitted Cmp think not Past
 'It was only into that university that John thought Mary would be admitted.'
 b. J wa [sika-nai-x (<sono daigaku ni> -x M ga gookakusuru to omotta)]
- (39) a. John wa [Mary wa sono daigaku ni sika gookakusuru] to omow anakatta.
 John Top Mary Top the university to be admitted Cmp think not Past
 'It was only into that university that John thought Mary would be admitted.'
 b. J wa M wa [sika-nai-x (<sono daigaku ni> -x gookakusuru to omotta)].
- (40) a. John wa [sono daigaku ni wa Mary sika gookakusuru] to omow anakatta.
 John Top that univ. to Top Mary be admitted Cmp think not Past
 'It was only Mary that John thought would be admitted into the university.'
 b. J wa sono daigaku ni wa [sika-nai-x (M-ga-x gookakusuru to omotta)].
- (41) a. John wa [sono daigaku ni wa kessite Mary ga gookakusuru] to omow anakatta.
 John Top that university to Top Mary Nom be admitted Cmp think not Past
 'John never thought that Mary would be admitted into that university.'
 b. J wa sono daigaku ni wa [kessite-nai (M ga gookakusuru to omotta)]
 J Top that univ. to Top M be admitted Cmp think not Past

When *dake* 'only' is in the embedded clause, the sentence can be ambiguous.

With *sika-nai* instead of *dake*, (42a) can be rewritten as (42b) and (42c).

- (42) a. Mary ga John ni [LGB dake wo yomu] yooni itta.
 Mary Nom John to LGB only Acc read to told
 'Mary told John to read only LGB.'
 b. Mary ga John ni LGB sika yoma nai yooni itta.
 Mary Nom John to LGB read to told
 'Mary said to John that he should read only LGB.'
 Mary ga John ni [sika-nai-x (LGB-wo-x yomu)] yooni itta.
 c. Mary ga John ni LGB sika yomu yooni iw-anakatta.
 'It was only LGB that Mary told to John to read.'

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Mary ga John ni [sika-nai-x (LGB-wo-x yomu yooni itta)]

In other words, *dake* behaves like a compound negative and should be analyzed in the same way as *sika-nai*. (42a) derives from both (43a) and (43b).

- (43) a. Mary ga John ni [dake-x (LGB-wo-x yomu)] yooni itta.
'Mary said to John that he should read only LGB.'
b. Mary ga John ni [dake-x (LGB-wo-x yomu yooni itta)]
'It was only LGB that Mary told John to read.'

The same thing can be said about English *only*. (44a) is ambiguous since its underlying structure can be either (44b) or (44c).

- (44) a. Mary told John to read only LGB.
b. Mary told John [only-x (to read LGB-x)]
'Mary said to John that he should read nothing but LGB.'
c. only-x [Mary told John to read LGB-x]
'It was only LGB that Mary told John to read.'

Summary:

The requirement that NPI's be in the scope of a negative cannot be defined in the sentence grammar since it involves the discourse context. *Mettani*, *kessite*, etc. are not NPI's, but are part of compound negatives *mettani-nai*, *kessite-nai*, etc. English *only* and Japanese *dake* behave like compound negatives.

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