

The scope of *someone* in the infinitive complement of negated *want*: ambiguity of *want* and possibility of Neg-lowering

Makoto Kaneko

Aoyama Gakuin University / 4-4-25 Shibuya, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-836, Japan
kanekomakoto06@gmail.com

Abstract

Some-type indefinite pronouns in the infinitive complement of a negated *want* sometimes take a narrow scope under the matrix negation, as in *I don't want to offend someone*. Previous studies claim that this reading is available when the complement predicate denotes the subject's non-responsible or non-intentional action. By presenting some data against this generalization, I argue that i) the meaning of the complement predicate only indirectly bears upon the interpretation of *some*-type indefinites; ii) the availability of their narrow scope under the negation depends on the scope relation between *not* and *want*, which in turn depends on the ambiguity of *want*: when it is paraphrased by *would like*, its scope relation with *not* follows the surface configuration, and a *some*-type indefinite scopes, being a PPI, over *not*; when *want* is paraphrased by *intend*, the negation may be semantically lowered; iii) in the latter case, the notional distance between the attitude holder and the complement situation is increased, and *not want to* may amount, by coercion, to meaning *intend not to bring it about that*, where the negation is external with respect to the complement, and doesn't anti-license *some*-type indefinites within it.

1. Introduction

This study aims at shilding a new light on the interpretation of *some*-type indefinite pronouns in the infinitive complement of negated *want*. It has been observed, for example, that *someone* in (1a) should take a wide scope over *not*, while the narrow scope is allowed in (1b), where *offend* is interpreted as *happen to offend*.

- (1)a. I don't want to call **someone**. (Szabolcsi 2004: 417, footnote 10)
b. I don't want to offend **someone**. (ibid.)

According to the previous studies, the availability of the second reading is reduced to

the subject's non-responsibility (Szabolcsi 2010) or non-intentionality (Goncharov 2018) with respect to the complement predicate (ex. *call* vs. *offend*). In this study, I claim that i) the meaning of the complement predicate only indirectly bears upon the interpretation of *some*; ii) the availability of their narrow scope depends on the scope relation between *not* and *want*, which in turn depends on the ambiguity of *want*; iii) when *want* is paraphrased by *intend*, the negation may be lowered. In this case, the notional distance between the attitude holder and the complement situation is increased, and *not want to* may amount, by coercion, to meaning *intend not to bring it about that*, where the negation scopes over the complement and doesn't anti-license *some* within it.

In what follows, Section 2 first reviews previous analyses and points out their problems. Section 3 advances my hypotheses. Section 4 finally recapitulates the main claims.

2. Previous studies

Szabolcsi (2010) claims that i) the anti-licensing domain of a PPI, *someone* in (1a,b), is the whole sentence and ii) the scope difference between (1a) and (1b) depends on whether the subject assumes or not RESPONSIBILITY in the event denoted by the complement. The notion of RESPONSIBILITY is due to Farkas (1988). She points out, to detect this property, four distributional tests, i.e. incompatibilities with (a) rational clauses, (b) imperatives, (c) an adverb *intentionally* and (d) control verbs, like *require*. The results of these tests in (2a-d) in effect show that *call someone* in (1a) conveys RESPONSIBILITY, and (*happen to*) *offend someone* in (1b) does not.

- (2)a. I {call / #(happen to) offend} someone in order to kill time.
b. {Call / #(Happen to) Offend} someone!
c. I {call / #(happen to) offend} someone intentionally.

- d. #John required me to {call / #(happen to offend} someone.
 (3) I want [FOR IT (not) TO BE THE CASE THAT] I (happen to) offend someone.

Szabolcsi then suggests that i) (1b), including a non-RESP complement, is paraphrased by (3), and ii) the non-RESP marker (corresponding to FOR IT TO BE THE CASE THAT in (3)) “shields [indefinites] from negation”. Importantly, in (3), the negation is lowered¹ and externally scopes over the complement.

A similar idea is advanced by Jackendoff & Culicover (2003: 542), who invoke, for (4a) (where *try* takes a non-action complement predicate), the notion of COERCION, i.e. “a conventionalized omission of semantic material [corresponding BRING IT ABOUT THAT in (4b)] in syntactic structure”. Grano (2018) calls this ‘semantic material’ RESP(ONSIBILITY) marker. Thus, NON-RESP or RESP marker is coerced when the notional distance between the attitude holder and the complement situation is increased: the semantics of the complement predicate is one of the triggers of this coercion.

