Non-Truth-Conditional Aspects of Meaning and Negative Polarity Licensing in Tamil*

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Abstract: This paper provides a semantic account of two kinds of negative polarity items (NPIs) in Tamil: the **wh-NPI** and the **-ve-NPI**. Under a general understanding of the Conceptual Semantics (CS) framework (Jackendoff 1990), the semantics module of grammar is non-autonomous. This implies that there does not exist any proprietary level of "semantic representation" that is reserved only for the logical property of sentences, while a different level deals with the pragmatic/heuristic aspects of language. In essence, both "pragmatics" and "semantics" are defined over the same level of mental representation called conceptual structure. In this paper, I adopt the above conception of non-autonomous semantics to explain certain negative polarity phenomena in Tamil.

1. Introduction

The main impetus for a semantic approach to the problem of polarity licensing lies in its ability to account for cross-linguistic variation in simple yet precise terms. In this paper, I will address both the similarities as well as the differences in the licensing patterns that exist among languages (instances from Tamil and Dutch) and it seems quite striking that a number of features in the licensing of NPIs seem to warrant a conceptual approach to semantics in order to fully account for many of the aspects that have remained, as it were, out of range of contemporary analyses. For instance, under a model-theoretic approach such as the "Davidsonian program" (Davidson & Harman[1]; 1972), meaning of propositions

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* I dedicate this paper to Baba.

[1] This program was most explicitly and most vigorously defended by Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman in their 1972 work. However, it is important to note that Harman himself

in natural languages was assigned by associating sentences with truth-theoretically interpreted formulas of a logical system. Thus, under this view, a "theory of meaning" was more a theory of meanings of the expressions of a particular *target language* than one associated with a natural language such as English. The fact that (the generative nature of) linguistic abilities under the Davidsonian program was circumscribed by a metatheory such as the above, seems to suppress the now-established fact that language use is highly complex, highly versatile and above all, a natural phenomenon. Grammars / analyses of languages that operate with an archetypal conception of language as a system of general rules tend to ignore irregular phenomena in the quest for generalizations. In contrast, a context-based, conceptual theory assumes responsibility for representing a speaker's grasp of linguistic convention, which include particular as well as general statements about language.

I take the paradigm of language use to be its use in communication and communicative abilities. More specifically, I believe that a theory of meaning, as well as its description, must explain how (English-speaking) X, upon hearing (English-speaking) Y produce an utterance, acquires the belief *that p*. Further, a theory of meaning must not only provide the semantic interpretation of the utterance, but also more importantly, figure in the explanation of why speakers produce the utterances they do in particular circumstances. Indeed, in providing an explanation for the latter part more than just knowledge of truth-conditional meaning is involved. This aspect of non-truth-conditional meaning is what we will be looking at more closely in this paper. The notion that any description of meaning, or a study thereof, must be composed of both the truth-conditional as well as the non-truth-conditional aspects of meaning (Reed 1993), comes about with associating the study of meaning with an I-language (Chomsky 1986). That is, the characterization of language in terms of a body of internally encoded

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abandoned this 'program' as early as 1974; and Harman's (1974) paper provides reasons for this apostasy, the details of which is beyond the scope of the present work.

information (as opposed to an extrinsic E-language). Jackendoff extends this distinction to underscore the difference between I-concepts and E-concepts.

> "Corresponding to the indefinitely large variety of syntactic structures, then, there must be an indefinitely large variety of concepts that can be invoked in the production and comprehension of sentences. It follows that the repertoire of I-concepts expressed by sentences cannot be mentally encoded as a list, but must be characterized in terms of a finite set of mental primitives and a finite set of principles of mental combination that collectively describe the set of possible I-concepts expressed by sentences." (Jackendoff 1990: 8-9).

However, as Lycan (1984; p.9) rightly points out, "the role of a speaker's linguistic knowledge in the respective etiologies of the speaker's [utterances] is a vexed one." In the following discussion, I will try to address certain instances of polarity licensing in Tamil that have added to the 'vexation' that Lycan alludes to.

2. Polarity Licensing in Tamil

This section establishes the distribution of two polarity sensitive items in Tamil – the *any* expression along with the counterpart of the NPI *ever / at all* – to show that their distribution in some cases, is influenced by non-truth-conditional aspects of meaning which include certain conventional implicatures associated with the NPIs themselves. In the following sub-section, I will address the issue concerning PS (polarity sensitive) *any* in Tamil and consider as well instances from Dutch that are comparable to the Tamil facts.

