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Pseudo-imperatives & Negative Polarity Items
—— The Speaker Commitment Hypothesis

Hidemitsu Takahashi

1 Introduction

This paper discusses the acceptability of Negative Polarity Items in pseudo-imperatives such as (1):

(1) PSEUDO-IMPERATIVES
  a *Lift a finger* to help her and you'll be sorry.
    (**Lift a finger* to help her.)
  b Come *any* closer and I'll call the police.
    (*Come *any* closer.)
  c Mention that to *a single soul* and I'll never forgive you.
    (*Mention that to a living soul.)

Negative Polarity Items (or NPIs) include expressions such as indefinite *any*, *lift a finger*, *move/budge an inch*, *a soul*, *sleep a wink*, to name a few. They encode a minimal value and typically appear under overt negation. Previous works have revealed the importance of scalar inferencing as the crucial mechanism of NPI licensing (cf. Fauconnier 1975a/b, Ladusaw 1980, Israel 1995; 1996, inter alia). However, this paper argues that the appearance of NPIs is also controlled by a speaker's attitude toward

propositional content not only in pseudo-imperatives and but also in several other NPI contexts.

2 Defining "Pseudo-imperatives"

First, let me define the term "pseudo-imperative" as employed here. I mean a kind of non-prototypical imperative appearing in the "left-subordinating *and*" construction (cf. Culicover & Jackendoff 1997).[1] In my previous articles (cf. Takahashi 1994; 2000), I observed that an imperative is potentially ambiguous with respect to the degree of **Force Exertion.** In sentences (2),

(2)a Sleep until noon. (You're tired.)
b Sleep until noon and you'll feel better.
c Sleep until noon and you'll miss lunch.

(2a) is an instance of **command imperative**, (2b) **a conditional command**, and (2c) exemplifies a **pseudo-imperative**. I analyzed command imperatives in terms of PLUS MAXIMUM force exertion, conditional commands in terms of PLUS but MILD, and pseudo-imperatives in terms of ZERO or MINUS force.[2]

Figure 1 portrays the way in which each imperative in (2) can be located on the continuum of Force Exertion:

The basic idea is that an imperative may obtain any value between −1 and +1. The "command" sense derives from (near) plus maximum [+1] force, "threat or sarcasm" from minus force, and pure condition from zero force.

<Figure 1>

Imperatives & the Continuum of Force Exertion
(cf. Takahashi 1994; 2000)

MINUS MAXIMUM		PLUS MAXIMUM
[-1]	[0]	[+1]
NON-PROTOTYPICAL		PROTO.
(2c)	(2b)	(2a)

(2a): command imperative
(2b): conditional command
(2c): **pseudo-imperative**

3 Defining Negative Polarity Items (NPIs)

Next, I would like to discuss how and why pseudo-imperatives may license NPIs, like overt negation. Israel (1995; 1996) offers a comprehensive analysis of polarity phenomena, which he terms as the (Appropriate) Scalar Model. The Scalar Model account combines semantic approaches of entailments such as the Downward Entailing (cf. Ladusaw 1980), on the one hand, and pragmatic analyses of scalar implicature (cf. Fauconnier 1975a/b, Linebarger 1989, Kay 1990, inter alia), on the other.[3] According to this model, NPI licensing in overt negation can be explained as follows.

(3)a Marianne didn't *sleep a wink* that night.
b *Marianne *slept a wink* that night.

(cf. Israel 1995: 216)

Sentence (3a) contains a text proposition *Marianne didn't sleep a mini-*

mal amount, which entails that *M didn't sleep a normal amount* (such as 8 hours). Inferences are running from low to high quantity value, so the NPI may properly express its emphatic and informative value. However, the NPI is not allowed in the affirmative *b*-sentence, because *Marianne slept a minimal amount* does not entail *M slept a normal amount*. As a result, the NPI cannot express its emphatic value.

Applied to pseudo-imperatives, it is easy to see that this scalar model account correctly predicts NPIs to be acceptable. Sentence (1a) would entail that *Help her* (*a normal amount*) *and you'll be sorry*. Similarly, sentence (1b) would imply that *Come* (*a normal amount*) *closer and I'll call the police*. Again, inferences are running from low to high quantity, so the NPIs are acceptable.

