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

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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 lowered 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” RESPONSIBILITY 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}.

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.)  

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]  
(10a)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 want2, only two involve non-intentional

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

=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.

(15)a. If you don’t want to offend *somebody*, you must watch your behavior well.
   = You must watch your behavior well in order not to offend *somebody*.
   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).

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

b. Society did not *surely* intend to stigmatize their own order.5

A quick corpus research on BNC3 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’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>not want to</em>/ <em>want not to</em></th>
<th>852/10 (98.8%/1.2%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*not intend to */ <em>intend not to</em></td>
<td>342/8 (97.7%/2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>would not like</em>/<em>would like not to</em></td>
<td>49/0 (100%/0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>not want to</em>/ <em>want not to</em></th>
<th>9269/27 (99.7%/0.3%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*not intend to */ <em>intend not to</em></td>
<td>632/5 (99.2%/0.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>would not like</em>/<em>would like not to</em></td>
<td>131/12 (91.6%/8.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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. \( #P(p) \vee P(\neg p) \)], 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.  
\( \equiv \) It is likely that she will not go.  
b. It is not possible that she will go.  
\#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\textsuperscript{would-like}, and not for want\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{would-like} is tolerant, while want\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{would-like}]

In (1a), want is interpreted as want\textsuperscript{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 takes wide scope over the negation, whence [some > not > want\textsuperscript{would-like}].

In (10a) (=21a), the predicate, resemble, is incompatible with want\textsuperscript{intend}, as shown in (21b). Therefore want is interpreted as want\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{intend} not to bring it about

In (1b) and (10b), want is interpreted as want\textsuperscript{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 predicaded 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\textsubscript{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. 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’

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.’

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\textsubscript{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\textsubscript{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 hypothesis\textsuperscript{8}, which admittedly remains speculative for the moment.

\textsuperscript{4}http://mikan33e.hatenablog.com/entry/20100609/1276108393
\textsuperscript{7}http://j-lyric.net/artist/a0057ed/l00bff7.html
\textsuperscript{8} Another possible analysis is to assume that some can move to take an intermediate scope between want\textsubscript{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)
References


