

ESLLI Introductory Course on
Negative Polarity Items: Corpus Linguistics, Semantics, and Psycholinguistics
English NPIs Collected in von Bergen and von Bergen 1993

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1 Denotative Strengthening of Negation (Denotative Negationsverstärkung)

- (1) a. at all
b. what(so)ever
c. possibly
mainly with *can*.

2 Affective Strengthening of Negation (Affektive Negationsverstärker)

- (2) a. the hell
b. the fuck
c. give a damn
d. worth a damn
e. a (god)damned thing
(i) You can't get a (god)damned thing out of him.
f. a doggoned thing
(i) Three months I've worked here, and not a doggoned thing has happened.

Some of these are similar to minimal elements, but for von Bergen and von Bergen (1993) these are more affective.

With occurrences primarily in questions (?)

- (3) a. on earth
b. the hell
c. the fuck

These have to precede the interrogative constituent immediately:

- (4) a. What the hell are you doing?
b. *What are you doing the hell?

3 Strengthening of Negation by Minimal Items (Negationsverstärkung durch minimale Elemente)

- (5) p. 139
- a. budge an inch
 - b. drink a drop
 - c. sing a note
 - d. say a word
 - e. believe a word of it
 - f. have had a bite to eat
 - (i) I haven't had a bite to eat all day
 - g. hurt a fly
 - (i) He wouldn't hurt a fly
(normally with "would"?)
 - h. sleep a wink
 - i. cost you a penny
 - j. has a penny to his name
 - k. move a muscle
 - l. worth the paper it was written on
 - m. have got a stitch on
 - (i) The maid walked in without knocking, and he hadn't got a stitch on.
 - n. a hair of his head
 - (i) Not a hair of his head was harmed.
 - o. a hair out of place
 - (i) She turned up with not a hair out fo place
why is this in this group??
 - p. give a damn
also in group 2
 - q. worth a damn
also in group 2
 - r. have a bean
 - s. worth a bean
 - t. care a rap
 - u. have a leg to stand on
 - (i) When he changed his mind, I had not a leg to stand on
 - v. be worth the candle
 - w. make head or tail (of sth)
 - x. have the ghost of a chance
 - (i) You haven't the ghost of a chance of getting the job.
 - y. have a spark of decency (generosity, honour, consideration, interest, enthusiasm)
 - z. an iota of truth
 - (i) There's not an iota of truth in what she said!
 - aa. a drop of jealousy
 - (i) There isn't a drop of jealousy in her.
 - ab. a thing

- (6) verbal NPI
- a. bat an eyelid
idiomatic VP (even-test):
(i) *He didn't bat anything, not even an eyelid.
(ii) He didn't do anything, not even bat an eyelid.
 - b. lift a finger
idiomatic VP
 - c. [p. 140]
 - d. say boo to a goose
idiomatic VP
(i) He couldn't say boo to a goose
always with "can"/modal?
 - e. have a clue (about)
 - f. have the least idea
 - g. turn a hair
idiomatic VP
(i) He did not turn a hair
 - h. dream of (V-ing)
idiomatic VP
 - i. touch
VP NPI
(i) He swore he'd never touch a drink again.
 - j. lay a finger on
idiomatic VP
 - k. will hear of
idiomatic VP
(i) I won't hear of you walking to the station — let me give you a lift
 - l. budge (sth)
VP NPI
(i) We tried to lift the rock but we couldn't budge it.
 - m. touch (???)
VP NPI
(i) When it comes to making speeches, there's no one to touch him.
 - n. can (be fit to) hold a candle to (so) [= be a servant to]
idiomatic VP
(i) Everyone is so inferior that they can't even hold a candle to him.
 - o. be in the same street as [=be in the same category]
idiomatic VP
(i) His second book is not in the same street as his first
 - p. be a patch on
idiomatic VP
(i) This Algerian wine isn't a patch on the French.

- (7) Adverbial NPI
- a. suggesting for a minute
Adv NPI
 - b. see an inch in front of him
Adv NPI
 - c. in the least
Adv NPI
 - (i) He's not in the least worried.
 - d. be caught dead
Adv NPI
 - (i) I wouldn't be caught dead in a fast food restaurant.
 - (ii) even-test (p. 151): I wouldn't be caught in a fast food restaurant, not even dead.
 - e. can get a word in edgeways
"word" is NP minimizer
"in edgeways" is ADV-NPI
 - (i) He talks so much that no one else can get a word in edgeways.
 - f. begin to (p. 150)
 - (i) I couldn't begin to explain
- (8) *even*-test (von Bergen and von Bergen, 1993, p. 145):
- a. Ist das Einfügen von *even* in einem NPI-Satz nicht möglich, ohne dessen Sinn entscheidend zu beeinträchtigen, so kann das NPI keine minimale Einheit enthalten.
 - b. Wenn wir das minimale Element nach hinten in eine *even*-Phrase auslagern, tritt es unzweideutig hervor. So kann man nachweisen, ob das minimal Element eine Nominalphrase [...], eine Verbalphrase oder eine adverbiale Bestimmung ist.

