

The ample negative construction in English

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Today

- 1 Properties of the Ample Negative Construction
- 2 Theoretical analyses

The ANC

- The phenomenon, which we dub the Ample Negative Construction (ANC) after Lawler (1974)

- (1) A: Does it matter? B: **Not to me, it doesn't**, not really.
- (2) A: Do you know the secret to happiness, commander? B: **Not yours, I don't**.
- (3) A: You can't leave. We need you. B: **Not when I'm like this, you don't**.

Question for today

- What is the syntax and semantics of the ANC?
- We propose two ellipsis-based analyses

Basic properties of the ANC (Lawler 1974, Michaelis 2025)

- A negated XP followed by a clause hosting negated Verb Phrase ellipsis (VPE)
- The XP can be expressed by various categories (e.g. NP, PP, AdvP, VP or a clause)
- The XP, or part of it, is focused
- VPE is mandatory in the second clause
- No sentence boundary between XP and following clause
- A 'syntactic amalgam': Negative fragment + negated VPE (Michaelis 2025)

Distribution of the ANC (based on the COCA)

- The two ellipses, XP and VPE, depend on an antecedent in preceding context
- The XP within Not XP takes implicit (4) or overt correlates (5)

(4) A: Does it matter? B: Not **to me**, it doesn't, not really.

(5) A: Do you know **the secret to happiness**, commander? B: Not **yours**, I don't.

- 96 out of 125 correlates (76.8%) are implicit (or sprouted) and 24 (19.2%) are arguments

The ANC's Auxiliary Choice VPE

- A QUD derived from the antecedent makes $p \vee \neg p$ salient
- The VPE portion picks out $\neg p$ (subject stays the same across antecedent and VPE-hosting clause and auxiliary is focused, see Miller & Pullum 2013)
- The VPE part denies the general proposition and the Not XP part its particular instance

The ANC's fragments

- Look like the type of negated fragments that also picks out $\neg p$ from the set of salient $p \vee \neg p$ alternatives and can take sprouted correlates (6) (indications that fragments are heads)
- Neither the ANC nor these fragments can be embedded

(6) A: Does that sound crazy? B: Not to me. (Kim 2024)

- The ANC's VPE part can have a disambiguating function (7)

(7) A: But isn't it funny how people tell you fast food is always hiring?
B: Not for me, they aren't.

The ANC's fragments are head daughters

- In being nonembeddable, the ANC aligns with several kinds of clausal ellipsis, i.e. negated fragments, interrogative fragments (8), reprise fragments (9), reprise sluices (10) & exclamative sluices (11)

(8) A: Who left? B: Harvey?

(9) A: Cucurella left. B: Cucurella?

(10) A: Cucurella left. B: Who?

(11) What a waste of time!

Cases of multiple negation in English

- English has 'resumptive' (or 'presumptive') negation, i.e. separate propositions are denied, with one either strengthening or weakening the other (Jespersen 1917, Dowty 2008, Horn 2009)
- But depending on the analysis, a negative-concord-style approach may be required

(12) Nothing can bring your daughter back, not even talking to my father.

(13) That isn't really legal, I don't believe. (Dowty 2008)

Ingredients of our analysis: Fragments

- Fragments are nonsentential utterances that can take overt or implicit correlates (Ginzburg & Sag 2000)
- Negation in fragments: the negator is stored and can be retrieved at various points in the structure for either constituent negation or sentential negation (Ginzburg & Sag 2000, De Swart & Sag 2002, Kim 2024)

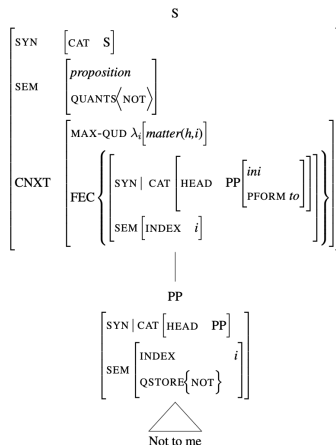
Fragments as nonsentential utterances

- Fragments are licensed by the Head-Fragment construction (e.g. Ginzburg & Sag 2000, Sag & Nykiel 2011, Abeillé & Kim 2022, Nykiel & Kim 2022)
- A fragment's semantics is a proposition whose content is supplied by the context with two attributes: a MAX-QUD and Focus-Establishing Constituent (FEC)

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{hd-frag-cx} \\ \text{SYN} \quad \text{S} \\ \text{SEM} \quad \text{E} \\ \text{CNXT} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{FEC} \quad \left\{ \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SYN} \mid \text{CAT} \mid \text{VAL} \quad \boxed{1} \\ \text{SEM} \quad [\text{INDEX} \quad \boxed{2}] \end{array} \right] \right\} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SYN} \mid \text{CAT} \mid \text{VAL} \quad \boxed{1} \\ \text{SEM} \quad [\text{INDEX} \quad \boxed{2}] \end{array} \right]$$

Fragments and negation

(14) A: Does it matter? B: Not to me.