- (4)a Hilary plans for there to be more light in here. (Jackendoff & Culicover 2003: 542)
 b. Hilary plans to BRING IT ABOUT that there is more light here. (ibid.)

The analysis in terms of shielding is also advanced by Hoeksema (2018), who suggests that an attitude predicate, *want*, itself serves as an intervener in (5).

- (5) I don’t want to do **something** for somebody else. (Hoeksema 2018).

Goncharov (2018) however points out that i) on the one hand, in ordinary shielding cases, an intervention effect is detected, as in (6a), where *always* serves as intervener, and a PPI *some*, but not a NPI *any*, is accepted, ii) on the other hand, in the relevant construction in (6b), *any* is accepted. The lack of intervention effect puts into question the analysis in terms of shielding.

- (6)a. John doesn’t *always* call {someone/*anyone} (Szabolcsi 2004: 415-416)
 b. I don’t want to offend {someone/anyone}.

¹ I assume that Neg-lowering is not a syntactic process, but a pragmatic phenomenon. For a recent analysis against the syntactic view, see Jacobsen (2018).

² 12 of the 24 examples include a relative clause, as in (ia). I suggest that a relative serves, by providing a contrast, to attract the negation, as in (ib). The licensing of *someone* in

Goncharov next points out that intentional predicates, as *call*, induce the identification of the referent of *someone*, as in (7a), which may not be the case with non-intentional ones, as (*happen to*) *offend* in (7b). She then claims that i) the anti-licensing domain for *some* is the complement, and ii) it is the identification meaning induced by intentional predicates that forces a wide-scope of *some* in (1a), while (1b) shows a run-of-the-mill scope behavior.

- (7)a.A: What happened [...]? – B: I called someone. #But I don’t know who. (ibid.)
 b. A: What happened [...]? – B: I happened to offend someone. But I don’t know who.

Goncharov’s analyses however face theoretical and empirical problems. Theoretically, although (8a) surely requires the speaker’s identification of *someone*, (8b) accepts its non-specific reading. Her analysis, which assumes that the anti-licensing domain for *someone* is the complement, cannot invoke its PPI status in order to explain why the negation nullifies the non-specific reading, as in (8c).

- (8)a. I called someone. [+identification]
 b. I wanted to call someone. [*want* > *some*]
 c. I didn’t want to call someone.
 [+identificational: *some* > *not* > *want*]

Empirically, first, some intentional verbs (cf. *eat*) don’t always induce identification of the referent, while forcing wide-scope of *some* as in (9a,b). Second, a narrow scope reading of *some* is sometimes rejected with non-intentional predicates, as *resemble*, in (10a), and admitted with intentional predicates, as in (10b).

- (9)a. I ate something. But I don’t know what.
 b. I don’t want to eat something. [*not>some]
 (10)a I don’t want to resemble **someone** in my family. [*not > *some*]
 b. [...] the more you are liberated mentally, the more you do not want to have **somebody** cleaning your shoes, washing your clothes and so on. (BNC, HSL 610)

In effect, among 24 examples collected on BNC and Coca, where a *some*-type indefinite shows a narrow-scope in the infinitive complement of negated *want*², only two involve non-intentional

(4) may also be due to a contrast, as shown by the paraphrase in (ii) (cf. Horn 2001; Larrivé 2012).

(i)a. an individual with normal speech will not want to date **someone** who stutters. (Coca)
 b. an individual with normal speech will want to date not someone who stutters, but someone who doesn’t.

predicates (i.e. *risk someone stealing a key, see somebody executed*). Furthermore, (10a) may be paraphrased in terms of non-RESP marker.

(11) I want [FOR IT not TO BE THE CASE THAT] I resemble someone in my family.

(10b) satisfies 4 tests of RESPONSIBILITY. (10a,b) thus come against Szabolcsi's analysis.

3. Proposals

In order to account for (10a,b) as well as (1a,b), I propose to focus on the semantics of *want*, rather than that of the complement predicate.

3.1 Ambiguity of *want*

Levinson (2003: 223) points out that one and the same reasonable person can utter (12a) and (12b) to reply to the question in (12), within a short time, without having changed her mind.