The (b)-test is rather strange: most NPIs have nominal minimizers. If there is a V and and NP, it fails for the NP in cases of idiomatic VPs.

Productivity

von Bergen and von Bergen (1993) (p. 152) observe a high degree of productivity: in V-NPmin combinations, V can vary. Maybe there is even a general pattern of "Verb + minimales Element". Generalizing this idea to endpoints on scales, they attempt to capture superlatives as well. . . . and purely pragmatically inferable endpoints for occasional NPIs:

- (9) She didn't even want to see her boyfriend. (p. 153)

4 Strengthening of Negation by Maximal Items (Negationsverstärkung durch maximale Elemente)

- (10)
- a. for the world
 - (i) I wouldn't hurt her for the world.
 - b. hit the broad side of a barn.
 - (i) He can't hit the broad side of a barn.
always with "can"?
 - c. touch with a barge-pole/ ten-foot pole
 - d. Wild horses would drag (someone somewhere)

- e. in a hundred years
Adv-NPI
- f. for all the tea in China
Adv-NPI
- g. know him from Adam [= I have no idea who he is]
idiomatic VP
 - (i) I don't know him from Adam.

even-test is applied here as well!

5 Simple and Elaborated Forms (Einfache und elaborierte Form)

pairs, one of which is an NPI:

- (11) a. much (vs. a lot) (Adv)
 - (i) He didn't say much.
 - (ii) He said a lot.
- b. much N (vs. a lot of N)
 - (i) There isn't much food left.
 - (ii) There is a lot/ lots of/ plenty of food left.
- c. many N (vs. a lot of/ a great many/ plenty of)
 - (i) I don't have many things to see to.
 - (ii) I have a lot of/ a great many/ plenty of things to see to.
- d. far (vs. a long way/ quite far/ rather far)
 - (i) It's not far from here.
 - (ii) It's a long way from here.
- e. long (vs. a long time)
 - (i) He's not been away long.
 - (ii) He's been away a long time.
- f. yet (vs. already)
- g. that A (vs. as A as that)
 - (i) Come along, it's not that difficult.
 - (ii) It's as difficult as that.

Observations:

- the simple form is the NPI, the “elaborated” the positive element (Lott, 1962).
- some of these NPIs are only NPIs in certain registers.

6 Nonreferential Indefinites (Nichtreferentielle Indefinita)

(von Bergen and von Bergen (1993) list the NPI together with its positive counterpart)

- (12)
- a. any (vs. some)
 - (i) There aren't any left.
There are some left.
 - b. any (vs. a little (somewhat))
 - (i) It isn't any better
It's a little (somewhat) better.
 - c. anything (vs. something)
 - d. anybody (vs. somebody)
 - e. anywhere (vs. somewhere)
 - f. any more (vs. some time)
 - (i) I won't go there anymore
I will go there again some time.
 - g. any good (vs. ???)
 - (i) The film wasn't any good.
The film had some good scenes in it.
 - h. ever (vs. sometimes)
 - (i) He won't ever admit that he's made a mistake.
He will sometimes admit that he's made a mistake.
 - i. ever (vs. -)
 - (i) I don't remember ever seeing him before.
I remember having seen him before
 - j. either (vs. both)
 - (i) I don't want either of them.
I want both of them.
 - k. , either (vs. , too)
 - (i) I don't want that one, either.
I want that one, too.

Why are these not sorted under "einfache und elaborierte Form"? (p.162)

- they are a homogeneous semantic class (indefinites)
- the positive form is not "more elaborated"/ "phonologically stronger" than the negative form.
- exchanging the simple and the elaborated form leads to a change in register; exchanging some/any leads to a different meaning:

- (13)
- a. I live far/a long way from the center of town.
 - b. The student couldn't answer some/any of the questions.

7 Understatement

(14) First subgroup: modifiers

The positive equivalent is often possible, but has a different meaning (*He's quite the James Bond type..* But not always: * *He's a lot of a swimmer* (see (14-f)).

- a. too
 - (i) I haven't been too well lately.
- b. overly
 - (i) I'm not overly interested.
- c. exactly
 - (i) She's not exactly beautiful.
- d. quite
 - (i) She is not quite right in the head.
- e. quite
 - (i) He's not quite the James Bond type.
- f. much
 - (i) He's not much of a swimmer.
 - (ii) She's not much to look at.
 - (iii) This film is not up to much.
- g. all that
 - (i) I'm not all that hungry.
- h. overmuch
 - (i) He doesn't like me overmuch.