Applied to (affirmative) command imperatives, the model correctly predicts NPIs to be unacceptable. An imperative like Come any closer does not invite any scalar construal.

However, applied to conditional commands such as (4),

(4) CONDITIONAL COMMANDS
- a *Lift a finger to help her and she'll be happy.
- b *Come any closer and I'll give you a candy.
- c *Mention that to a living soul and I'll appreciate it.
- d *Sleep a wink tonight and you'll feel better.

the Scalar Model does not seem to predict NPIs to be unacceptable. Sentence (4a), for instance, would entail that *Help her* (*a normal amount*) *and she'll be happy*. Similarly, (4b) would imply that *Come* (*a normal amount*) *closer and I'll give you a candy*. Since inferences are running from low to high quantity value, the Scalar Model account should predict sentences (4) to be acceptable.

This examination leads us to assume that while the Scalar Model is necessary for NPI licensing, scalar reasoning alone cannot provide a full explanation for NPI licensing in pseudo-imperatives.

4 The Speaker Commitment Hypothesis

In what follows, I argue that NPI licensing is also controlled by the speaker's (evaluative) attitude toward propositional content. It has been pointed out that NPIs are allowed in *if* conditionals like (5), corresponding to pseudo-imperatives such as (1), but disallowed in conditionals like (6), corresponding to conditional commands such as (4) (cf. Lakoff 1969, Davies 1986, Fillmore 1990, Clark 1993):

(5) Conditionals in "negative interpretations"
  a If you *lift a finger* to help her, you'll be sorry.
  b If you come *any* closer, I'll call the police.
(6) Conditionals in "positive interpretations"
  a *If you *lift a finger* to help her, she'll be happy.
  b *If you come *any* closer, I'll give you a candy.

There is a close correlation in the speaker's attitude between pseudo-imperatives (1) and conditionals in negative interpretations (5). In either case, the speaker does not seem to empathize with the relevant proposition; P is considered as "undesirable" (cf. Akatsuka 1997). In contrast, the speaker does have empathy with P in the unacceptable sentences (4) and (6); proposition is considered as desirable. To my knowledge, Borkin (1971) is the only author who clearly pointed out the role of speaker attitude in her discussions of the felicity of NPIs in interrogative sentences. Concerning examples (7) below,

(7)a (*)Who bats an eye when the boss comes around?
b (*)Who lifted a finger to help when I needed it?
c (*)Who drank a drop of your cognac?
d (*)Does Charlie bat an eye when you threaten him?
e (*)Does Harold do a goddamned thing around house?
(Borkin 1971: 56-57)

Borkin observes that "as a genuine question to elicit information, the sentences are awkward. As a question expecting a negative response, they are generally acceptable.".

Given that a speaker's attitude determines the acceptability of NPIs in questions as well as conditional constructions, we might naturally expect that it plays a role in other environments as well. To capture the commonality in speaker attitude across a wider range of constructions, let me propose a general notion of speaker attitude in (8), which I term as the Speaker Commitment Hypothesis:

(8) The Speaker Commitment Hypothesis
i. Speaker Commitment (SC) is the speaker's identification, which may vary in degree, with the propositional content (P) of a linguistic environment.
ii. The degree of the speaker's identification with P ranges from +1 to −1. SC [+1] signifies a total identification, SC [−1] a total rejection, and SC [0] a neutral stance.

The idea of (8) inherits from Kuno (1987)'s empathy the following two insights. Just like empathy, Speaker Commitment is a matter of a speaker's identification, and it is understood in terms of gradience. However, Speaker Commitment distinguishes itself from Kuno's empathy

in two respects. First, Speaker Commitment deals with the relation between a speaker and PROPOSITION, not clausal participants. Second, it includes MINUS DEGREES, not just zero or plus degrees. By the term Proposition, I roughly mean a basic state-of-affair conveyed in any type of clause. I exclude elements of attitudinals such as overt negatives and evidential markers.

