

## On being flabbergasted

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### Abstract:

Sentences with negation expose differences in word meaning. Consider the English words *some* and *any*. The logical negation of an affirmative sentence with *some*, as in (a), is a sentence with *any*, as in (b). The logical negation of (a) cannot be expressed simply by adding negation, as in (c). This is because *some* is interpreted as taking scope over negation in sentence (c), as indicated by the paraphrase in (d).

- a) Mary ate some of the dessert.
- b) No, Mary didn't eat any of the dessert.
- c) No, Mary didn't eat some of the dessert.

Paraphrase of sentence (c):

- d) There is some dessert that Mary didn't eat (and some that she did).

In the literature, words that must take scope over negation are called Positive Polarity Items. English *some* is a Positive Polarity Item.

There is no semantic enmity between *some* and *any* in certain linguistic contexts, however. These contexts cancel the polarity sensitivity of English *some*, such that both *some* and *any* make sentences true in the same circumstances. For example, *some* and *any* are interchangeable (*salva veritate*) when they are embedded under pseudo-negative verbs such as *flabbergasted*, *surprised*, *astonished*, *amazed*, .... To illustrate, sentences (b) and (c) are embedded under the verb *flabbergasted* in sentences (e) and (f). Sentences (e) and (f) are judged to be true in the same circumstances.

- e) I'm flabbergasted that (b)Mary didn't eat any of the dessert.
- f) I'm flabbergasted that (c)Mary didn't eat some of the dessert.

We can appeal to this linguistic test to evaluate the proposal that disjunction words are Positive Polarity Items in Japanese (*ka* 'or') and in Mandarin Chinese (*huozhe* 'or'). If so, then the polarity sensitivity of these disjunction words should be cancelled in sentences with pseudo negative verbs. The prediction is that disjunction words yield the same interpretation across languages in sentences with pseudo-negative verbs. All will be revealed in the talk.