

A novel NPI analysis of the degree modifier poly- ‘much’

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Introduction: The Greek morpheme *poly* ‘much/a lot’ belongs to the category of degree modifiers showing no restricted distribution. Its bound counterpart, however, the element *poly-* ‘much’, exhibits polarity behavior – a fact that has escaped attention in the literature so far. I propose a syntactic analysis for the licensing of the Greek strong NPI *poly-* ‘much’, which can also explain the polarity behavior of all strong NPIs.

Background: The current research is based on the *(non)veridicality theory of polarity* (Giannakidou 1994, 1997, *et seq.*).

Data: While *poly* occurs in both negative (1a) and affirmative environments (1b), the bound *poly-* occurs only in antiveridical contexts, like negation, as in (2a):

- (1) a. I Ioanna *dhen* *dhiavase poly*. (2) a. I Ioanna *dhen poly-* *dhiavase*.
the Joanne not studied.3sg much the Joanne not much-studied.3sg
‘Joanne didn’t study much.’ ‘Joanne didn’t study much.’
b. I Ioanna *dhiavase poly*. b. *I Ioanna *poly-* *dhiavase*.
the Joanne studied a-lot the Joanne much-studied.3sg
‘Joanne studied a lot.’ ‘*Miranda studied much.’

Poly and *poly-* have also different meanings. By uttering (1a), the speaker means that Joanne studied less than a lot, that is, she studied adequately. On the other hand, by uttering (2a), the speaker means that Joanne studied only a little, thus, less than a lot, but also less than adequately.

Analysis: The Greek bound *poly-* ‘much’ is licensed only locally by negation allowing opacity effects when appearing in indicative and subjunctive embedded clauses. Given that, I argue that its licensing is accomplished syntactically via the operation of Agree (Chomsky 2001). Following Giannakidou (2007), I assume that the negative operator *dhen* ‘not’ has an interpretable [*Neg*] feature and c-commands *poly-* with the uninterpretable [*uNeg*] feature. The [*uNeg*] feature is checked and eliminated against the [*Neg*] feature of *dhen*. Contrary to the bound *poly-*, the free *poly* does not have an [*uNeg*] feature. Hence, no feature checking is needed, which shows why the free *poly* does not need to be licensed by negation and so, it can appear in affirmative environments as well. I also provide syntactic structures for sentences, like in (1a) and (2a), arguing that *poly* and *poly-* occupy different positions, and I discuss the phenomenon of verb incorporation (Baker 1988) with respect to Greek past tense cases.

To capture the difference in meaning, I provide distinct semantic denotations for the free *poly* and the bound *poly-* showing that the value of the former is mapped to the threshold and that of the latter is close to the lowest values on a scale of degree.

Conclusion: I argue that the bound degree modifier *poly-* is a strong NPI and its polarity behavior depends on the feature it encodes, contrary to the non-polarity behavior of the free *poly*. The licensing of *poly-* is an Agree relation between its [*uNeg*] feature and the [*Neg*] feature of the

antiveridical operator in a sentence. This analysis can account for the polarity behavior of the English *much* and all strong NPIs.

References:

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