- (12) Do you want to play tennis?
 a. I really want to play, but I have to teach.
 b. No [=I don't want to], I have to teach.

According to Levinson (2003: 222-223), this is because *want* is ambiguous: it denotes i) in (12a), a mere desire 'as a matter of psychological fact'; ii) in (12b), a 'desire accompanying intentional action' or an 'all-things-considered judgment'. Grano (2018) proposes to paraphrase the two readings by *would like* and *intend*. I hereafter call the two readings *want^{would-like}* and *want^{intend}*. One test to disambiguate them is provided by 'anankastic conditionals', informally represented by (13), and illustrated by (14).

(13) For an agent *a* and predicates, *P* and *Q*,
 if *a* wants to *P*, *a* must *Q*
 = *a* must *Q* in order to *P*.
 (*Q* is a necessary condition for *P*)

(14) If you want to go to Harlem, you must take the A train. (Condoravdi & Lauer 2016: 2)

(ii) I want to do **something** not for somebody else, but for myself.

³ Among the above-mentioned 24 examples in my corpus, only one example, (i), may be analyzed as including *want^{would-like}*. In (i), *someone* is licensed because the negation is associated with *unless* in the following clause.

(i) A criminal psychopath would not want to kick **someone's** face in for the fun of it *unless* he had at least an inkling of what it feels like to the victim. (BNC, CB1)

⁴ https://books.google.co.jp/books/about/Animal_Welfare_Anti_vivisection_1870_191.html?hl=ja&id=NoF16oyRzcsC&redir_esc=y

=You must take the A train in order to go to the Harlem.

Now, the compatibility with an anankastic conditional in (15a,b) indicates that *want* in (1b) and (10b) is interpreted as *want^{intend}*³.

(15)a. If you don't want to offend **someone**, you must watch your behavior well.

= You must watch your behavior well in order not to offend **someone**.

b. If you don't want to have **somebody** cleaning your shoes, you should be liberated mentally.

= You must be liberated mentally in order not to have **somebody** cleaning your shoes.

Inversely, *want* in (1a) and (10a) is interpreted as *want^{would like}*, and the scope relation between *not* and *want* reflects the surface configuration. In (1b) and (10b), as shown by the paraphrases in anankastic conditionals in (15a,b), *not* is semantically lowered. The lowering of the negation is further supported by the availability of PPI adverbs in the matrix, as in (16a,b) (cf. Ernst 2009; Ginnakidou 2011; Liu 2012).

(16)a. The Kuwaiti friends did not want *still* to ask for foreign interference. (Coca)

b. Society did not *surely* intend to stigmatize their own order⁴.

A quick corpus research on BNC⁵ summarized below equally suggests that *intend* precedes *not* more often than *would like*. In 9 of the 10 cases including a sequence '*want not to*', *want* is appropriately interpreted as *want^{intend}*.

<i>not want to / want not to</i>	852/10(98.8%/1.2%)
<i>not intend to / intend not to</i>	342 /8(97.7%2.3%)
<i>would not like to/would like not to</i>	49/0(100%/0%)

Next, to elucidate this correlation between the two readings of *want* and the availability of Neg-lowering, I refer to Horn (2001).

⁵ A sequence '*would like not to*' is frequently observed in Coca, as shown in the table below.

<i>not want to / want not to</i>	9269/27 (99.7%/0.3%)
<i>not intend to / intend not to</i>	632/5 (99.2%/0.8%)
<i>would not like to/would like not to</i>	131/12 (91.6%/8.4%)

This frequent occurrence seems to be due to the fact that, in American English, *would like* sometimes conveys an 'all-things-considered judgment', but is used to avoid the responsibility, as in (i).

(i) I would like not to give an opinion upon that because I do not know exactly. (Coca)

3.2 Ambiguity of *want* and Neg-lowering

According to Horn (2001: 320), Neg-lowering occurs through the following process: for a predicate P and a proposition p , i) when $P(p) \vee P(\neg p)$ is shared by discourse participants, and ii) when P is *intolerant* [i.e. $\#P(p) \wedge P(\neg p)$], if the speaker utters $\neg P(p)$, the hearer can infer $P(\neg p)$. For example, on the one hand, *likely* is intolerant, as in (17a). The disjunction in (17b) is exclusive. When the disjunction is shared among discourse participants, if the speaker asserts the first disjunct is false, the disjunction being exclusive, the hearer can infer the second disjunct, where the negation is lowered, is true.

