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I. Topic
High Degree Readings of Adjectives in Finite Result-Clause Constructions with Negative Polarity Minimizers

II. Background
Empirical investigation on **emphatic negative polarity items**, especially **negative polarity minimizers**, that occur in **degree finite result-clause constructions** -- work-in-progress.
Languages: Romanian, English, German.
Initial analysis of Romanian data: January-March 2019 -- DAAD research grant at the Institut für England- und Amerikastudien (IEAS), Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main.

Terminology & examples

Finite result clause constructions (RCXs)

Finite result clause constructions RCXs:
primary predication (in main clause)
+ secondary predication (in finite *result clause* RCl):
atât de deasă ADJ [RCl: de   *nu se vede om cu om*]
so   thick ADJ [RCl: (that) *you can't see your hand in front of your face*]

(1)   Dimineața e o ceață [**RCX: atât de deasă, de nu se vede om cu om**.]
lit.: In the morning there is a fog so thick that you can't see the closest person.
Intended: 'In the morning, the fog is [**RCX: so thick you can't see your hand in front of your face**'.]

High degree RCXs with *emphatic negative polarity items* (E-NPIs)

(3)   Dimineața e o ceață [atât de deasă, de **#(nu)** se vede om cu om].
lit.: In the morning there is a fog so thick that you can't see the closest person.
Intended: 'In the morning, the fog is [so thick you ca**n't** see your hand in front of your face].'

(4)   Ion e [așa de prost de **#(nu)** știe cum îl cheamă (cu buletinul în mână)].
lit.: Ion is so stupid that he does not know his own name (with the ID in hand).
Intended: 'Ion is [so stupid he ca**n't** see a hole in a ladder].'

High degree RCXs

RCXs of the type **ADJ + finite RCl** can receive a *high degree* interpretation:

(2)   ceață [RCX: atât de deasă.ADJ
fog   [RCX: so   thick.ADJ
[RCl: de   *nu se vede om cu om*]]
[RCl: that *you can't see your hand in front of your face*]]
⇒ ceață **extrem de deasă/extremely thick** fog

E-NPIs

Mostly represented by *minimizer expressions* – typically denoting minimal elements on a contextually salient scale:

(5)   a. se vede om cu om/ see one's hand in front of one's face
– the minimum range of visibility
b. știe cum îl cheamă / see a hole in a ladder
– the minimum manifestation of one's knowledge / of one's sensitivity to details

Objectives

➢   **Find corresponding expressions** used in degree finite result-clause constructions, in Romanian, English, German

RO	EN	GER
a nu se vedea om cu om	(can)not see (one's) hand in front of (one's) face	die Hand nicht vor (den) Augen sehen (können)
a nu-și (putea) lua ochii de la cineva/ceva	(can)not take (one's) eyes off (of) sb/sth	den Blick nicht abwenden (können) von jdm./etw.
a nu-și (putea) crede ochilor	(can)not believe (one's) eyes	seinen Augen nicht trauen (können)

(6) a. E o ceață atât de deasă, de **nu se vede om cu om.** (RO)
   b. The fog is so thick (that) you **can't see your hand in front of your face**. (EN)
      (https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/can%27t+see+hand+in+front+of+face)
   c. Der Nebel ist so dicht, dass man **die Hand nicht vor den Augen sehen kann.** (GER)
      (www.redensarten-index.de)
      extremely thick
(7) a. Era atât de atrăgător, de **nu-mi puteam lua ochii de la el.** (RO)
   b. He was so handsome (that) **I couldn't take my eyes off him.** (EN)
      (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/not-take-your-eyes-off-sb-sth)
   c. Er war so attraktiv, dass **ich meinen Blick nicht von ihm abwenden konnte.** (GER)
      extremely handsome
(8) a. Locul ăla era așa de mizerabil, de **nu-mi puteam crede ochilor.** (RO)
   b. That place was so dirty (that) **I couldn't believe my eyes.** (EN)
      (https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/(one)+can+hardly+believe+(one%27s)+eyes)
   c. Dieser Ort war so schmutzig, dass **ich meinen Augen nicht trauen konnte.** (GER)
      extremely dirty

➢ **Classify** English & German E-NPIs according to a number of tests that we have already applied to Romanian E-NPIs; this resulted in three classes in Romanian:

- E-NPI1: *a (nu) vedea la un pas* 'not see within a step' (lit.: not to see a step ahead) (id.: 'there is no visibility at all')
- E-NPI2: *a (nu) se vedea om cu om* 'not REFL see person with person' (lit.: not to see the person in one's immediate range of sight) (id.: 'there is no visibility at all')
- E-NPI3: *a (nu) [te/vă] vedea* 'not CL.ACC.2SG/PL I.see' (lit.: not to see sb.)