Highly schematic, Speaker Commitment subsumes different types of speaker attitude separately proposed concerning different constructions. Included are a speaker's evaluation of truth (cf. Givon 1982), degree of hypotheticality (cf. Comrie 1986), belief concerning reality of a proposition in conditionals (cf. Dancygier & Sweetser 2000), Desirability in conditionals (cf. Akatsuka 1997), and Force Exertion in imperatives (cf. Takahashi 1994; 2000). I surmise that the specific value of a given proposition in context is determined with respect to some of these parameters.

Speaker Commitment is either overtly coded or covertly communicated via intonational or contextual clues. As listed in (9), a proposition typically obtains s SC [+] value in assertive statements, command imperatives, and conditionals considered as highly desirable or clearly factual:

(9) P is typically interpreted as SC [+] in:
Assertive Statements: It's lovely weather!
Command Imperatives: Be quiet!
Questions of polite request/suggestion: Can you be quite?
/Would you like a *glass*/**drop* of wine?
***If* Conditionals considered as highly desirable**: I'd appreciate it if *you* could *send me a copy of your paper*.
***If* Conditionals treated as clearly factual**:

A: I visited Tokyo when I was a teen.

B: Oh, if *you've* (**ever*) *been to Tokyo*, I recommend you visit Kyoto the next time.

As listed in (10), a proposition typically obtains a SC [−] value in explicit denials, imperatives used as threats or sarcasms, conditionals considered as highly undesirable:

(10) P is typically interpreted as SC [−] in:

Explicit Denial: It's not lovely weather.

Assertive Statements used as irony: [In a downpour] It's lovely weather!

Imperatives in "negative interpretations":

Come any closer and I'll shoot./Tell me about it.

Some Rhetorical Questions: Who (in the world) would want to work with you?

Conditionals considered as highly undesirable: If *you bring alcohol to school*, you'll be suspended.

The idea of Speaker Commitment not only captures functional commonalities between a pair of related constructions but it also explains a subtle difference in meaning which might arise. To take an instance of an *if*-conditional and its corresponding imperative, the two constructions are generally believed to be synonymous. However, look at (11a), an example taken from a sea park placard:

(11)a PLEASE BE AWARE:

If *you bring your own baby stroller to the park*, for safety reasons you will be asked to park it outside of stadiums and

most attractions. Sea World is not responsible for strollers left unattended in the park. For your convenience, strollers are available for rent. We urge you to lock up your stroller. Thank you for your cooperation.

Now, compare (11b), a variant using a conditional imperative:

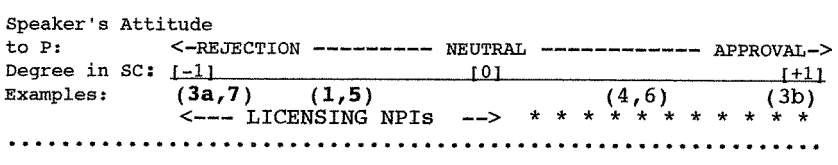
(11)b PLEASE BE AWARE:
Bring your own baby stroller to the park and for safety reasons you will be asked to park it outside of stadiums and most attractions.....

The conditional imperative in (11b) carries the connotation that you should NOT bring the stroller. The original *if*-conditional in (11a) does not necessarily carry such connotation.[4] According to the Speaker Commitment hypothesis, the proposition, YOU BRING YOUR OWN STROLLER, obtains zero value (SC [0]) in (11a) but a minus value (SC [−]) in (11b).

Figure 2 summarizes the discussions made so far.

On this continuum of figure 2, all the sentences located between -1 and 0 license NPIs; they lack the speaker's empathy with proposition. The

<Figure 2> Degree of Speaker Commitment



rest, located above 0, disallow NPIs; they do involve empathy.

From the perspective of the hypothesis in (11), we can state the constraint on NPI contexts in (12):

(12) **the Speaker Commitment Constraint on NPI contexts**
An NPI is allowed in a linguistic environment which involves a minus or zero degree of Speaker Commitment, i.e. SC [−1∼0].

