Weird polarity indefinites in French[*]

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1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the distribution and interpretation of a special class of four morphologically distinct polarity-like indefinites in French: *n'importe qui, quiconque, qui que ce soit, quelque N que ce soit*.[1] French is different in that respect from English which possesses only one such indefinite, *any*. First, it will be shown that *quelque N que ce soit* is a typical Free Choice Item, anti-licensed by episodicity. Second, that *qui que ce soit* is an anti-modal Polarity Item. Third, it is argued that the indefinites *n'importe qui* and *quiconque* have diverse licensing conditions depending on whether they are adjectives or pronouns. Finally, I show how the special distributional properties of the French indefinites have consequences for the general classification of polarity items and free choice items crosslinguistically.

The discussion is organized as follows. In Section 2, the differences between English and French polarity indefinites are presented. In Section 3, I review the general properties of polarity and free choice items. In Section 4, I propose a new classification of the French polarity-like indefinites based on their distributional properties. In Section 5, I analyze these items based on the classification of Section 4. The impact of these results on the general classes of polarity and free choice items are given in the final section.

2. The general problem

Consider a language like English which possesses the indefinite *any* and employs it in the cases (1) and (2) but not in (3):

(1) Mary didn't talk to anybody.

(2) You can talk to anybody!

(3) *You saw anybody.

In the first sentence, *anybody* seems to constitute an existential quantifier, a likely paraphrase of (1) being *there isn't an x, such that x is a person and Mary talked to x.*

In the second sentence (2), *anybody* seems to be interpreted as a universal quantifier: *every person is such that you can talk to x.* In its first use (1), *anybody* is characterized as Negative Polarity Item (NPI).[2] In its second use, *anybody* is characterized as Free Choice Item (FCI) (see Dayal (1998) *inter alia* for a comparative analysis of both).[3] If we compare these two uses with (3), it becomes obvious that not all contexts license *anybody*.[4] In general, that kind of preference or allergy that some items, like *anybody*, have for certain types of contexts is called polarity and these items are consequently called polarity items (PIs).

For instance, *anybody* is allergic to contexts of type (3) called by Giannakidou (1997, 2001) episodic assertive. In general, sentences like the ones in (1) and (3) with verbs in the past and with perfective aspect describe a unique event and are episodic (4). Based on Greek, a language with morphologically distinct PIs and FCIs, the linguist claims that FCIs are anti-licensed in all kinds of episodic contexts, either negative (1) or assertive (3), and that PIs are licensed in episodic negative ones. This will become clearer in the next section where the morphological paradigm of Greek NPIs and FCIs is given.

(4) $\exists!e\ \varphi(e)$

Consider now a language like French, which possesses four morphologically different polarity-like indefinites and employs them in the three cases above, repeated below. The results are presented schematically in Table 1.

(1′) *Jean n' a   pas parlé   avec*
      John not has not spoken with
      n' importe qui /qui que ce   soit/
      no matter who/who SUB this SUB.be
      **quelque ami   que ce soit   /quiconque*
      some   friend SUB this SUB.be/whoever
      'John didn't talk to anybody.'

(2′) *Jean peut parler avec*
      John can talk   with
      n importe qui /*qui que ce   soit/
      no matter who/who SUB this SUB.be
      quelque ami   que ce soit   /quiconque
      some   friend SUB this SUB.be/whoever
      'John can talk to anybody.'

(3′) *Jean a   parlé   avec*
      John has spoken with
      n' importe qui /*qui que ce   soit/
      no matter who/who SUB this SUB.be
      **quelque ami   que   ce soit/quiconque*
      some   friend SUB.this SUB be /whoever
      '*John talked to anybody.'