- Type 1: NPIs that are only occasionally used in result clauses and act as intensifiers; there is also a result interpretation:
  E-NPI1: *(de) nu se vede la un pas*
- Type 2: NPIs that require a result relation, being bound to the result construction; they encode a high degree reading, while also keeping the notion of result:
  E-NPI2: *de nu se vede om cu om*
- Type 3: NPIs that express nothing but intensification, being lexicalized into high-degree modifiers:
  E-NPI3: *de nu [te/vă] văd*

➢ **Test experimentally** whether there is an interaction between a complete exhaustification -- i.e., endorsing the strongest alternative within the set of alternatives contributed by the E-NPI, which would reflect the speakers' tendency of applying **pragmatic strengthening[1]** -- and the processing of upper bound high degree readings of the primary predicates:
  • **Experiment A** will test the hypothesis that there is an interaction between **(i)** speakers' decision whether to apply pragmatic strengthening in the proposition in the RCl and **(ii)** the endorsement of the strongest scale-mate, representing the degree of the adjective in the matrix -- that is, whether in the constructions where the adjective and the negated minimizer are represented in a cause-result relation in discourse, the interpretation of the degree of the adjective -- as 'extreme/high degree' vs. 'relatively high degree '-- is correlated to whether the negated minimizer expression in the RCl is associated by the subjects to 'the strongest possible claim' (i.e., to an absolute endpoint on a contextually salient scale), or to 'strong, but not strongest' claims.
  • **Experiment B** will test if, for an individual minimizer NPI, there are specific degree RCXs -- within the set of its admitted collocations with degree adjectives and nouns modified by the respective adjectives -- where speakers consistently (i.e., significantly) expect the strongest claim possible while 'clearly excluding' less strong claims.
  Aims: offer a deeper understanding of the relationship between the different inferences involved in the processing of high degree vs. relatively high degree readings of adjectives; potentially provide new insights on the scalar analyses of negative polarity.

III. Analysis

Scalar implicatures play a role in deriving the **intensity readings** of adjectives that occur as primary predicates in finite RCXs, where the secondary predication in the RCl is represented by an E-NPI.

NOTE: **E-NPI = Minimizer NPI (MIN)**

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[1] By *strengthening*, we understand here *the phenomenon by which an utterance receives a stronger interpretation than its semantic meaning.*

Research question: Is there is an interaction between endorsing the strongest alternative within the set of alternatives contributed by the E-NPI and the processing of upper bound high degree readings of the primary predicates of the RCXs?

Two **scalar inferences** concur in deriving the intensity readings of an RCX:

➢ **Pragmatic Strengthening (PS)** -- responsible for the interpretation of the negated MIN in the **RCl**;

(6) The fog is so thick [RCl: (that) you **can't see your hand in front of your face**].

[NOT+ the speaker's subjectively defined low degree on a visibility scale (*see your hand in front of your face)*]
→ *one can see* **absolutely** *nothing at all* **[+PS]** (**Scenario 1**) / *one can see* **almost** *nothing at all* **[- PS]** (**Scenario 2**)

➢ **Indirect Scalar Implicature (ISI)** -- responsible for the high degree reading of the adjective in the **matrix**.

Hypothesis (H):
Attributing a high degree vs**.** relatively high degree reading to the adjectives occurring as primary predicates in finite RCXs depends on whether the Speakers apply **PS** when interpreting the negated MIN in the RCl.

I. The E-NPI gives rise to a set of alternatives (here, *ranges of visibility*); when the E-NPI is used in an RCl, the latter makes an emphatic statement with respect to the alternatives provided by the E-NPI:

(6') The fog is so thick [RCl: (that) you **can't see your hand in front of your face/an inch ahead/within a step/two steps ahead/ within half a meter/ two meters ahead**, etc.].

II. [RCl: (that) you **can't see your hand in front of your face**].

<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Apply PS:** *one can see* **absolutely** *nothing at all & there is an* **extremely/very low** *degree of visibility*; the negated minimizer in the RCl is perceived as **complete exhaustification** (-- i.e., contributing the strongest claim within the set of alternatives).
• the negated minimizer is correlated by the Speaker with the **strongest, most emphatic possible claim** within the set of alternatives contributed by the E-NPI → absolute endpoint on a contextually-salient scale → endorsing the strongest endpoint-denoting scalemate
e.g. on the visibility scale, endorsing the utmost low point: **there is an extremely /very low degree of visibility.**

Assumption: what is perceived as *the most emphatic* statement largely depends on a subjectively-defined threshold varying with the speaker.

e.g.: the RCX *fog so thick you can't see within half a meter* indicates a **less low visibility** in comparison to the alternatives formulated in (6') on its purely semantic meaning; however, for some speakers, it could still imply that 'there is absolutely no visibility at all' -- i.e., to make the *strongest claim.*

Possible explanation: the utterance in the RCX is attributed a mere emphasis purpose in the communication process, then offering no relevant semantic information on the actual distance where visibility is possible.

<u>Scenario 2:</u> **Not apply PS:** *one can see* **almost** *nothing at all & there is a* **quite/pretty low** *degree of visibility;* the negated minimizer in the RCl is perceived as **non-complete exhaustification** (-- i.e., making a relatively strong claim.).
• the negated minimizer is correlated by the Speaker with a **strong**, but not the **strongest claim** within the set of alternatives contributed by the E-NPI → close to the contextually-salient scalar endpoint
e.g. on the visibility scale, endorsing a strong scalemate, but not the lowest bound: **there is a quite/pretty low degree of visibility.**

III. [RCX: fog so thick [RCl: (that) you **can't see your hand in front of your face**]].
Apply ISI for the interpretation of the entire RCX

e.g.: if the fog is so thick that there is an extremely low degree of visibility → there must be an extremely thick fog.

According to H1:

- **If S1 (apply PS)** → the primary predicate in the matrix receives a high degree reading:
  the fog is extremely/very thick
- **If S2 (not apply PS)** → the primary predicate in the matrix receives a relatively-high degree reading:
  the fog is quite/pretty thick

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