(17)a. #It's likely she'll go and likely she won't go. (Horn 2001: 320)

- b. (It's likely she will go) \vee (It's likely she won't go) [exclusive disjunction]

On the other hand, *possible* is tolerant, as shown in (18a). Even if the speaker denies the truth of the first disjunct, the disjunction being inclusive, as in (18b), the hearer cannot conclude the truth of the second disjunct.

(18)a. It's possible she'll go and possible she won't go.

- b. (It's possible she will go) \vee (It's possible she won't go) [inclusive disjunction]

Now, intolerant *likely*, but not tolerant *possible*, yields a Neg-lowered reading, as in (19a,b).

(19)a. It is not likely that she will go.

\rightleftharpoons It is likely that she will not go.

- b. It is not possible that she will go.

\neq It is possible that she will not go.

Then, are the two readings of *want* intolerant or tolerant? Condoravdi & Lauer (2016) point out that *want* allows contradictory wishes, but this holds only for *want*^{would-like}, and not for *want*^{intend}. Thus, “the consistency of [(20) with *want*] is dependent on a contextual resolution for *want* where the targeted preference is ‘mere desire’ [...]. While [(20) with *would like*] is coherent (and simply attributes indecision to John), [(20) with *intend*] sounds contradictory (or attributes a certain amount of irrationality to John).” (Condoravdi & Lauer 2016: 28).

(20) I {want / would like / intend} to move in with my girlfriend, but I also {want / would like / intend} to keep living alone.

In this example, the complement of the second conjunct, *to keep living alone*, amounts to the

negation of the first conjunct, *to move in with my girlfriend*. (20) thus suggests that *want*^{would-like} is tolerant, while *want*^{intend} is intolerant. The difference between the two readings of *want* as for the availability of Neg-lowering is then explained in terms of their (in)tolerance. Now, we can attack the scope difference in (1a) and (10a) vs. (1b) and (10b).

3.3 (1a) / (10a): [*some* > *not* > *want*^{would like}]

In (1a), *want* is interpreted as *want*^{would-like}, and out-scoped by *not*. In effect, with an intentional predicate (ex. *call*), *not want to* is often used as an indirect polite refusal to a request (ex. *Could you call everyone?*), by denying one of the preparatory conditions of the requested action (i.e. existence of desire to do that). Now, being a PPI, *some* scopes over the negation, whence [*some* > *not* > *want*^{would like}].

In (10a) (=21a)), the predicate, *resemble*, is incompatible with *want*^{intend}, as shown in (21b). Therefore *want* is interpreted as *want*^{would-like}. Being tolerant, it does not allow Neg-lowering, and *some* takes wide scope over the negation, just in the case of (1a).

(21)a. I don't want to resemble **someone** in my family. [**not* > *some*] (=10a))

- b. #John intends to resemble his father. (Grano 2018: 34)

3.4 (1b) / (10b): *want*^{intend} *not to bring it about*

In (1b) and (10b), *want* is interpreted as *want*^{intend}, and allows Neg-lowering thanks to its intolerance. Now, I propose that not only the semantics of complement predicate (see Section 2), but also Neg-lowering serve to increase the notional distance between the attitude holder and the complement action, and to coerce RESP marker, BRING IT ABOUT THAT. A lowered negation may scope over either the complement predicate or RESP marker. In the latter case, (1b) amounts to meaning (22), where the negation is external with respect to the complement, and doesn't therefore anti-license *some* within it.

(22) I intend not TO BRING IT ABOUT THAT I have **someone** cleaning my shoes.

In effect, with non-intentional predicates, as *offend* in (1b), and intentional predicates denoting socially or morally less recommended actions, as *have X cleaning one's shoes*, *not want to* tends to convey not a simple absence of desire (which might be treated as half-heated in these contexts), but a manifestation of intention

to avoid an occurrence of the relevant situation. The semantics in (22) captures this intuition.

At least three arguments come in favor of this hypothesis.

(I) The correlation between the lowering of *not* and the licensing of narrow scope *some* is confirmed by the fact that the expressions like *in no way* and *never*, which force the negation to be interpreted in the matrix, are not fully compatible with *some*-indefinites, as in (23a,b).