Example (13) illustrates this constraint:

(13)a # If *he ever takes any medicine*, he will get better.
b He is seriously ill and will die sooner or later. We eagerly await his death, because his fortune will then be ours. But if *he ever takes any medicine*, he will get better.
(Yoshimura 1992: 261)

(13a) strikes us as bizarre. However, in the special context of (13b), the NPIs *ever* and *any* become fully acceptable. Yoshimura explains the improved acceptability in terms of the presence of "contrastive assumption". On my account, the identical conditional clause satisfies the constraint. The *b*-context makes it apparent that Proposition is "undesirable" for the speaker. The *a*-sentence simply violates the constraint.

5 The Speaker Commitment constraint & other NPI contexts

Next, I would like to demonstrate that the proposed constraint serves to differentiate between several other contexts licensing NPIs and those not licensing NPIs.

First, overt negatives normally license NPIs, but not under metalinguistic use, a phenomenon problematic for most theories of polarity sensitivity:

(14) METALINGUISTIC NEGATION
  a *He didn't MANAGE to solve *any* problems--he was given the answers. (originally from Karttunen & Peters 1979, cited in Horn 1985: 130)
  b *I didn't mention that to *a soul*--I mentioned that to everyone.

One obvious function of metalinguistic negation is to convey the speaker's objection to a choice of a particular word or sometimes even the way a word is pronounced (cf. Horn 1985; 1989). There is another less obvious function; metalinguistic negation involves the speaker's tacit **approval** of proposition. In (15a), for instance,

(15)a The professor didn't DISLIKE Harry--he *hated* him.
  b Jim didn't PLAY Hamlet--he *was* Hamlet.
  c Around here we don't eat toMEYto--we eat *toMAto*.

The speaker accepts as true the idea, THE PROFESSOR DISLIKED HARRY. The same thing can be said about (15c), where the proposition, AROUND HERE WE EAT TOMATO, is being accepted.

Languages like Japanese communicate metalinguistic negation lexically. Normally, forms of indirect or partial negation are used. In sentence (16), corresponding to (15a),

(16) (=corresponding to 15a)
kyoju wa Harry o kirai datta nodewanai/
Professor TOP Harry Obj 'dislike' PAST not-exactly-true/
(*denakatta)--kare o nikunde-ita.
not PAST him OBJ hate PAST
("The Professor didn't dislike Harry--he *hated* him.")

the indirect negative *nodewanai*, which roughly means "(it is) not exactly true", more transparently indicates the speaker's approval (or empathy) of the propositional content as well as the rejection of the verb *kirai* ("*dislike*"). If this analysis is correct, metalinguistic negation simply violates the Speaker Commitment Constraint in (12) above.

Next, complements of adversative predicates are also NPI licensers, another problematic phenomenon:

(17) ADVERSATIVE PREDICATES
a I was suprised that she contributed a red cent to the ACLU.
(Linebarger 1991: 173)
b I was surprised/sorry that he budged an inch.
(van der Wouden 1997: 162)

(18) NON-ADVERSATIVE PREDICATES
a *I'm glad that she contributed a red cent to the ACLU.
(Linebarger 1991: 173)
b *I'm glad that he budged an inch.
(van der Wouden 1997: 162)

Linebarger explains the acceptability of (17a), for instance, in terms of the effect of "Negative Implicature". That is, the expression that "I was surprised that P" frequently implies that "I expected that not P". The

present framework captures this intuition. The attitude of the speaker is one of detachment or dissociation from the proposition, SHE CONTRIBUTED THE SMALLEST AMOUNT. For this reason, the speaker does not have empathy with P, although the propositin is being treated as factual. Complements of adversative predicates satisfy the constraint in (12).

Finally, some subordinate *before* clauses may license NPIs. Previous analyses have discussed a contrast like the one in (19):

(19) SURBORDINATE *BEFORE* CLAUSES
  a Miss Prism spilled her wine before she had tasted a drop.
  b ??Miss Prism poured her wine before she had tasted a drop.

I agree with Israel (1995: 660) that only the acceptable *a*-sentence offers an easy scalar construal. However, I would like to argue that the *a*-sentence satisfies the Speaker Commitment constraint as well. The *before* clause of (19a) refers to an event which did not occur in the real world. In other words, this use counts as an instance of Irrealis *before*, exactly like (20):

(20) Irrealis *before*
  a She hit me before I had a chance to get up.
    (cf. van Hoek 1997: 92)
  b I'm afraid it'll get even worse before it gets *any* better.
(21) Realis *before*
  a I called Jessie before I went to bed last night.
  b I stopped at San Francisco before I came to Santa Barbara.