2.1 Polarity Sensitive *any*: wh-*um*/ wh-*aavdi*

There are two types of PS *any* expressions in Tamil analogous (but not identical) to the NI-NPIs (wh-*um*) and the I-NPIs (wh-*aavdi*) in Serbo-Croatian. The only difference between the NI-NPIs and wh-*um* NPIs is that while the former can appear only under clausemate negation, the latter can appear both with clausemate and superordinate negation. In other words, wh-*um* NPIs occur in any environment that is overtly negative, regardless of the distance of the negative

element. The wh-*aavdi* NPI, on the other hand, occurs in all the other polarity licensing contexts that are non-overtly negative. This distinction is very clear. However, it will be observed that analogous to the homophony of the *any* expression in English, the wh-*um* expression is used both in PS and FC (free-choice) contexts. First of all, let us observe the distribution of wh-*um*[2] NPIs.

(1) naan *yaar-ai-um* paarka-le
I who-ACC-PRT see-NEG
I didn't see anyone.

(2) avan *yaar-ai-um* paartataaga solla-le
he who-ACC-PRT having seen say-NEG
He didn't say that he saw anyone.

(3) *naan *yaar-ai-um* paar-tt-en
I who-ACC-PRT see-PST-1sg.
*I saw anyone.

(4) *yaarum avan-ai paar-tt-aan
anyone him-ACC see-PST-3p.mas.
*Anyone saw him.

(5) *yaar-um* avan-ai paarka-le
Anyone him-ACC see-NEG
(Lit: Anyone didn't see him.) No one saw him.

As seen in the above examples, the *any* expression in Tamil is morphologically complex wherein case relations are overtly indicated when the *any*-expression (Wh-*um*) represents the direct object. Also, in all of the above contexts, the *any*-expression is licensed only in the environment of overt negation (clausemate or clause-external). In other licensing contexts it is possible to use only the wh-*aavdi* polarity sensitive (PS) expression.

(6) ni yaar-ai-*aavdi* / (*yaar-ai-um) paartay-a?

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[2] The suffixal element *-um* as introduced in the gloss (PRT) refers to a particle. This element has a variety of functions that include the 1) coordinative, 2) concessive, 3) all-inclusive and 4) inclusive uses the details of which are beyond the scope of this paper.

you anyone saw-Q

Did you see anyone?

(7) ni yaar-ai-*aavdi* / (*yaar-ai-um) paartey-naa, ennai koopidi

you anyone see-if, me (ACC) call

If you see anyone, call me.

(8) yaar-*aavdi* / (*yaar-um) ippo kooptaa-naa, enakku aacaryamaaga

anyone now call-if, I (DAT) surprise

irukkum

will be

I will be surprised if anyone calls now.

The varying uses of the *any*-expression in Tamil provides a clear distinction between overt negative contexts and non-negative licensing contexts[3]. However, this clarity is somewhat blurred by the fact that the *wh-any* expression in overt negative contexts (*wh-um*) is homophonous with the *any* expression in free-choice contexts, comparable to the situation in English[4].

As Haspelmath (1993) observes, Wh-NPIs are common crosslinguistically, probably historically derived from a type of free relative sentence adjunct. I will hypothesize that this may often be the reason why it is common to find a homophonous *any* expression across languages, one that varies between a FC and a PS reading. Observe the transition of the *any* expression from (9a) through (9c) that Haspelmath believes is diachronic:

(9)a. Niemand wil met een student spreken, *welke student je ook kiest*.

No one wants with a student talk, which student you PRT choose

'No one wants to talk to a student, whichever student you choose.'

b. Niemand wil met een student spreken, *welke student dan ook*.

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[3] Korean and Japanese NPIs function in identical ways: *amwu-to* (Korean) and *daremo* (Japanese) appear only in contexts where there is overt negation; in all other contexts *amwu-lato* and *dareka* take their place respectively.

[4] FC *any* in Tamil PS *any* in Tamil

(i) yaarum varalaam (ii) yaar-ai-um paarka-le

'Anyone can come' '(I) didn't see anyone'

No one wants talk with a student, which student PRT

'No one wants to talk with a student, no matter which student.'

c. Niemand wil spreken met *welke student dan ook*.

No one wants talk with which student PRT

'No one wants to talk with any student.'

