

On the affixal negation of negative polar adjectives in German

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It is usually assumed that negative roots generally may not be negated with affixal negation (Zimmer 1964), and that *un*-formation is possible only if the adjectival base is e(valuatively)-pos(itive), not if it is e-neg(ative) (Horn 1989, Cruse 1980). Contrary to these assumptions, however, corpus research shows that external negation can license the word-internal negation of (German) negative polar adjectives (NPAs, cf. *nicht unübel* 'not unbad', *nicht unkurz* 'not unshort'. Moreover, these constructions can display double negation (DN, cf. (1)) as well as negative concord (NC, cf. (2)) readings.

- (1) Die Gebrüder Grimm sind da ja auch manchmal **nicht ungrausam**, [...] ich sag nur Augen aushacken oder Hexe in Ofen (<https://www.lovelybooks.de> autor leserunde)
- (2) Ich habe es mal auf meine (**nicht unkurze**) ToDo-Liste gesetzt. (deTenTen23 via SketchEngine)

I will investigate this phenomenon in two experiments (run on PClbex, participant recruitment via Prolific). Experiment 1 is an Acceptability Judgement Task for grammaticality-rating of *nicht un-NPA* constructions. Here I focus on Experiment 2, a Forced Choice Task investigating their interpretation. Experiment 2 is split into two sub-experiments, testing adjectives that typically receive DN readings and adjectives that typically receive NC readings separately. Adjectives are sorted according to their respective readings observed in corpora. 10 NPAs are chosen for each adjective type. Participants will see a neutral context sentence followed by the critical sentence containing the NPA in either a double or a single negation construction (single factor "Negation Type" with levels DN and SN). Participants will then choose between two follow-up sentences representing a DN or NC reading, respectively. They will then be asked to provide confidence ratings on a 7-point Likert scale. To ensure that the presented follow-up choices work as intended, a pre-study will be run for each sub-experiment using the same material, but with the NPA and its antonym instead of the *nicht (un-)NPA* constructions to represent the intended readings directly. Some sample items and the expected choice proportions are given in the appendix.

References

Cruse, D. Alan. 1980. Antonyms and gradable complementaries. *Perspektiven der lexikalischen Semantik*. 14-25 • Horn, Laurence R. 1989. A natural history of negation. Reissue edition 2001. With a foreword by Laurence R. Horn. Stanford, CA: CSLI • Prolific, available at www.prolific.com • Zehr, J., & Schwarz, F. 2018. PennController for Internet Based Experiments (IBEX). <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/MD832> • Zimmer, Karl E. 1964. Affixal Negation in English and other Languages, Etc., [New York]; printed in Great Britain.

Appendix: Experimental Items and Expected Choice Proportions

Experiment 2a: DN adjectives		
Neutral context	Tom kam gerade von der Arbeit nach Hause. "Tom just came home from work."	Expectation: Proportion of Choice
Condition 1: Double Negation	Toms Alltag war nicht unanstrengend . "Toms day was not unstressful."	
Choice A (= DN reading)	Tom war etwas müde und wollte früh zu Bett gehen. "Tom was a bit tired today and wanted to go to bed early."	HIGH
Choice B (= NC reading)	Tom war noch ziemlich fit und wollte Sport machen. "Tom felt energetic and wanted to exercise."	LOW
Condition 2: Single Negation	Toms Alltag war nicht anstrengend . "Toms day was not stressful."	
Choice A	Tom war etwas müde und wollte früh zu Bett gehen. "Tom was a bit tired today and wanted to go to bed early."	VERY LOW
Choice B	Tom war noch ziemlich fit und wollte Sport machen. "Tom felt energetic and wanted to exercise."	VERY HIGH

Prestudy for Experiment 2a (Control)		
Neutral context	Tom kam gerade von der Arbeit nach Hause. "Tom just came home from work."	Expectation: Proportion of Choice
Condition 1: NPA	Toms Alltag war anstrengend . "Toms day was stressful."	
Choice A	Tom war etwas müde und wollte früh zu Bett gehen. "Tom was a bit tired today and wanted to go to bed early."	VERY HIGH
Choice B	Tom war noch ziemlich fit und wollte Sport machen. "Tom felt energetic and wanted to exercise."	VERY LOW
Condition 2: Antonym	Toms Alltag war entspannt . "Toms day was relaxed."	
Choice A	Tom war etwas müde und wollte früh zu Bett gehen. "Tom was a bit tired today and wanted to go to bed early."	VERY LOW
Choice B	Tom war noch ziemlich fit und wollte Sport machen. "Tom felt energetic and wanted to exercise."	VERY HIGH
Experiment 2b: NC Adjectives		
Neutral context	Tom hat seinen Kollegen gerade eine Frage gestellt. "Tom just asked his colleagues a question."	Expectation: Proportion of Choice
Condition 1: Double Negation	Toms Frage war nicht undumm . "Tom's question was not undumb."	
Choice A (= DN reading)	Toms Frage hat die Kollegen ziemlich irritiert. "Tom's question irritated his colleagues."	LOW
Choice B (= NC reading)	Toms Frage hat die Kollegen ziemlich beeindruckt. "Tom's question impressed his colleagues."	HIGH
Condition 2: Single Negation	Toms Frage war nicht dumm . "Tom's question was not dumb."	
Choice A	Toms Frage hat die Kollegen ziemlich irritiert. "Tom's question irritated his colleagues."	VERY LOW
Choice B	Toms Frage hat die Kollegen ziemlich beeindruckt. "Tom's question impressed his colleagues."	VERY HIGH
Prestudy for Experiment 2b (Control)		
Neutral context	Tom hat seinen Kollegen gerade eine Frage gestellt. "Tom just asked his colleagues a question."	Expectation: Proportion of Choice
Condition 1: NPA	Toms Frage war dumm . "Tom's question was not dumb."	
Choice A	Toms Frage hat die Kollegen ziemlich irritiert. "Tom's question irritated his colleagues."	VERY HIGH
Choice B	Toms Frage hat die Kollegen ziemlich beeindruckt. "Tom's question impressed his colleagues."	VERY LOW
Condition 2: Antonym	Toms Frage war klug . "Tom's question was clever."	
Choice A	Toms Frage hat die Kollegen ziemlich irritiert. "Tom's question irritated his colleagues."	VERY LOW
Choice B	Toms Frage hat die Kollegen ziemlich beeindruckt. "Tom's question impressed his colleagues."	VERY HIGH