Table 1. Distribution of French *qu-* indefinites in episodic negative, modal and episodic assertive contexts

Contexts	N'importe qu-	Qu- que ce soit	Quelque N que ce soit	Qu-conque
Episodic negation	OK	OK	*	OK
Modality	OK	*	OK	OK
Episodic assertion	OK	*	*	OK

These indefinites have received various characterizations. According to Fauconnier (1977), Muller (1991), Tovena, Déprez and Jayez (2002) and Larrivée (2002) *qu-que ce soit* is an NPI. *N'importe qu-* is a PI following Muller (1991) and Fauconnier (1977). According to Tovena, Déprez and Jayez (2002) and Tovena and Jayez (2001) it is an FCI being anti-episodic. *Qu-conque* has been characterized as FCI (Tovena, Déprez and Jayez (2002)) but only in the form *un N quelconque* (*a N anyone*). To my knowledge, *quelque N que ce soit* hasn't yet been analyzed.

These accounts are representative of the unpredicted and diverse properties of the French polarity-like indefinites that will be described in the following sections. My main aim is to reconsider in detail their licensing properties reviewing the contexts of their appearance. In view of the special character of these indefinites, it will be shown that the general classes of PIs and FCIs are far from being homogeneous. After a brief overview on the literature of PIs and FCIs given in the following section, a different analysis of both items and contexts is considered indispensable.

3.   The "natural history" of polarity items

The literature on PIs is extensive and covers this phenomenon crosslinguistically (Haspelmath (1993, 1997)). Wouden (1996) makes a thorough overview of the general class of PIs. Bosque (1996) and Quer (1998, 1999) give a detailed analysis of this phenomenon for Spanish and Catalan, Rullmann (1996) for Dutch, Vikner (1999) for Danish, Saebø (2001) for Norwegian and Swedish, Dayal (1998) for Hindi, Lee (1997) for Korean, Giannakidou (1997, 1998, 1999, 2001) for Greek, Gaatone (1971), Larrivée (2002), Tovena and Jayez (1999a.b., 2000, 2001), and Tovena, Déprez and Jayez (2002) for French.

The studies on the licensing contexts of PIs are various. According to Klima (1964) "a negative polarity item is grammatical in a sentence S if and only if it is in construction with a negative operator". Consequently, if a sentence containing *any* is well formed, then there is some expression in this sentence which corresponds to an abstract semantic property *neg* and *any* is c-commanded by this expression.

Baker (1970) claims that NPIs are licensed either in negative or in affirmative sentences which entail negative ones. In (5), *any friends* is licensed via the negative entailment *I expected that you have no friends.*

(5)   I am surprised that you have any friends.

Ladusaw (1979) proposes that NPIs are acceptable only if they are found in the scope of downward entailing (DE) functions which have the following semantic form: $X \subseteq Y \rightarrow f(Y) \subseteq f(X)$ (6). Linebarger (1981, 1987, 1991) has been the first to refute this claim. Zwarts (1995) and Giannakidou (1997) adopt this hypothesis. They claim that PIs are licensed in the scope of nonveridical operators, which presuppose the nonveridical character of a sentence *p*.[5] Negation is a typical instance of nonveridical operator as (7) shows:

(6)   No student likes music.
{Greek music} $\subseteq$ {music}
= No student likes Greek music.

(7)   Mary didn't talk to anybody $\nrightarrow$ Mary talked to somebody (cf. ex. (1))

As shown in the previous section, *any* is also sensitive to another type of context, called episodicity. In its FCI use, it is anti-licensed by any form of episodic contexts. As English possesses a unique indefinite, *any*, as PI and as FCI, the limits between these two uses are not clear at all. The morphological distinction between PIs *kanena* and FCIs *opjosdhipote* in Greek is in this respect rather helpful (Giannakidou 1997, 2001):

(8)   *O   Dimitris dhen milisse se *opjondhipote/kanena*
the Dimitris not   spoke to FC-anybody /PI-anybody
'Dimitris didn't talk to (*FC-anybody)/PI-anybody.'

(9)   *Idhe o   Pandelis kanena   /*opjondhipote?*
saw the Pandelis PI-anybody/FCI-anybody
'Did Pandelis see PI-anybody/(*FC-anybody)?'

(10) *O   Markos efije xoris   na   dhi kanena   /*opjondhipote.*
the Markos left without SUB.PART see PI-anybody/FCI-anybody
'Marcos left without seeing PI-anybody/(*FC-anybody).'