Sentence (19a) suggests that after Miss Prism spilled her wine, she could

NOT taste any of it. The proposition, SHE HAD TASTED THE SMALLEST AMOUNT, is not being identified with. Conversely, the *before* clause of (19b) does not seem to be interpreted this way. The proposition, SHE TASTED A SMALL AMOUNT, seems to be accepted. If this analysis is on the right track, the contrast in (19) directly derives from the effect of the Speaker Commitment constraint.

To conclude, I am not claiming that every NPI is equally sensitive to the same set of NPI licensers. I am also not claiming that every NPI is accepted on every point on the SC continuum between -1 and 0. As pointed out in previous works (cf. van der Wouden 1997), each NPI has its own idyosyncratic behaviors. All I have attempted to demonstrate is that when an NPI felicitously appears, the speaker does not have empathy with the propositional content with respect to one parameter or another.

The main points of my discussions can be summarized as follows:

i. The acceptability of NPIs in pseudo-imperatives is not an ad-hoc but a clearly definable phenomenon.

ii. In addition to scalar inferencing, the speaker's attitude, which I define as the Speaker Commitment constraint, captures NPI licensing in pseudo-imperatives and several other environments.

Footnotes

*A portion of this paper was presented at the 7th International Cognitive Linguistics Meeting (University of California, Santa Barbara, 23 July, 2001). An ealier version was presented at the 36th meeting of Cognitive-Functional Working Group (Hokkaido University, Faculty of Letters, 4 July 2001). I appreciate the comments received there. Special thanks go to Randy Evans and Joseph Tomei for valuable comments at other occasions. Any inadequacies which remain are all mine alone.

[1] Culicover and Jackendoff 1997 distinguish this asymmetric conjunction as one which

is 'syntactically coordinate but conceptually subordinate', pointing out that only 'left-subordinating' *and*, not normal coordinate *and*, yields a conditional reading:

(i) Examples of "Left-subordinating *and*"
  a. *One more can of beer* and I'm leaving.
  b. *You drink another can of beer* and I'm leaving.
  c. *Big Louie sees you with the loot* and he puts out a contract on you.
  d. *Give anyone too much money* and he will go crazy.

(Examples from Culicover & Jackendoff 1997: 197-198)

Although the left conjunct of LSand is quite resricted in its distribution in terms of tense and aspect, it does not need to be a pseudo-imperative but a present-tense declarative and even an NP can occupy this syntactic slot.

[2] Clark (1993: 79) distinguishes three separate readings of imperatives, positive, negative and neutral. Clark labels not only and conjunctions but also or disjunctions as "pseudo-imperatives", so all he terms all the examples below as "pseudo-imperatives":

(i)a. Come closer and I'll give you five pounds.
  b. Be off or I'll push you downstairs.
  c. Come one step closer and I'll shoot.
  d. Open the Guardian and you'll find three misprints on every page.

(Examples from Clark (1993: 79)

In the present paper, only *c* and *d* examples count as pseudo-imperatives. In either sentence, the imperative not only appears in a conjunction but also involves a 'negative' or 'neutral' interpretation, with (ic) expressing a warning against the addressee's action, and (id) a pure condition. The *a* and *b* examples do not classify as pseudo-imperatives, since more or less positive force is being exerted. I treat all the examples in (i) above as 'conditional imperatives' (cf. Davies 1979), but not pseudo-imperatives.

[3] Israel (1996) distinguishes four types of polarity items, emphatic NPIs, understating NPIs (*much, long, all that*, etc.), emphatic Positive Polarity Items (*scads, totally, far Xer*, etc.) and Understating PPIs (*a little bit, sorta, rather*, etc.) (Israel, 625-629). NPIs

are licensed and PPIs blocked in those contexts that reverse the direction of entailments; in contrast, NPIs are blocked and PPIs licensed in environments that preserve the direction of entailments (Israel, 646).

[4] I am indebted to Randy Evans for this interpretation.

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