

snippets

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1.

Katrin Axel-Tober, Patrick Grosz – *University of Tübingen*

Even strong evaluatives can occur under negation

katrin.axel-tober@uni-tuebingen.de, patrick.grosz@uni-tuebingen.de doi:10.7358/snip-2013-028-axel

Evaluative speaker-oriented adverbs (*unfortunately*, *fortunately*, *luckily*) are ungrammatical in contexts such as the scope of negation ((1b)) and conditional antecedents ((1c)). It is an ongoing debate whether such constraints are syntactic (cf. Haegeman 2010) or semantic (cf. Ernst 2007, 2009) in nature.

- (1) a. They **fortunately** have not withdrawn their funds.
b. * They have not **fortunately** withdrawn their funds.
c. * If they **luckily** arrived on time, we will be saved.
(Ernst 2007:1027)

Ernst (2007, 2009) observes that negated conditional antecedents, (2), allow for a subset of speaker-oriented adverbs, such as *mysteriously* in (2a). He explains this observation by analyzing evaluatives as Positive Polarity Items (PPIs). These can be ‘indirectly licensed’ if they modify a proposition that is implied to be true (here: ‘they decided to resign’). However, Ernst introduces a distinction between ‘weak evaluatives’ (such as *mysteriously*) and ‘strong evaluatives’, such as *fortunately*, *unfortunately* and *luckily*. He claims that the latter cannot occur in negated conditional antecedents, illustrated in (2b) (his judgment). He then develops a system that derives this distinction.

- (2) a. If they hadn’t **mysteriously** decided to resign, things would have been fine.
b. * If they hadn’t **fortunately** decided to resign, things would have been fine.
Ernst (2007:1029)

Crucially, Ernst’s empirical generalizations do not seem correct. ‘Strong evaluative’ adverbs can occur in negated conditionals quite freely, (3)-(4) being two representative examples.

- (3) I would have lost data if I hadn’t **fortunately** kept a copy of the data on my MacBook.
(‘Automated backups to servers only when I’m in the office’, blog post, 4/1/2010, on *Geekery*)
- (4) That being said, if Ledger hadn’t **unfortunately** passed away prior to the film’s release, no one would be talking about an Oscar nomination.
(‘The Dark Knight: DVD Talk Review of the Theatrical’, blog post, 7/9/2008, on *DVD Talk*)

On the one hand, such data support and strengthen Ernst’s semantic analysis of evaluative adverbs as PPIs that can be indirectly licensed. On the other hand, they clearly undermine the proposed distinction between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ evaluatives.

What we observe from the constructed examples in (5) is that the distribution of ‘strong evaluatives’ in negated conditionals is mainly constrained by pragmatic inferences: Negated antecedents that contain a positive adverb (*fortunately/luckily*)

correlate with negatively evaluated consequents (*things would have been worse* in (5a)). Contrastively, negated conditional antecedents that contain a negative adverb (*unfortunately/sadly*) correlate with positively evaluated consequents (*things would have been fine* in (5b)). This is due to conflicting entailments in the unacceptable cases. For instance, in (5a), *unfortunately* would trigger the entailment that it was unfortunate that they decided to resign. This conflicts with the entailment that things would have been worse if they had not decided to resign. The resulting implicature would be that it is unfortunate that things are not worse, which is clearly deviant. Notably, such a conflict does not always arise, e.g. it does not arise in (4); this follows from the pragmatic / extra-linguistic nature of the perceived conflict.

- (5) a. If they hadn't {**fortunately/#unfortunately**} decided to resign, things would have been **worse**.
 ⇒ Implicature: It is **fortunate/#unfortunate** that things are not **worse**.
 b. If they hadn't {**unfortunately/#fortunately**} decided to resign, things would have been **fine**.
 ⇒ Implicature: It is **unfortunate/#fortunate** that things are not **fine**.

References

- Ernst, T. (2007) "On the role of semantics in a theory of adverb syntax." *Lingua* 117, 1008-1033.
 Ernst, T. (2009) "Speaker-oriented adverbs." *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 27, 497-544.
 Haegeman, L. (2010) "The internal syntax of adverbial clauses." *Lingua* 120, 628-648.

Appendix: Additional data from corpora

unfortunately

His own good sense might have checked him, if Aunt Kipp hadn't **unfortunately** recovered her voice at this crisis [...]

(Louisa M. Alcott. 1868. *Kitty's Class Day And Other Stories*.)

I would have rated this 3 stars if I had not **unfortunately** ordered the calamari [...]

(online review on *Yelp*, September 12, 2010)

fortunately

I did so, and was glad of the chance, for I was tired, and was, moreover, near the first crossing of Roanoke, which I would have been compelled to wade, cold as the water was, if I had not **fortunately** met this good man.

(David Crockett. 1834. *Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*.)

This event could have had a very bad ending if we had not **fortunately** been in the right place at the right time.

(‘Portsmouth Association of Yacht Security (PAYS)’, blog post, February 20, 2012, on *Easy Go Adventures*)

luckily

It's my belief you just slipped in when poor old Mrs. Winter was out of the way for a minute, and if I hadn't **luckily** caught you in the very act you would have been off with your pockets crammed—

(S.E. Cartwright. 1899. *The Eagle's Nest*.)

if my sister had not **luckily** brought some concealer and foundation, I would have had raccoon eyes for the ceremony

(online review on *Yelp*, June 10, 2012)

Parallel corpus data can be found for the German counterparts "leider" (sadly), "glücklicherweise" (luckily/fortunately) and "unglücklicherweise" (unfortunately).