Aside from the historical change that Haspelmath alludes to, the above sample also reflects the fact that the Wh-NPI can be used to express the free-choice use as well, as observed in the above Dutch examples (9a) and (9b). This is true of many languages including Tamil. The implications of this obscure coexistence of FC and PS *any* only goes to indicate that the distinction between these two items is never always clear-cut, no matter which language is taken under consideration. In truth, the above examples clearly point to the fact that it is a tough call, in terms of terminology, whether to refer to the *any* expression in an example such as (9c), as FC *any* or PS *any*.

However, under a conceptual view of polarity licensing, we may say that an *any* expression is assigned polarity status as long as the underlying intent of the speaker is to convey NOT P while the hearer infers the belief that NOT P as well. Consider the following examples to discern the NOT P nature of speaker-meaning:

(10)a. I don't want ANY apple, (no matter which kind of apple it is.)

b. I don't want anything *at all*. (No matter how tempting it may be.)

Even though the free-choice reading is available in sentences such as (10a), the speaker's primary intent is to convey the meaning that s/he does not want an apple (NOT P). The proposition expressed by the *any* expression in (10b) clearly marks it as a PS item too despite the parenthetical free-choice component. It must, therefore, be recognized that an *any* expression in negative contexts can often convey a 'free-choice' subsidiary import – but this does not detract from the invariable fact that the *any* expression in the above instances is the PS item because it primarily conveys NOT P.

Some languages seem to have a syntactic means of marking two varieties of PS *any* in overtly negative contexts, one of which is used to rule out the so-

called `free-choice' component. These two varieties have been catalogued as (i) Wh-NPIs and (ii) *even*-NPIs by Rullmann (1995). Among the differences between the two types (cf. Rullmann, for details), one of the most significant is that Wh-NPIs can appear in true FC contexts such as modals and generics, while *even*-NPIs may not. As already seen, the former type in Tamil is expressed by a wh-expression followed by a particle (*yaar-um*). The latter variety is expressed by the following sequence: *one N-particle (oru apple-um)*, where N stands for any nominal element. Consider the following examples from Tamil (11) and Dutch (12):

(11)a. naan *enda student-ai-um* paarkale. (*wh*-NPI)
I *which student-ACC-PRT* see-NEG
I didn't see any student.

b. naan *oru student-ai-um* paarkale. (*even*-NPI)
I *one student-ACC-PRT* see-NEG
I didn't see any student. (I didn't see even one student)

(12)a. Niemand heeft met *welke student dan ook* overleg gepleegd.
No one has with *which student PRT* consulted

b. Niemand heeft met *ook maar een student* overleg gepleegd.
No one has with *even one student* consulted
No one consulted any students.

The apparent synonymy between the two types of PS *any* (*Wh*-NPI and *even*-NPI) is belied by the fact that the Wh-NPI is appropriate in FC contexts while the *even*-NPI is not. Once again, examples from Tamil (13) and Dutch (14) are provided:

(13)a. naan *enda-book-ai-um* paDipp-en.
I *which book-ACC-PRT* can read-1p.sg
I can read *any book* (no matter what kind of book it is).

b. *naan *oru book-ai-um* paDipp-en.
I one book -ACC-PRT read-1p.sg.
I can read *any book*.

(14)a. Je mag trouwen met *wie dan ook.*
You may marry with *who-PRT*

b. *Je mag trouwen met *ook maar iemand.*
You may marry with *even some/anybody*
You may marry *anyone*.

Observe also the use of the *wh-um* expression in episodic contexts (15a) and under metalinguistic negation (16).

(15)a. enakku enda kaai-um piDikkum
I (DAT) which vegetable-PRT like
I like any vegetable.

b. *naan enda kaai-um saapadren
I which vegetable-PRT eating
*I am eating any vegetable.

(16) naan **enda** kaai-um saapada maaTen, keerai maTTum saapduven
I which vegetable-PRT eat NEG, spinach only eat
I don't eat just **any** vegetable, I eat only spinach.

This brief excursus on the nature of the *any* expression in Tamil is important to show that just like the homophony of the *any* expression in English, there are several languages that share this feature: Wh-NPIs are used in both PS and FC contexts. Wh-NPIs in overt negative contexts (that express truth-conditional negation) often produce a 'free-choice'/*no-matter-what* reading which, however, does not affect the (primarily) polarity meaning of the *any* expression available as common-ground information. However, in order to suppress the free-choice reading, some languages make use of a distinct lexical expression (*even*-NPIs) that unambiguously conveys negativity. In essence, what counts as negative for the licensing of PS *any* is the speaker-intent that amounts to NOT P under truth-conditional (as opposed to metalinguistic) negation[5]. The use of *even*-NPI signals

[5] Compare (11a) with (16) to perceive the important distinction I make between truth-conditional and metalinguistic negation.

the speaker's intent to represent NOT P as well, but its essential function is to diminish the 'free-choice' import that may often arise (as observed in the case of (10)).