(11) *I   Frosso milisse se *kanena   /*opjondhipote*
the Frosso spoke to PI-anybody/FC-anybody
'Frosso talked to PI-anybody/(*FC-anybody).'

The Greek PI *kanena* is licensed in episodic negation (8), episodic question (9), *without* clauses with an episodic antecedent (10) but not in episodic assertions (11). The Greek FCI is anti-licensed in all kinds of episodicity (8, 9, 10, 11). The clear morphological distinction between PIs and FCIs in Greek will be shown very helpful for the analysis of the distributional properties of the French polarity-like *qu*-indefinites presented in the next section.

4.   Weird *qu-* indefinites

Comparing the data above with the data (1′)–(3′), it becomes clear that French PIs and FCIs do not have the same licensing conditions as Greek PIs and FCIs. More precisely, the indefinite *n'importe qu-* is not anti-licensed by all forms of episodicity. Even more surprisingly, this indefinite and its cousin, *qu-conque* are licensed in episodic assertive contexts, bad licensors of PIs in general (Giannakidou 2001). The behavior of these indefinites in episodic assertive and negative contexts has been given in Section 2. Let's observe their distribution in some other episodic contexts like questions and *without* clauses with an episodic antecedent:

(12) *Est-ce que Elodie a   vu*
       did   Elodie has seen
       ⋆n'importe qui/⋆quelque ami que ce soit/qui que ce soit/⋆quiconque?
       anyone   /any friend   /anyone   /anyone[6]
       'Did Elodie see anyone/any friend?'

(13) *Jeanne est partie sans   inviter*
       Jeanne left   without invite
       n'importe qui/⋆quelque ami que ce soit/⋆qui que ce soit/quiconque
       anyone   /any friend   /anyone   /anyone
       'John left without inviting anyone/any friend.'

N'importe qu- and *qu-conque* are anti-licensed in episodic questions but licensed in *without* clauses with an episodic antecedent. Moreover, as pointed out in Vlachou (2002a,b, 2003), these indefinites have different distributional properties depending on their grammatical category: as adjectives, they are licensed in all episodic contexts, questions included.

(14) *Claire a vu n'importe quel/quelconque ami*
       Claire saw *any   /any friend*
       '⋆Claire saw any friend.'

(15) *Francis n'a   pas lu   n'importe quel/quelconque journal.*
       Francis not.has not read any   /any   newspaper
       'Francis didn't read any newspaper.'

(16) *Est-ce que Carine a   lu   n'importe quel/quelconque journal?*
       did   Carine has read any   /any   newspaper
       'Did Carine read any journal?'

(17) *Il est parti sans   acheter n'importe quel/quelconque journal.*
       he is left   without buy   any   /any   newspaper
       'He left without buying any newspaper.'

From the data above, it becomes obvious that episodicity doesn't always anti-license *n'importe qu-* and *qu-conque.* In order to get a clear image of the general distribution of these items, an appendix with detailed data is given at the end of the paper. For reasons of space, I present in the Table 2 below a classification based on this appendix.

Table 2. Classification of the licensing properties of French qu- polarity-like indefinites

Contexts	GR FCI	GR PI	Qu-que ce soit	Qu-conque	Quelconque	N'importe qui	N'importe qu-	Quelque N que ce soit
1 Epis. assertive	*	*	*	OK	OK	OK	OK	*
2 Epis. negative	*	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	*
3 Epis.question	*	OK	OK	*	OK	*	OK	*
4 before+assert. epis. antec.	*	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	*
5 Without+assert. epis.antec.	*	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	*
6 Modality[7]	OK	OK	*	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK
7 Adversative verbs	OK	*	?OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	*
8 Too+ass. Epis. antec.	*	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	*
9 Clausal comparatives	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK
10 Conditional	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK	OK

As it will be shown in the next section, the special distributional properties of the French *qu*-indefinites reveal many interesting points for the general class of PIs and FCIs crosslinguistically.

5.   The proposal

In the previous section, I proposed a classification of the polarity-like French *qu*-indefinites. In this section, I argue that their special distribution creates subclasses of PIs and FCIs in the already extant classes described in Section 3.

