

Investigating discourse referent salience patterns of negative quantifying expressions

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In this talk, we report the results from three studies investigating discourse salience patterns of negative quantifying expressions (e.g. ‘not all’, ‘few’) in Swedish, from both a hearer (comprehender) and a speaker (producer) perspective. Salience from these two perspectives has been argued to rely on different information structural properties. For hearers, sentence TOPICS are often more salient than non-topics (COMMENTS), while for speakers, FOCUSED material is often more salient than BACKGROUNDED material (e.g. Chiarcos, 2010; Molnár and Vinckel-Roisin, 2019). The hearer perspective has been extensively studied in the context of pronoun resolution (e.g. Ariel, 1990; Gundel et al., 1993). Previous research on quantifying expressions in English has shown that for negative quantifying expressions (monotone decreasing), such as *not all*, *not many*, *few*, both the set of entities for which some property is true, the REFERENCE SET, and the set of entities for which the property is *not* true, the COMPLEMENT SET, are available for anaphoric reference. Although both sets are possible, speakers generally prefer to refer back to the COMPLEMENT SET (e.g. Moxey and Sanford, 1987, and subsequent work):

- (1) Not many kids were outside in the morning.
- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|---------|
| a. | They were building a snow castle. | REFSET |
| b. | They stayed inside instead. | COMPSET |

In three sentence continuation studies, we investigated which of these sets speakers referred back to, and what linguistic form they used to refer to this set. The aim was to find out what discourse topic speakers selected and how this selection reflected both hearer and speaker salience of discourse entities. In Experiment 1, 244 participants read the sentence in (2) but with one of the eight QEs in (3) instead of ‘QE’ (six negative ones, plus two positive ones included as a control condition), and wrote a continuation of it. As indicated in the translation in (2), the word *de* can be either a personal pronoun, which can appear with or without modifiers, a demonstrative pronoun, or a definite article.

- (2) QE föräldrar var på klassmötet igår och de ...
'QE parents were in the school meeting yesterday and they/the/those ...'
- (3) a. **Negative Quantifying Expressions**
inte exakt alla ‘not exactly all’, *inte precis alla* ‘not precisely all’ *inte riktigt alla* ‘not quite all’, *få* ‘few’, *inte många* ‘not many’, *nästan inga* ‘almost no
- b. **Positive Quantifying Expressions**
några ‘some’, *nästan alla* ‘almost all’

For all negative quantifiers except *få* (‘few’), the linguistic form used as an anaphor indicated that the COMPLEMENT SET was most salient from a hearer perspective while reference to the REFERENCE SET required a more marked structure. However, for all quantifiers it was the REFERENCE SET that was most salient from the speaker perspective, most often selected as the discourse topic. In Experiment 2, we had a closer look at the quantifier *få* (‘few’), investigating whether relative and cardinal readings of this quantifier (see e.g. Partee, 1989) resulted in different patterns and could shed some light on the exceptional behaviour of *få* in Experiment 1. Sixty-one participants read the sentence in (2), with one of the quantifying expressions *färre än tio* (‘fewer than ten’) (cardinal) and *färre än hälften* (‘fewer than half’) (relative) in place of ‘QE’, and wrote a continuation of it. The results were similar to those for *få* in Exp 1, with no clear difference between the cardinal

and the relative quantifying expressions. Thus, the participants referred back to the REFERENCE SET, using an unmodified pronoun. The REFERENCE SET was thus most salient from both the hearer and speaker perspective.

In Experiment 3, we investigated whether the discourse salience patterns of negative QEs are affected by the status of the clause in which the anaphoric NP is found. The sentence fragment read by the participants (192) was therefore modified to include a complementizer, *att* ('that'), before the final word, *de* ('they/the/those'). In this way, the participants were prompted to write a continuation where *de* would be (part of) the subject of the *that*-clause that would itself function as the subject of a co-ordinated structure. Instead of 'QE' the six negative quantifying expressions from Experiment 1, in (3a), were used.

- (4) QE föräldrar var på klassmötet igår **och att de ...**
'QE parents were in the class meeting yesterday **and that they/the/those ...**'

With this form of the prompt, the participants selected the COMPLEMENT SET as discourse topic to a much larger extent than in the other two experiments. For all quantifiers except *få* ('few'), the COMPLEMENT SET was the most salient set from both the hearer and the speaker perspective in this experiment. The quantifier *få* again showed a different behaviour but notably to a lesser degree than in Experiment 1. Experiment 3 thus showed that the speaker salience pattern is also dependent on whether the subject of the continuation is an entity or a proposition. The three experiments showed that the discourse referent that is re-mentioned in production is not necessarily the one that is most salient in comprehension, supporting views that hearer- and speaker-salience should be distinguished (e.g. Chiarcos et al., 2011). This distinction is important not least in the study of reference patterns of quantifying expressions.

References

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