(17) naan *oru book-um* paDika-le
I *one book-PRT* read-NEG
I didn't read *a single (any) book*, (# no matter which book).

To sum up, an *any* expression in a language such as Tamil is used in different ways to communicate different meanings. Under truth-conditional negation the *wh-um* expression represents the PS item, but in episodic contexts and under metalinguistic negation, it represents the FC item. The semantic difference between the *wh*-NPI expression and the *even*-NPI is subtle, yet significant. The former is used to express a relationship on a Quality / Kind scale (cf. Fauconnier 1975a,b; Israel 1994, 1995), while the latter is used to express a relationship on a Quantity scale exclusively in negative contexts. In order to explain this better, let us briefly discuss scalarity.

A scalar model consists of a set of propositions which a speaker and hearer share as background knowledge. Within a scalar model[6] then, the propositional schema in (18b) is pragmatically entailed by (18a). A sentence such as (18b), the **context proposition** (cp) (Kay 1990), may itself be overtly present in the discourse or may simply represent a default expectation or norm built into the dimensions of a scalar model. Essentially, a scalar model of any given type defines a pattern of entailments: for any proposition p (an *any* proposition) within the model, if we know that p is true, then it naturally follows that any other proposition q that is lower than p on the scale will also be true. An instance of an *any* expression in a Quality Scale is provided in the following examples. The sentence in (18) depicts FC *any* while the sentence in (19) represents PS *any*. Assume for (18) that the scale for lawyers range from the most ignorant on the low

[6] The notion of a scalar model goes back, in one form or the other, to the work of Fauconnier (1975a, b) and even farther back to Horn (1972). The notion of scalarity has been considerably refined in Kay (1990) and Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor (1988).

end to the most clever on the upper end, while for (19) a scale where music ranges from the most soothing to the most jarring.

(18)a. Any (kind of) lawyer can tell you that driving while intoxicated is a felony. =

b. Even **the most ignorant** lawyer can tell you that ... is a felony.

(19)a. I don't like any (kind of) music.

b. I don't like even **the most soothing** music.

On the other hand, an instance of a Quantity Scale is provided in the example below:

(20)a. Mary didn't drink any beer at the party. =

b. Mary didn't drink even **a single drop/can** of beer at the party.

The sentence in (20a) evokes as its cp the proposition that Mary didn't drink a minimal quantity of beer and asserts that Mary didn't drink some larger amount, say, two cans of beers.

I will not get into details regarding scalar operators, contextual dimensions and the various schemata involved in the assessment of such propositions. My description here is intended to provide a functional approximation of the notion of scalarity in general and to indicate that there may exist various types of scales that may may serve to account for grammaticality variation. Consider the following instances from Tamil:

(21)a. enakku enda kaai-um piDikkum (=14) Quality / Kind Scale
I like <u>any kind of</u> (any)vegetable.

b. enakku enda kaai-um piDikaadi
I don't like <u>any kind of</u> (any)vegetable.

(22)a. *naan *oru book-ai-um* paDipp-en (=12b) Quantity Scale
* I read <u>even a single</u> book.

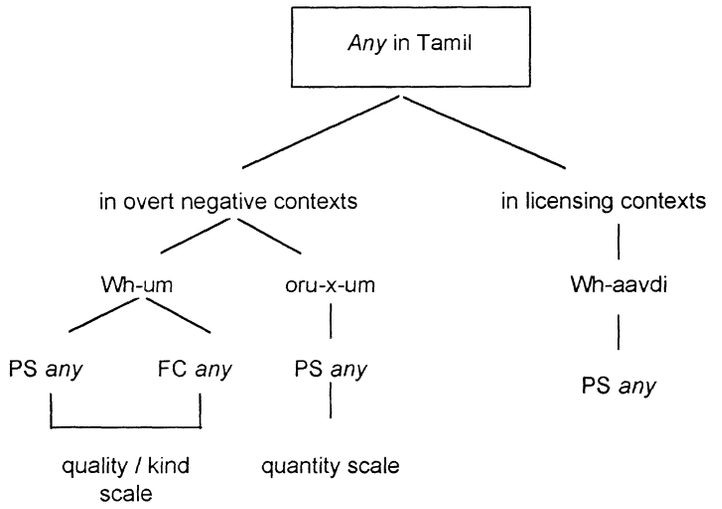
b. naan oru book-um paDikka maaTen
I don't read <u>even a single</u> (any) book.

