

ONLY AND POLARITY ITEMS IN DJIBOUTIAN SOMALI

Sumiyo Nishiguchi

Abstract

In Djiboutian Somali, kalidi “only” is the licenser of the weak negative polarity item (NPI) wuli “ever.” Kalidi “only” changes the polarity of the sentence. The addition of kalidi “only” makes the otherwise felicitous NPI infelicitous despite the presence of negation, and otherwise felicitous positive polarity item (PPI) infelicitous even without the negative element. The contribution of kalidi “only” equals that of negation in that it flips over the polarity.

1. Negation, NPI, and Only in English

Certain lexical items have limited distribution. Phrases called negative polarity items (NPIs) are grammatical only in the scope of negative expressions such as *not*. For example, the NPIs *any* and *anymore* are felicitous in negative sentences, but not in affirmative sentences, as in (1).

- (1) People *(do not) wear any masks anymore.
- (2) a. Only Mary has ever attended ACAL.
b. But that process is only possible at all because of the Incarnation, ...¹

It is not only a negative marker *not* that licenses the NPIs. There are “weaker” NPI licensers, according to their logical properties—medium and weak negative contexts. Since Fauconnier (1975a, 1975b) and

1 *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith*, via BNC Web

Ladusaw (1979), reversed scalar implicatures and downward monotonicity have been known to mark NPI licensing contexts.

For example, *few* is monotone decreasing both in the restrictor *linguistic conferences with any on site presentations* in (3) and the nuclear scope *were hosted at all in Japan* in (3). Logically, (3a) entails (3b) downwardly because the set of English linguistic conferences is a subset of the set of linguistic conferences, and Tokyo is the capital of Japan. Thus, the NPIs *any* and *at all* are felicitous.

- (3) a. Few linguistic conferences with any on-site presentations were hosted in Wonderland.
 b. Few English linguistic conferences with any on-site presentations were hosted in Wonderland.

However, certain NPI licensors such as *only* are not monotone decreasing. Even though *only* licenses the “weak” NPI *ever*, (4a) does not infer (4b). When (4a) holds true, all popular camping sites could have been located in the mountains, not beaches. In such a situation, (4a) would be true but (4b) will be false. Moreover, because *last summer* is part of *last year*, *Only camping sites became popular last year* may entail that *Only camping sites became popular last summer*. However, this is not the case. In the annual total, the number of campers could have exceeded that of other types of vacationers; however, comparing summer vacationers may have resulted in different results.

- (4) a. Only camping sites became ever popular last year.
 b. Only camping sites on the beach became ever popular last summer.

Thus, the NPI licensor *only* in English is not monotone decreasing.

2. Djiboutian Somali

Somali is a Cushitic language that belongs to the Afroasiatic language family. Somali is widely spoken in Djibouti whose population is 1.1 million in 2023 (United Nations Population Fund).²

The word order is SOV.

2 <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/DJ>

2.1 NPI *Wuli* “ever”

Wuli “ever” is licensed by the negative marker *ma*. In (5a,b), the use of *wuli* “ever” is felicitous regardless of the different word order with negation. Since the omission of *ma* “NEG” in (5c) makes the sentence infelicitous, *wuli* appears to be the NPI licensed by strong negation.

- (5) a. $\sqrt{\text{Hassan wuli ma tagi-n Francisca.}}$
 Hassan ever NEG travel-PAST France
 “Hassan has not yet travelled to France.”
- b. $\sqrt{\text{Hassan ma wuli ma tagi-n Francisca.}}$
 Hassan NEG ever travel-PAST France
 “Hassan has not yet travelled to France.”
- c. $\ast\sqrt{\text{Hassan wuli tagi Francisca.}}$
 Hassan ever travel France
 “Hassan is yet to travel to France.”

2.2 NPI Licenser *Kalidi* “Only” with *Wuli* “Ever”

According to the survey, it is not only the negative marker *ma* that licenses *wuli* “ever.” *Kalidi* “only” also licenses the weak negative polarity item (NPI) *wuli* “ever.”

- (6) Hassan kalidi wuli tagi Francisca.
 Hassan only ever traveled France
 “Only Hassan has ever been to France.”

2.3 Flip Over

Peculiarly, we can say that *kalidi* “only” changes polarity of the sentence. It is because the addition of *kalidi* “only” makes the otherwise felicitous NPI infelicitous despite the presence of negation, and the otherwise felicitous positive polarity item (PPI) infelicitous even without a negative element.

The contribution of *kalidi* “only” equals that of negation in that it flips over the polarity as given in (7) (Jespersen 1909, 1949, Szabolcsi 2004).