I propose that *quelque N que ce soit* is a typical FCI. It has the same licensing conditions as the Greek FCI *opjosdhipote*.[8] It is invariably anti-licensed by any form of episodicity, such as assertion, negation, questions, *without* and *too* clauses with an episodic antecedent (column 8). As such, the anti-episodicity principle (4) is verified.

Qu- que ce soit presents as clear a distribution as *quelque N que ce soit*. Its

distribution shows that it is a PI. It is licensed in all contexts where its Greek PI *kanena* is, with the exception of modality.[9] For this reason, I propose that it is an anti-modal PI. Interestingly, this indefinite is always licensed in the scope of modality whenever this operator is in the scope of another nonveridical operator (Section 3). This reinforces my initial claim that modality cannot license *qu-que ce soit*:[10]

[*negation > MOD*]

(18) *Elle ne   peut pas dire quoi que ce soit.*
       she not can not say anything
       'She cannot say anything.'

[*question > MOD*]

(19) *Peut-elle dire quoi que ce soit?*
       can-she say anything
       'Can she say anything?'

The indefinites *n'importe qu-* and *qu-conque* constitute the fuzziest pair of French polarity-like *qu-* indefinites. As already mentioned in the previous section, they have a split character depending on whether they are used as adjectives or as pronouns.[11] In their first use, they do not present any polarity-like property, being licensed in all possible polarity sensitive contexts (Table 2: columns 5,7). When used as pronouns, they are polarity items (Table 2: columns 4,6). In view of the divergence between these two cases, I propose that the pronominal *n'importe qu-* and *qu-conque* are completely different items from their adjectival counterparts. The first ones have a split character. They behave like FCIs (Table 2: context 6) and Polarity Items (Table 2: contexts 2,4,5,8–10).[12]

    Interestingly, they are the only polarity-like *qu-* indefinites of Table 2, which are licensed in the scope of episodic assertion (Table 2: context 1). According to Lee & Horn (1994, rev. version 1995) and Horn (2000a,b), *anybody* can be licensed in episodic contexts with an indiscriminative reading. In these cases, it is preceded by the particle *just*. However, they give no account for cases where *anybody* is in an episodic assertive context, like the case at hand.[13] Moreover, the example below shows that *n'importe qu-* doesn't always have an indiscriminative reading in episodic contexts. In the example below, it cannot be translated by *just anything*.

(20) *fait à Orly: Société I…C…P… Je ne savais pas ce que signifiaient les*
       in Orly: Society ICP I didn't know the meaning of these
       initiales. J'ai avalé ma salive, j'ai dit:
       initials. I swallowed my saliva I said:
       – c'est une agence de publicité.
       – It's an advertisement agency
       – Et alors?
       – And so what?

> *J'ai répondu n'importe quoi:*
> I said whatever/*just anything
> – International Caravaille Publicité. *Frantext, 1966*

This shows that not all uses of *n'importe qu-* in episodic sentences are indiscriminative. Vlachou (2003) accounts for the non-indiscriminative uses of this item in terms of its quantificational properties: it is a universal and existential quantifier just like its English counterpart *any*.

6.   Conclusion

The primary goal of this paper has been to present the special distribution of French *qu-* polarity-like indefinites and to analyze their impact on the general classes of Polarity and Free Choice Items. It has been claimed that *quelque N que ce soit* is a typical FCI having the same distribution as its Greek counterpart. *Qu- que ce soit* has been analysed as an anti-modal PI, being licensed in all nonveridical contexts, apart from modality. Finally, it has been argued that the grammatical category of *n'importe qu-* and *qu-conque* items is crucial for their licensing. I propose that the adjectival indefinites *n'importe qu-* and *qu-conque* are completely different indefinites from the pronominal ones, having no restrictions in their distribution and are not therefore PIs. The pronominal indefinites *n'importe qu-* and *qu-conque* have a split character between FCIs and PIs. The data presented in this paper create subclasses in the already extant classes of Polarity and Free Choice Items: modality doesn't always license PIs and episodicity doesn't always anti-license FCIs.