The *any* expression which expresses a relationship on a Quality / Kind scale can be used either as PS or FC *any*. But the *any* expression that expresses a relationship on a Quantity scale is appropriate only in PS contexts.

The essence of this discussion is to show that like English, Tamil also has a homophonous *any* expression, the varying uses of which are also similar to English. The distinction between Quality and Quantity scales is used to bring out the different ways a speaker expresses negative polarity in Tamil. These scales are also useful in predicting that FC *any* is used as an expression of kinds. Figure 1 below gives a succinct picture of the various types of *any* expression and their function in Tamil.

Emphatic stress of the *wh-um any* expression under metalinguistic negation induces a FC reading just like it does in English. In English, contrastive stress of an *any* expression under truth-conditional negation results in the emphasis of NOT P. This function is achieved in Tamil by the use of the *even*-NPI (*oru x-um*). *Any* in other licensing contexts is unproblematic because of the use of a different lexical item (wh-*aavdi*).

Figure 1 ***Any* Expression in Tamil**



The preceding discussion also reaffirms the position that truth-conditional negation and metalinguistic negation are functionally different universally and it is important to recognize this feature in any analysis of polarity sensitivity since it makes it easier to delineate the two types of *any* often seen in exactly the same licensing contexts. In addition, the use of contrastive stress to tease out possible readings of an *any* expression is replaced in other languages by certain lexical strategies. These are languages that probably have a very productive lexical system. For example, while English uses contrastive ANY to tease out the FC reading in, say, a conditional, Serbo-Croatian uses the lexical item *bilo-ko* under these circumstances[7]. Drawing up an analogy like this might contribute towards the Lexical Parametrization Hypothesis (cf. Manzini & Wexler, 1987) which states that values of a parameter are associated not with particular grammars but with particular lexical items. A great benefit of this notion will be to reduce all learning of parametric values to the learning of lexical items (cf. Borer, 1984).

[7] Details appear in Ramachandran (1996a)

2.2 Implicature Inducing NPI in Tamil

Aside from the *any* expression that combines the same ambiguities and anomalies as in English, Tamil has another interesting NPI that appears to be the strictest polarity item in terms of the licensing requirement of overt negation. In fact, unlike the English *at all*, the corresponding item in Tamil cannot appear in non-negative licensing contexts such as conditionals and questions. The scalar endpoint *even / at all* is expressed by the suffix (*-ve/-e*) on the verb or noun, whichever the case may be.

(23)a. naan tuunga-ve[8] illai
I sleep-NPI NEG
I didn't sleep at all / a wink.

b. *naan tuunga-ve poren
I sleep-NPI going to
*I am going to sleep at all.

(24)a. Madras-ile inda varšam maRai-e peya-le
Madras-LOC this year rain-NPI pour-NEG
It didn't rain at all this year in Madras.

b. *Madras-ile eppodum maRai-e penjadi
Madras-LOC always rain-NPI poured
*It rained always at all in Madras.

The use of this suffix, corresponding to *at all* in English, is impossible in other licensing contexts.

(25) *naan avan-ai paarka-*ve* paarten-naa, sandošamaga irikkum
I him-ACC see-NPI see-if, happy will be
If *at all* I see him, I will be happy.

(26) *nii yaarai-aavdi paarka-*ve* paarte-aa?
you anyone see-NPI see-Q
Did you see anyone *at all*?

[8] The alternation between *-ve* and *-e* is phonologically conditioned.

The preceding clearly shows that the Tamil equivalent of *at all* cannot appear anywhere but in the vicinity of a negative element. This may also point to the fact that *-ve / -e* is one among such NPIs found across languages that are solely dependent on syntactic negation to license them. Nevertheless, this view about a prototypical instance of a "**negative**" polarity item is challenged by examples such as the following that leave many questions regarding its legitimate licenser unanswered.

(27)a. naan neti raatri tuunga-ve tuunginen
I last night sleep-NPI slept
*I *slept* (at all) last night.

b. #naan tuunga-ve tuunginen
*I *slept* (at all).

(28)a. Mary sabe-ile paaDa-ve paaDinaaL
Mary stage-LOC sing-NPI sang
*Mary *sang* (at all) on stage.

b. #Mary paDa-ve paaDinaaL
*Mary *sang* (at all).

