4.

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Negative islands in comparatives

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It has been known at least since Lees 1961 that the *than*-clause of the comparative construction must not contain downward entailing operators such as negation:

(1) a. Mary read more books than Bill read.
      b. *Mary read more books than Bill didn't read.

Rullmann 1995 and von Stechow 1985 attribute the INNER ISLAND ('II') violation in (1b) (Ross 1980) to the assumption that the semantic composition rules do not yield a value for the *than*-clause. On their account, the *than*-clause denotes a set of degrees ((2a)) which is maximized. If negation intervenes, the set lacks a supremum, since it contains all degrees except the one which corresponds to the number of books Bill read:

(2) a. …[[than Bill read]] $= \max(\ \{d|\text{Bill read d-many books}\}\ )$
     b. …[[than Bill didn't read]] $= \max(\ \{d|\text{Bill didn't read d-many books}\}\ )$
                                      $= \max(\ N^0\backslash\{d|\text{Bill read d-many books}\}\ )$

There is however a group of systematic exceptions to the negative island prohibition, indicating that the maximality account undergenerates. More specifically, II-violations are alleviated if the *than*-clause matches the matrix clause:

(3) Mary read more books than she didn't read.

Intuitively, what appears to discriminate the PARALLEL COMPARATIVE in (3) from (1b) is the fact that the set denoted by the *than*-clause in (3) induces a pragmatic bi-partition on the domain of books (those books Mary read, and those she didn't read). The cardinality of these two sets can now be compared in a meaningful way.

Not all parallel comparatives license the obviation of II-effects. To begin with, alleviation of II-violations is not attested in parallel predicative comparatives ((4)), or in parallel attributive comparatives ((5)):

(4) *Mary is taller than she isn't.

(5) *Mary read a longer book/longer books than she didn't read.

Moreover, II-violations persist in parallel amount comparatives with mass terms:

(6) *Mary read more poetry than she didn't read.

It seems as if a bi-partition can be established only if the comparison relation operates on degrees that keep track of cardinality (as in *d-many books*), but not if these degrees measure

properties *(d-tall* in (4) and *d-long books* in (5)) or amounts *(d-much poetry* in (6)), i.e. degrees which cannot be (pragmatically) mapped to the individual count domain.

Finally, *less than*-comparatives equally fail to license exemptions to negative islands:

(7)   *Mary read fewer books than she didn't read.

References
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