- (7) a. $[| \textit{kalidi} \text{ (only) } \phi |] \sim \> [| \sim \phi |]$
 b. $[| \textit{maa} \text{ (not) } \phi |] = [| \sim \phi |]$
 c. $[| \textit{maa} \text{ (not) } \textit{kalidi} \text{ (only) } \phi |] \sim \> [| \sim \sim \phi |] = [| \phi |]$

2.4 *Kalidi* “only” > ¬

Kalidi “only” scopes over negation. (8a) shows that *kalidi* is grammatical without negation. When negation is added in (8b), the meaning is that *it is only Hassan who does not speak Somali* which implies that Hassan does not speak the Somali language. If the negation takes a higher scope than *kalidi*, it would mean that *it is not only Hassan who speaks Somali* which means that Hassan does speak Somali, but this is not the case.

- (8) a. Hassan kalidi aya ku hadla Somali.
 Hassan only who speak Somali
 “Only Hassan speaks Somali. (Others do not)”
- b. Hassan kalidi aya-nan ku hadla Somali.
 Hassan only who-NEG speak Somali
 “Only Hassan cannot speak Somali. (Others are able to)”
- [*only* > ¬]
 $\neg \text{ speak-Somali(Hassan)} \wedge \forall x.[x \neq \text{Hassan} \rightarrow \text{ speak-Somali}(x)]$

2.5 **Kalidi* “only”- *nan* “not” - *walbay* “all”

Walbay “all” is the NPI licensed by strong negation.

- (9) a. √Wha walbay ma hay-o
 thing all me have-NEG
 “I do not have anything.” [∀ > ¬]
- b. *Wha walbay wan hay-a.
 thing all I have-POSITIVE
 “I have everything.”

The addition of *kalidi* “only” makes the sentence infelicitous.

- (10) *Hassan kalidi aya(-nan) ku hadla walbay Somali.
 Hassan only who-NEG speak everything Somali
 “Only Hassan can(not) speak Somali.”

2.6 *Wuli* “ever”: weak NPI

Our observations so far are mentioned below:

- *Wuli* “ever” is a weak NPI licensed by the negative *maa* “NEG,” question, superlative, *few*, and the universal.

- *Wuli* “ever” obligatorily takes narrow scope under these licensers.
- The omission of a negation makes the sentence infelicitous.

2.7 Question

Furthermore, the question intonation is a licenser, which makes (11) felicitous without *maa* “NEG.”

- (11)a. Hassan Francisca wuli ($\sqrt{\text{maa}}$) tagleh $\{*/\sqrt{?}\}$
 Hassan France ever NEG visited
 “{Hassan has never been to France./Has Hassan ever been to France?}”
- b. *Hassan Francisca wuli tagleh($\sqrt{?}$)
 Hassan France ever visited
 “Has Hassan ever been to France?”

2.8 Superlative-*wuli*

The superlative and *yar* “small” i.e., *few* license *wuli* “ever.”

- (12) $\sqrt{\text{Hassan}}$ wa qofki udhera ee wuli tagay Franciska.
 Hassan is person tallest who ever traveled France
 “Hassan is the tallest person who has ever been to France.”

2.9 *few*/ \forall > \neg

The NPI licenser *few* licenses *wuli* “ever.” The co-occurrence with negation is allowed as in (13). We also note that *yar* “small/few” and the universal *kofkasta* “everyone” take wide scope over negation.

- (13) Koox yar wuli $\{\sqrt{\text{tagay}}/\sqrt{\text{tagi-n}}\}$ Franciska.
 people small ever traveled/traveled-NEG France
 “Few people have (not) ever traveled to France.” [*few* > \neg]
- (14) Kofkasta wuli tagay/tagi-n Franciska.
 everyone ever visited/visited-NEG France
 “Everyone has ever visited France./No one has ever visited France.” [\forall > \neg]

2.10 Question

The imperative mood licenses *wuli* “ever” and question intonation is required.

- (15) √Hassan wuli ma tagi Francisca?
 Hassan ever NEG travel France
 “Has Hassan not yet travelled to France?”

2.11 *Wuli*: weak NPI

Then *wuli* “ever” is a weak NPI licensed in:

- antimorphic strong negation with *maa* “NEG” or the negative suffix *-n* “NEG”
- anti-additive *few*
- non-monotone right scope of the universal, *only*, and in question sentences (Zwarts 1998, van der Wouden 1997, Gajewski 2011, Ladusaw 1979, Nishiguchi 2003, 2004, 2009, 2016, 2023).

2.12 *Walegeedba* “ever”: PPI

Additionally, *walegeedba* “ever” is a PPI anti-licensed by strong negation rescuable by the presence of *kalidi* “only”. The omission of *ma* “NEG” makes the sentence infelicitous.

