

# **I DO have a leg to stand on: Licensing NPIs through negative side messages**

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Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) are linguistic expressions that require specific licensing environments to be considered grammatically correct. Traditionally, minimizers like *lift a finger* are mainly restricted to negative contexts, such as *Alex didn't lift a finger to help* or *No one lifted a finger*. However, research (Sedivy, 1990, Linebarger, 1987) has revealed that certain NPIs can occasionally appear in “non-typical” contexts that lack negation (*I DO give a damn*). Rather they are licensed through pragmatic factors via a negative side message: *I DO give a damn [but the **others** think I **DON'T** give damn]* (Sailer, 2022).

This study aims to analyze the patterns and mechanisms of several NPIs (*"have a hope in hell"*, *"sleep a wink"*, *"have a leg to stand on"* and *"to believe a word of it"*) that allow them to occur outside their usual negative contexts. Specifically, the study investigates the contexts where NPIs are licensed through inferential processes like implicatures or presuppositions. Secondly, it is also interesting to compare the contexts in which the analysed NPIs appear and examine the differences and the similarities.

We used the enTenTen2021 corpus provided by Sketch Engine platform. Firstly, we extracted the respective NPIs. Then, since we are not interested in negated NPIs, we did some coding with Python to filter out most of the negated sentences we are not interested in. Finally, the data was checked manually and analyzed according to different categories: rhetorical questions, emphasis, contrasts, verbs of belief and so on.

With our study we enriched the previous research on the pragmatic licensing of NPIs with new data. We could demonstrate that pragmatic licensing is as relevant as traditional licensing mechanisms. Furthermore, we also could show that scalar and non-scalar NPIs differ in their behaviour of pragmatic licensing.

Do we really “have a hope in hell” to convince you to come to our talk?

**References:** Linebarger, M.C. (1987). Negative polarity and grammatical representation. *Linguist Philosophy*, 10, 325–387. • Sailer, M. (2022). Use-conditional licensing of strong negative polarity items. *Proceedings of Sinn Und Bedeutung*, 26, 734–752. • Sedivy, J. (1990). Against a unified analysis of negative polarity licensing. *Cahiers Linguistiques D'Ottawa* 18, 95–105.