Ingredients of our analysis: VPE

- An auxiliary lexeme can map onto an 'auxiliary vpe word' with an empty COPMS list (Ginzburg & Miller 2018, Kim & Runner 2022)
- The VPE-cx has its head daughter realized as an aux-vpe-wd

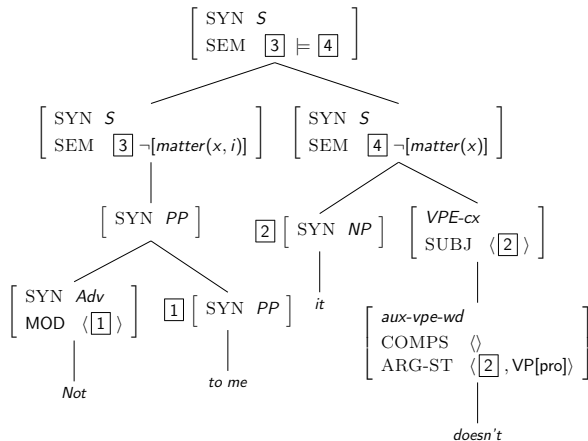
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{aux-lxm} \\ \text{ARG-ST } \langle \boxed{1}\text{XP}, \boxed{2}\text{YP} \rangle \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{aux-vpe-wd} \\ \text{VAL} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SUBJ } \langle \boxed{1}\text{XP} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS } \langle \rangle \end{array} \right] \\ \text{ARG-ST } \langle \boxed{1}\text{XP}, \boxed{2}\text{YP} \rangle \end{array} \right]$$

The ANC construction

- The difference from the Head-Fragment construction is that we have a mandatory adjunct (this has a precedent in *me too* fragments, see Abeillé & Kim 2022)
- The relation between the propositions expressed by the head daughter and the adjunct sister is upward entailment

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{anc-cx} \\ \text{SYN} \quad \text{S} \\ \text{SEM} \quad \text{E} \\ \text{CNXT} \quad \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{FEC} \quad \left\{ \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SYN} \mid \text{CAT} \mid \text{VAL} \quad [1] \\ \text{SEM} \quad [\text{INDEX} \quad [2]] \end{array} \right] \right\} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \Rightarrow [3] \mathbf{H} \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{neg-hd-frag-cx} \\ \text{SYN} \mid \text{CAT} \mid \text{VAL} \quad [1] \\ \text{SEM} \quad [\text{INDEX} \quad [2]] \end{array} \right], \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{aux-choice-vpe-cx} \\ \text{SYN} \mid \text{CAT} \mid \text{MOD} [3] \end{array} \right]$$

Fragment-as-head-daughter analysis



The upward entailment relation

- The proposition negated by the fragment is that it matters to the speaker, contrasting the speaker with other individuals
- The proposition expressed by the adjunct strengthens the contrast (i.e. It doesn't matter to this specific person but it could well matter to others)

(15) A: Does it matter?
B: Not to me, it doesn't.

Another theoretical possibility

- The ANC appears to be partially misaligned with negative fragments, which favor overt correlates over implicit ones (Kim 2024)
- But this could be a consequence of Kim's (2024) dataset including negative fragments with all MAX-QUDs (polar and wh-questions (16))

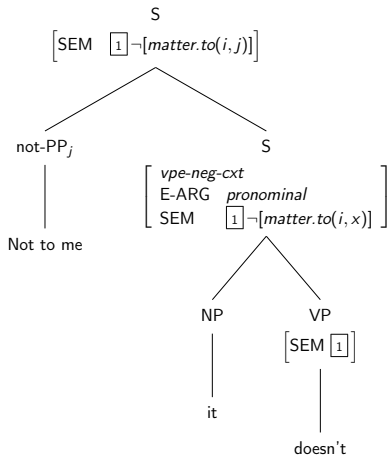
(16) A: Who could do such a thing?
B: Not Ella.

Another theoretical possibility

- The not-XP is a semantic filler while the VPE-S is the head
- One logical negation reading, possibly requiring a negative-concord-style analysis

$$S \left[\begin{array}{l} anc-cxt \\ SEM \neg P(i) \end{array} \right] \rightarrow not-XP_i, HS \left[\begin{array}{l} vpe-neg-cxt \\ E-ARG \textit{ pronominal} \\ SEM \neg P(x) \end{array} \right]$$

Another theoretical possibility



- We based our analyses on independently motivated HPSG analyses of fragments and VPE
- Our aim was to capture the nonembeddability facts, as well as the availability of both overt and implicit correlates for the ANC, just like they are for other instances of clausal ellipsis

Thank you!

'A constructionist approach to ellipsis' in progress for Cambridge Elements in Construction Grammar by Joanna Nykiel, Gabriela Bilbiie, Jong-Bok Kim & Anne Abeillé