ABSTRACT. Positive polarity items (PPIs) are generally thought to have the boring property that they cannot scope below negation. The starting point of the paper is the observation that their distribution is significantly more complex: specifically, someone/something-type PPIs share properties with negative polarity items (NPIs). First, these PPIs are disallowed in the same environments that license yet-type NPIs; second, adding any NPI-licenser rescues the illegitimate constellation. This leads to the conclusion that these PPIs have the combined properties of yet-type and ever-type NPIs: what appears to be a prohibition is nothing but ‘halfway licensing’. The paper goes on to propose a unification of the analyses of rescuable PPIs, NPIs, and negative concord, and questions the grounding of polarity sensitivity in the scalar or the referential semantics of the items involved.

1. NPIs AND PPIs – DO THEY HAVE MUCH IN COMMON?

Natural languages have two broad categories of polarity-sensitive expressions: negative polarity items (NPIs) and positive polarity items (PPIs). According to the crudest characterization, NPIs must, and PPIs must not, occur in the scope of negation. For instance:

(1) I *(don’t) see anything.
(2) I (*don’t) see something.
   * unless some scopes over not, or not is an emphatic denial

Is reference to the scope of negation in the two definitions a significant commonality? Initially it does not seem so. First, the relation between negation and any is thought of as a case of syntactic or semantic licensing,

* This paper owes much to discussions with Paul Postal, Dorit Ben-Shalom, the participants of my Fall 2002 seminar at New York University, and to comments by two anonymous NLLT reviewers. I also wish to thank Wayles Browne, Marcel den Dikken, Anastasia Giannakidou, Bill Haddican, Jack Hoeksema, Richard Kayne, and Orin Percus for suggestions. Earlier versions were presented at colloquia at USC, Rutgers, Yale, Princeton, and Cornell, and at Sinn und Bedeutung VII; I am grateful to the audiences for their comments. All remaining errors are mine.

an altogether respectable kind of grammatical phenomenon, whereas the relation between negation and some seems like a boring prohibition (Horn 1989, 2001b, p. 157) or a matter of pragmatic preference (as in Krifka 1992). Second, it is well known that NPIs come in many flavors (Zwarts 1981 and subsequent literature), whereas PPIs seem to singlemindedly avoid scoping below a particular operator. If so, mentioning NPIs and PPIs on the same page seems nothing more than classificatory convenience.

The second dissimilarity is the easiest to show to only be apparent. Van der Wouden (1997) observes that the three classical types of NPIs are matched by three comparable types of PPIs in Dutch (see the semantic definitions in section 2). Outside Dutch, class (3a) is exemplified by Korean pakkey ‘only’ (an exception, Nam 1994), (3b) by English yet, and (3c) by English ever, for example.

(3) NPIs:
   a. Must be in the scope of an antimorphic operator: mals ‘tender’, pluis ‘plush’
   b. Must be in the scope of an antiadditive operator: ook maar ‘also but = any’, hand voor ogen ‘hand before eyes’, met een vinger ‘with a finger’
   c. Must be in the scope of a decreasing operator: hoeven ‘need’

(4) PPIs:
   a. Must not be in the scope of an antimorphic operator: al ‘already’, nog ‘still’
   b. Must not be in the scope of an antiadditive operator: een beetje ‘a little’, nogal ‘rather’, maar ‘but’
   c. Must not be in the scope of a decreasing operator: allerminst ‘not-at-all’, niet ‘not’

Although the above NPI typology is not exhaustive (some NPIs are licensed in non-veridical contexts; see, e.g., Giannakidou 1998) and not uncontroversial (decreasingness needs to be taken with a grain of salt, see, e.g., von Fintel 1999), this much parallelism should already give us pause. Why are NPIs and PPIs sensitive to (at least roughly) the same semantic properties? Given van der Wouden’s (1997) very general framework of collocational behavior, the fact that semantic notions like downward monotonicity and antiadditivity play a role in natural language would make it