- (16) a. *Hassan (√kalidi) walegeedbaFrancisca ma tegi-n
 Hassan only ever France NEG travel-NEG
 “(Only) Hassan has not ever been to France.”
 b. *Hassan kalidi walegeedbaFrancisca tegi-n.
 Hassan only ever France travel-NEG
 “Only Hassan has not ever been to France.”

Question intonation is a rescuer too.

- (17) WaligeedbaFrancisca ma tegi-n?
 ever France NEG travel-NEG
 “Have you ever visited France?”

Thus, even though *kalidi* “only” is a weak NPI licenser,

- it penalizes a grammatical NPI licensed by strong negation.
- it rescues otherwise unacceptable PPI in a negative sentence.
- the contribution of *kalidi* “only” is similar to another negation.

2.13 *Waligaa* “ever”: PPI

Walbay “ever” is a positive polarity item (PPI) anti-licensed by strong negation.

- (18) a. Hassan waligaa Francisca?
 Hassan ever France
 “Has Hassan ever been to France?”
 b. Waliga Francisca maa tegte-h?
 ever France NEG visit-PAST
 “Have you not been to France?”
- (19) a. Ali waliga Francisca mad tagte-h.
 Ali ever France you visit-PAST
 “Ali has ever been to France.”
 b. Ali waliga Francisca maa tagte-h.
 Ali ever France NEG visit-PAST
 “Ali has never been to France.”

3. Conclusion

Thus, our conclusion is:

- *Kalidi* “only” takes wide scope over negation.
- *Kalidi* “only” is the weak NPI licenser that licenses the weak NPI *wuli* “ever.”
- The weak NPI *wuli* “ever” can also be licensed by question intonation, superlatives, *few*, and the universal quantifier, which take wider scope than cooccurring negation.
- *Walbay* “all” is the NPI licensed by strong negation. The addition of *kalidi* “only” makes the sentence infelicitous.
- *Walegeedba* “ever” is a PPI anti-licensed by strong negation rescuable by the presence of *kalidi* “only”.

To date, there has been little work on polarity items in Somali (Saeed 1999, Nishiguchi 2021; cf. Hunter 2015) or linguistic literature

focused on the Djiboutian dialect of Somali. The data were collected first-hand. Hopefully, the current work will contribute to the progress of the study of Djiboutian Somali.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to the Embassy of Djibouti in Japan for the data collection. The project “Negation and Contexts in Somali and Dhaasanac” has been supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP16K02643 and JP24K03832.

References

- Fauconnier, G. 1975a. Polarity and the Scale Principle. *CLS*, 11: 188–199.
- Fauconnier, G. 1975b. Pragmatic Scales and Logical Structure. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 6: 353–375.
- Gajewski, J. R. 2011. Licensing strong NPIs. *Natural Language Semantics*, 19: 109–148.
- Hunter, F. M. 2015. *A Grammar of the Somali Language*. Byculla: Education Society’s Press.
- Jespersen, O. 1932. *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*. London: George, Allen, and Unwin Ltd.
- Ladusaw, W. A. 1979. *Polarity Sensitivity as Inherent Scope Relations*. PhD thesis, University of Texas, Austin.
- Nishiguchi, S. 2003. Non-monotonic negativity. In D. H. Ji. et al. (ed.), *Proceedings of PACLIC 17*, 204–215. Singapore: COLIPS.
- Nishiguchi, S. 2004. Five Types of Affective Contexts: Nonmonotonic NPI Licensers. *CLS*, 40-1: 249–264.
- Nishiguchi, S. 2009. Bipolar Items and Attitude Predicates. *BLS* 35, 424–435.
- Nishiguchi, S. 2016. Bipolar Items. *Topics in Linguistics*, 17(2): 1–11.
- Nishiguchi, S. 2021. *Sound and Meaning in East Cushitic Languages: Dhaasanac, Burji, Rendille, Somali, and Afar*. Singapore: Springer.
- Nishiguchi, S. 2023. Polarity Item Licensing in Vector Model: Negative, Positive and Bipolar Items. *JELS*, 41, 248-254. Tokyo: The English Linguistic Society of Japan.
- Saeed, J. 1999. *Somali*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Szabolcsi, A. 2004. Positive Polarity-Negative Polarity. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 22: 409–452.

- van der Wouden, T. 1997. *Negative Contexts: Collocation, Polarity and Multiple Negation*. London: Routledge.
- Zwarts, F. 1998. Three Types of Polarity. In Fritz Hamn and Erhard Hinrichs, eds. *Polarity and Quantification*. 177– 238. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic.

Sumiyo Nishiguchi
Otaru University of Commerce

