On Negative Eventualities, Negative Concord, and Negative Yes/No Questions

The general aim of this paper is to argue for the existence and linguistic importance of negative eventualities. The paper is divided into three parts. First, it shows that arguments which led to the acceptance of events as first-class semantic objects apply also to negative eventualities. Second, it argues that negative eventualities play the licensing role in Negative Concord. Third, it provides evidence from negative polarity questions for the claim that negation is ambiguous between propositional and eventuality negation meanings. Although the considerations below are compatible with a number of semantic frameworks, the full paper formalizes the analysis within Situation Semantics.

I. The ontological status of negative eventualities (NEs) is controversial both in philosophy and in linguistics. We show that, once we accept events as objects in their own right, we must also accept NEs: most of the arguments given for the former carry over to the latter.[1] First, NEs can be referred to by derived nominals, e.g., *the non-explosion of the gases* (Higginbotham, 1996). Second, they can be referred to by anaphors, e.g., *John didn't ask Mary to dance at the party and this made her angry* (de Swart, 1996). Third, they can be modified by relative clauses, e.g., *John didn't ask Mary to dance, which made her angry.* Fourth, they can answer "What happened?" (de Swart, 1996). Fifth, they can be quantified over implicitly or explicitly, e.g., *There were quarrels every time she didn't wash the dishes.*[2] Sixth, adverbs of quantification can quantify over NEs, e.g., *He often hasn't paid taxes* (de Swart, 1996). Seventh, cardinality adverbials can be used to count NEs, e.g., *John didn't come to the party twice already.* Eighth, NEs can be both causes and results in causative sentences, e.g., *He didn't stop at the lights because he didn't notice them* (cf. Rosner (1986); Parsons (1990); Higginbotham (1996)). Ninth, NEs occur in perceptual reports, e.g., *I saw her not stop at the traffic lights* (Engdahl). Tenth, NEs can be modified by temporal adverbials, e.g., *John [didn't play golf] until noon* (Higginbotham, 1996). Eleventh, NEs can move forward the reference time, e.g., *Mary smiled at John. He didn't smile back. She slapped him.* (de Swart, 1996). Twelfth, in some languages, NEs can be arguments of 'take place', e.g., Polish: *Niedopełnienie obowiązków służbowych przez X miało miejsce w roku 1983*, lit.: "non-fulfillment (of) professional duties by X had place in year 1983." In the full paper, we discuss the relative strengths of the above arguments in detail.

II. Once negative eventualities are acknowledged, the question arises, where do they surface in the grammar. We argue that they play an important role in Negative Concord (NC): they license *n*-words (i.e., cognates of *nobody*, *nothing*, *never*, etc. in languages which exhibit NC). There are two main arguments for this claim.

First, in NC-languages, verbal negation licenses *n*-words which are (within) eventuality-level dependents (i.e., in arguments, instrumental adjuncts, *with*-adjuncts, manner adjuncts, etc.), but not (within) other dependents, e.g., not within sentence modifiers or speech act modifiers such as *in nobody's opinion*, *according to nobody*, *thanks to nobody*, etc.: cf. Polish **Nie zrobiłem tego dzięki nikomu*, lit.: "not I-did it thanks to nobody" (putative: "I didn't

[1] Some of these arguments for NEs are scattered throughout the literature, other are new. To the best of our knowledge, they have never been collected in one place.

[2] A moment's reflection should suffice that the quantification is over eventualities, not over times. This is also made clear upon consideration of languages which allow quantificational determiners to combine with derived nominals, e.g., Polish: *Każde jej niepozmywanie naczyń oznaczało kłótnię*, lit.: "Every her not-washing (of the) dishes meant (a) quarrel."

do that thanks to anybody."). This is surprising for theories relating *n*-words directly to the negative marker (*nie* above), or to the scope of negation (negation can scope over the *thanks to* modifier), but expected in theories relating NC to NEs.

Second, *n*-words are licensed in negative *yes/no* questions only when they are understood as questions about the existence of a negative state of affairs, but not when the negation is neutralized, cf. the contrast from Polish: *Naprawdę nikogo nie widziałeś?*, lit.: "really nobody not you-saw?" ("You really didn't see anybody?") vs. *??*Nie widziałeś może nikogo po drodze?*, lit.: "not you-saw perhaps nobody on way?" (putative: "Haven't you perhaps seen anbyody on your way?"). (Similar facts are observed in other Slavic languages, as well as in Italian.) This is explained if negation is ambiguous between propositional and eventuality negations, where only the latter licenses *n*-words.

III. The above data show a tension between the standard analysis of negative *yes/no* questions as ambiguous only pragmatically, and the standard analysis of NC in Romance and Slavic as a syntactic/semantic phenomenon, unaffected by pragmatics. We argue for giving up the former and claim that negative *yes/no* questions are ambiguous semantically. We formalize this ambiguity within Situation Semantics and argue that it reflects the ambiguity of negation between propositional and eventuality negation recognized (in slightly different terms) within this theory.[3] Thus, the interrogative "Not p?" may mean either: "Does situation s not-support p?" (propositional negation) or "Does situation s support not-p?" (eventuality negation). Propositional negation is neutralized in questions: the former reading above is equivalent to "Does situation s support p?" (an answer to one gives an answer to the other one). On the other hand, eventuality negation in questions remains meaningful: "Does s support p?" and "Does s support not-p?" are two different questions: an answer to one does not necessarily determine an answer to the other (cf. partiality of situations).

In summary, we show that negative eventualities are first-class linguistic entities, argue for their crucial role in Negative Concord, and suggest that they bear on the semantic ambiguity of negative *yes/no* questions.

References

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[3]See, e.g., Barwise and Etchemendy (1987) and Cooper (1997).