- (23)a. ?In no way do I want to offend **someone**.
 b. ?I never wanted to offend **someone**.

(II) Purpose phrases, *in order / so as to*, also express an intention. It is then predicated that *in order/ so as not to* sometimes boil down to meaning *in order / so as not to BRING IT ABOUT THAT*, and are compatible with a narrow scope *some*. This prediction is borne out, as in (24a,b).

(24)a. Retailers are clinging to the phrase "Happy Holidays" in order not to offend **someone** who objects to the fact that Jesus Christ died for our sins. (Coca)

- b. Saying "Happy Holidays" (or sending out cards) so as not to offend **someone** of another faith is one thing. (Coca)

(III) My hypothesis assumes that, with *want*^{intend}, a lowered negation may scope over either RESP marker or the complement predicate, and that *some*-type indefinites are available only in the former case. This hypothesis predicts that strong NPIs, which require a clause-mate negation, cannot co-occur with *some*-type indefinites in the complement. This prediction is borne out in Japanese, which has strong NPIs, like *kessite* ('at all'). Now, on the one hand, (25b) where *kessite* co-occurs with *dare-ka* ('someone') in the complement is much less acceptable than (25a) without the strong NPI.

⁶<http://mikan33e.hatenablog.com/entry/20100609/1276108393>

⁷ <http://j-lyric.net/artist/a0057ed/100bff7.html>

⁸ Another possible analysis is to assume that *some* can move to take an intermediate scope between *want*^{intend} and *not*. According to this analysis, *some* rather conveys a non-specific reading, and its 'narrow scope' reading is in fact a free-choice like reading induced under the scope of *want*. This scope configuration is effectively observed in (i). Moreover (ii) shows that a non-specific *some* under attitude predicates may convey a free-choice reading, which is clarified, in (ii), by a supplementary *any*.

- (i) Why is it appropriate to want **someone** not to have acted badly? (G. Sher, *In Praise of Blame*)
 (ii) She is waiting for a policeman, any policeman, to show up. (Dayal 2013: 92)

This confirms that the negation is external with respect to the complement in (25a).

- (25)a. dare-ka-o kizutuke-taku-nai
 someone-ACC hurt-want-NEG
 'not want to hurt **someone**'⁶
 b. ?kessite dare-ka-o kizutuke-taku-nai
 at all someone-ACC hurt-want-NEG
 'I don't want to hurt **someone** at all.'
 c. kessite dare-mo kizutuke-taku-nai
 at all anyone hurt-want-NEG
 'I don't want to hurt **anyone** at all.'⁷

On the other hand, in (25c), *kessite* co-occurs with another strong NPI, *dare-mo* ('anyone'). This indicates that the negation here directly scopes over the complement predicate.

4. Concluding remarks

While the previous studies try to account for the different scope possibilities of *some*-indefinites in the complement of negated *want* in terms of the semantics of the complement predicate, this study essentially reduced them to the ambiguity of *want*: i) in one reading (*want*^{would-like}), *want* tends to be out-scoped by *not*; a *some*-indefinite, being a PPI, takes a wide scope over *not*, and yields a specific reading; ii) in another reading (*want*^{intend}), the negation may be semantically lowered, which serves to increase the notional distance between the attitude holder and the complement action, and to coerce RESP marker, BRING IT ABOUT THAT. A lowered negation may scope over either the complement predicate or RESP marker: in the latter case, the negation is external with respect to the complement, and doesn't anti-license *some* within it. Further support surely is needed to verify this hypothesis⁸, which admittedly remains speculative for the moment.

This analysis cannot explain why Dutch PPI predicates, which don't move for scope taking, are licensed in the complement of negated *willen* ('want'), as in (iii).

- (iii) Ik wil u niet in een
 I want you not in a
 lastig parket brengen.
 tough spot bring. (Hoeksema2018)
 'I don't want to put you in an awkward position.'

It should be noted that Dutch PPI predicates are anti-licensed by an external negation, as in (iv), and that (iii) therefore comes against my hypothesis too.

- (iv) *Ik denke niet dat we in
 I think not that we in
 een lastig parket zitten.
 a tough spot sit. (ibid.)
 'I don't think that we are in a difficult situation.'

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