Notes

1.   These indefinites are used in their abbreviated forms (*n'importe qu-*, *qu-conque*, *qu- que ce soit*) throughout. As they are formed by the French *qui/que* (who) pronouns, they will be referred to as *qu-* indefinites.

2.   Or Affective Polarity Item (API): "APIs are polarity items which are grammatical in "affective contexts" (Klima (1964)), questions and negation being among such contexts. The term (NPI) is

most appropriately reserved to single out PIs which are only licensed in negative contexts" (Giannakidou 2001). In the present study, the term PIs will refer to both APIs and NPIs.

3. In works by Haspelmath (1993, 1997), Horn (2000), Giannakidou (2001), FCIs are analyzed as a subclass of PIs. In order to make the distribution of the French indefinites clear, I keep these two classes apart (see for discussion Vlachou 2003).

4. *Anybody* is always an NPI in the *immediate* scope of episodic negation and not an FCI. It is always an FCI (and not an NPI) in the *immediate* scope of modality. When *anything* is not in the immediate scope of modality, it may be an NPI on the relevant reading: *you can't do anything around here.* (Horn p.c.)

5. Not all kinds of PIs are licensed by nonveridical operators (cf. note 10)

6. In order to avoid repetition, no literal translation is provided for the French *qu-* indefinites. They are invariably translated into *any*. The reader can refer to examples (1′-3′). This change is maintained in the following sections as well.

7. In this table, the term *modality* covers also habitual and generic contexts.

8. *Quelque N que ce soit* presents the same licensing conditions with the Greek FCI with the only exception of its anti-licensing in adversative contexts (Table 2, row 7). For the moment, the reasons for this difference remain unclear.

9. Permissive modals appear to license *quoi que ce soit*.

10. Similarly, Szabolsci (2001) proposes, that the PPI *some* is licensed in the scope of negation when both are in the scope of an anti-additive operator.

11. See also Hoeksema & Klein (1995) for a semantic difference between *een* (*a N*) and *iets* (*something*) in Dutch.

12. Their anti-licensing in episodic questions remains an open issue for future research.

13. According to Horn (2000), *any* is also licensed in episodic assertive contexts when preceded by a dilated particular: *I said something-anything.*

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Appendix (a: pronominal indefinites, b: adjectival indefinites)

Before clauses with episodic antecedent (Table 2, context 4)

Elle est partie avant d' embrasser
she is left before to kiss

a. *n'importe qui/*quelque ami que ce soit/qui que ce soit/quiconque*
    anyone   /any N   /anyone   /anyone

b. *n'importe quel ami/un ami quelconque*
    any friend   /any friend

'She left before kissing anybody/She left before kissing any friend.'

Adversative verbs (Table 2, context 7)

Il a refusé à
he has refused to

a. *n'importe qui/*quelque ami que ce soit/qui que ce soit/quiconque*
    anyone   /any friend   /anyone   /anyone

b. *n'importe quel client/un client quelconque*
    any client   /any client

de voir le directeur.
to see the director

'He refused to anybody/any client to see the director.'

too-clauses (Table 2, context 8)

Il a trop bu pour parler à
he has too drunk for speak to

a. *n'importe qui/*quelque personne que ce soit/qui que ce soit/quiconque.*
    anyone   /any person   /anyone   /anyone

b. *n'importe quel ami/un ami quelconque*
    any friend   /any friend

He drank too much to talk to anyone/any friend.

Clausal comparatives (Table 2, context 9)

Olivier est plus grand que
Olivier is more tall than

a. *n'importe qui/qui que ce soit/quelque enfant que ce soit/quiconque*
    anyone   /anyone   /any child   /anyone

b. *n'importe quel/quelconque enfant*
    any   /any child

ne l' est.
not this is

Olivier is taller than anyone else (is)/Olivier is taller than any child (is).

Conditional (Table 2, context 10)

Si tu   as   besoin de
if you have need   of
a.   *n'importe quoi/quoi que ce soit/quelque chose que ce soit/quiconque*
      anything   /anything   /anything   /anyone
b.   *n'importe quelle personne/une personne quelconque,*
      any person   /any person
dis-le moi!
say-it me
'If you need anything/any person, tell me!'