(15) Second subgroup: contains idiomatic expressions.

- a. in a hurry [= (not) too fast]
 - (i) I won't forget her kindness in a hurry.
 - (ii) I won't help her again in a hurry — she's so ungrateful.
- b. set the Thames on fire. [= (never) do anything overly spectacular]
 - (i) Jim will never set the Thames on fire.
- c. great shakes [= (not) too good at it]
 - (i) He's no great shakes as a piano player.
- d. mince matters/ his words [= said very clearly what he thought]
 - (i) The minister didn't mince matters/ his words.
- e. make bones about sth. [= felt no doubt or shame about it]
 - (i) She made no bones about her prejudice against them.
- f. care to [= keinen gesteigerten Wert legen auf]
 - (i) I wouldn't care to try hang-gliding.
- g. born yesterday [= he's not a fool]
 - (i) You won't take him in; he wasn't born yesterday.
- h. flies on him [= he cannot be tricked]
 - (i) There are no flies on him.

8 Presuppositionally Marked Verb Phrases (Präsuppositionell markierte Verbalphrasen)

- (16)
- a. can place so.
 - (i) I'm sure I've met her before somewhere, but I can't quite place her.
 - b. as black as X is painted
 - (i) He is not as black as he is painted.
 - c. can help
 - (i) The queen couldn't help sneezing
 - d. dare
 - (i) I dare not say anything against him.
 - e. mind
 - (i) I don't mind doing the washing up.
 - f. can stand
 - (i) I can't stand whisky [= it doesn't agree with me.]
 - g. can support
 - (i) I can't support this heat.
 - h. can abide
 - (i) I can't abide rude people.
 - i. can bear
 - (i) I can't bear being kept waiting.
 - j. can stand
 - (i) I couldn't stand people telling me what to do.
 - k. can stand the sight of
 - (i) I can't stand the sight of him.
 - l. have use for so
 - (i) I have no use for people who are always grumbling.
 - m. can support [= endure]
 - (i) I cannot support his jealousy any longer.
 - n. brook
 - (i) He would brook no interruptions from his listeners.
 - o. will stand for
 - (i) I won't stand for being treated like a child.
 - p. have
 - (i) I'm not having any more of your nonsense!
 - q. care (about)
 - (i) I don't care (about) what people think.
 - r. care for
 - (i) I don't really care for tea; I like coffee better.
 - s. bother
 - (i) He didn't bother to dress up for the party.
 - t. can be bothered
 - (i) I can't be bothered to look for it just now.
 - u. matter
 - (i) It doesn't matter if I miss my train.
 - v. good
 - (i) It's no good talking to him, because he never listens.
 - w. use

- (i) It's no use use complaining; they won't do anything about it.
- x. point
 - (i) There is no point in trying to persuade him — he'll never change his mind.
- y. dare
 - (i) I dare not say anything against him.
- z. hurry [= need for quickness]
 - (i) Don't drive so fast: there is no hurry.
- aa. need
 - (i) There is no need for you to come if you don't want to.
- ab. need
 - (i) You need not come to the meeting.

Characterization of the group (p. 177f.)

- These NPIs add information that directly contradicts presuppositions. (See: I've met her before, but I can't place her.)
- They can be used to explicitly confirm the presupposition (He's as black as he is painted.)

References

von Bergen, Anke and von Bergen, Klaus (1993). *Negative Polarity in English*. Tübingen: Narr.

Lott, Bernhard (1962). The Restricted Use of Certain Words and Collocations in Affirmative, Negative and Interrogative Constructions. In *Bulletin of the Central Institute of English*, Number 2, pp. 32–46. Hyderabad.

C. W. Von Bergen. Professor of Management, Southeastern Oklahoma State University. Verified email at se.edu - Homepage. A field experimental test of expectancy-valence incentive motivation techniques. RD Pritchard, PJ DeLeo, CW Von Bergen Jr. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 15 (2), 355-406, 1976. 26. Eversen (Bergen). Quite the same Wikipedia. Just better. In 1993 only 90 inhabitants belonged to the Roman Catholic parish in Bergen, which is responsible for Eversen.[30] Since the influx of Kurdish families in the 1980s there has been a sizeable minority of Yazidis in Eversen. Politics. Since the merging of local councils as part of the Lower Saxon administrative reforms of 1971, Eversen has been part of the town of Bergen. Together with the Junior Red Cross they collect and sell paper for recycling from the villagers.[34]. Economy and Infrastructure. Economy.