Split scope of negative indefinites with connected exceptives

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Connected exceptives (CEPs) like *but War and Peace* may modify negative indefinites. The sentence in (1) is felicitous and is correctly predicted by von Fintel (1993), Moltmann 1995, and many others, to entail that *War and Peace* is a book, that it is worth reading, and that no other book is.

(1) No book but War and Peace is worth reading.

However, on a closer scrutiny, it turns out that any theory on which CEPs are designed to only be able to combine with a (negative) universal quantifier (such as the theories by von Fintel 1993; Moltmann 1995) has serious issues with their modification of negative indefinites. To show this, let us first say a bit about what is required of an adequate treatment of negative indefinites.

1. Existential semantics of negative indefinites

Compelling reasons have been put forward to analyze negative indefinites as existential quantifiers that are accompanied by a quantifier-external negative operator (see Zeijlstra 2004; Penka 2011; Abels & Martí 2010; Alrenga & Kennedy 2014, among many others). The main argument for this analysis pertains to the ability of negative indefinites to participate in so-called split scope readings. For instance, the sentences in (2-a)-(3-a) may convey the meanings paraphrased in (2-b)-(3-b):

(2) a. The company need fire no employee.
b. One reading: There is no need to fire an employee.

(3) a. You have to read no book this month.
b. One reading: You are not required to read a book this month.

The consensus is that these readings can be adequately derived only on a construal on which the negative component of a negative indefinite takes scope above the modal, while the existential quantifier component takes scope below the modal (see the authors cited above). Candidate LFs for (2)-(3) are those provided in (4), where we leave the existential quantifier *in situ* for readability (cf. Zeijlstra 2004; Penka 2011).

(4) a. [NEG [□ [the company fire [∃ employees]]]]
b. [NEG [□ [you read [∃ book] this month]]]

2. The puzzle

Given the above treatment of negative indefinites, an analysis of CEPs that allows them to combine only with (negative) universal quantifiers yields the prediction that, at best, the split scope readings should not be available when negative indefinites are modified by a CEP (in fact, if negation is always external to the negative indefinite, as represented above, CEPs should not be able to modify negative quantifiers at all on this analysis). This turns out to be false. For instance, both sentences in (5-a)-(6-a) admit a split scope interpretation and can be naturally paraphrased as in (5-b)-(6-b):

(5) a. The company need fire no employees but the criminally negligent one.
b. One reading: C does not need to fire any employees but the criminally negligent one.

(6) a. You have to read no book but 'War and Peace' this month.
b. One reading: You do not have to read any book but 'War and Peace' this month.

Accordingly, the CEPs must be taken to modify existential quantifiers in these constructions. Their felicity is unexpected if they are designed to yield a contradiction when combined with an existential quantifier (e.g., von Fintel 1993; Moltmann 1995).

(7) Incorrect predictions:
   a. *[NEG [□ [the company fire [SOME employees but the negligent ones]]]]
   b. *[NEG [□ [you read [SOME book but 'War and Peace'] this month]]]

3. Resolution

The above data closely resemble the examples discussed by Gajewski (2008), where CEPs modify *any*-NPIs. And they can be analyzed in a parallel fashion as follows: Assume that a CEP consists of two components, *but* and *Min the negligent employee*, which are assigned the meanings in (8).

(8) a. ⟦Min the negligent employee⟧ = λP. P(N) ∧ ∀X∈E: P(X) → N≤X.
   b. ⟦but⟧ = λx. λP. λy. P(y) ∧ x≠y.

Moreover, assume that the *Min*-phrase may QR out of a negative indefinite. In this case, the sentence in (5) may be assigned the LF in (9), which has the interpretation in (10). This interpretation corresponds to the meaning that we intuitively observe for the sentence, as you can easily convince yourself.

(9) [Min N] [λx [¬ [□ [C fire [∃ employee but x]]]]]

(10) ¬□(C fire some employee that is not N) ∧ ∀X∈E: □(C fire some employee that is not X) → N≤X.

References

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