In these instances, as we can see, there appears no overt negative element that acts as a licenser for the so-called strict NPI. In fact, this NPI seems to exist in clearly positive contexts; while its presence in non-positive contexts such as in conditionals and questions (25-26) – that may warrant a conceptual notion of negativity[9] – is prohibited. In this state of double jeopardy, one is forced to seek out other means of explaining this phenomenon while still holding on to the belief that a cognitive approach to semantics will indeed provide answers to such syntactic idiosyncracies.

The astute reader will have already wondered about the contrast between the (a) and the (b) sentences provided above in (27-28), considering that the

[9] Fine points regarding the notion of a conceptual dimension of negativity is provided in Ramachandran (1996b)

difference between the two is minimal. The (a) sentences, by virtue of supplying extra information (*neti raatri* 'last night' and *sabe-ile* 'on stage'), provide a backdrop for forming a presupposition, while the (b) sentences are a little more difficult to process without the added information. To elaborate further, in uttering (27a) the speaker alludes to the fact that 'last night' was a special case where the least likely event would be for him to sleep. The NPI suffix acts like the word *even* in English. More accurately then, (27a) reads like this: "I *even* slept last night (though I didn't think I could)". This negative implicature (indicated in parentheses) is what licenses the NPI in an apparently non-negative sentence. One argument against this view might be that the above proposal seems circular: *-ve / -e* gives rise to a negative implicature; and this negative implicature licenses *-ve / -e*. In defence of this likely objection, I propose the following assertibility condition:

(i) Speaker S may not use the suffixal NPI (*-ve/-e*) unless s/he wishes to convey to Hearer H a negative implicature (NI).

(ii) The NI is true, and mutually believed by S and H.

In fact, this constraint explains why (27b) and (28b) sound odd. The speaker of these sentences cannot use the NPI without also intending to convey a negative implicature; but for the speaker to say that "I even slept" or that "Mary even sang" without establishing any discursive context sounds strange[10]. The focus of the suffixal NPI in positive sentences in Tamil must, therefore, denote something unexpected or unlikely in the ordinary epistemological sense. Hence, (27a) that reads "I even *slept* last night" is coherent when a speaker-hearer common-ground is established that acknowledges the fact that given the nature of affairs of last night, sleeping would have been the most unlikely event, let alone sitting down

[10] In English, however, it is perfectly natural to say "I even slept" etc., without having to establish or make reference to any background knowledge. This is so because the word *even* is tied to a certain conventional implicature. In other words, the implicature originates precisely in the choice of the word *even* (cf. Karttunen & Peters (1979); Kay (1990); Lycan (1991)). In Tamil, however, the suffixal NPI does not give rise to a conventional implicature, but rather the NPI cannot be used in positive contexts unless the speaker wishes to convey NOT P. This is the reason why "I even slept" and "Mary even sang" are acceptable in English while it is not in Tamil.

with a book to read, etc. and similarly, (28a) is coherent because the speaker-hearer common-ground postulates the assumption that Mary's singing on stage is the most unlikely event, given that she is normally extremely reticent, etc.

The fact that such presuppositions affect the grammaticality of certain sentences in Tamil provides further evidence that many non-truth-conditional aspects of meaning play an important role in the description of meaning. The traditional view of semantics that certain communication strategies such as emphatic stress, metalinguistic negation, the choice of words such as *even*, etc., and many such linguistic devices are merely emotive, pragmatic, and conversational, isolates linguistic research from psychological research on conceptualization. In fact, these 'communication strategies' have a greater impact on the study of meaning since this aspect of meaning eventually impinges upon the syntactic module of grammar. Jackendoff's CS module allows for such a representation by acknowledging the fact that the non-autonomous view of semantics – one that includes both 'semantic' as well as 'pragmatic' information – is what correctly accounts for all the facts of language. Formal systems, therefore, must not separate syntax from meaning and conversely, rigid mathematical systems must not divorce non-truth-conditional aspects that affect grammaticality from the study of meaning. Langacker (1987, p.12) sums up this concern by suggesting that meaning is at the heart of the territory of the study of natural language: "Meaning is what language is all about; the analyst who ignores it to concentrate solely on matters of form severely impoverishes the natural and necessary subject matter of the discipline and ultimately distorts the character of the phenomena described".

Hence we may use this argument, with sufficient justification, to state that in order to correctly describe a phenomenon such as negative polarity, the analyst must judiciously integrate the elements of *meaning* along with the elements of *form*, viewing thereby a conceptual framework of meaning not as a problem but as part of the solution.

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