

Title: Polarity Sensitivity of *much* and *many* by Register Variation

Topic Strand: Register/genre variation

400-word abstract

Negative polarity items (NPIs) are words or expressions that appear in a limited context such as in the scope of negation or in a question. Failure to have a proper licensing environment renders the NPI ungrammatical. In present day spoken English, *much* has become an NPI.

- (1) You know it doesn't cost *much* to do it. (Santa Barbara Corpus)
- (2) ?? You know it cost *much* to do it.
- (3) Do you all have *much* pollution there? (Switchboard Corpus)
- (4) ?? We all have much pollution here.

In the written language, however, we still see *much* appearing frequently in a non-NPI licensing environment.

- (5) That future owed *much* to the modernist dreams of women's emancipation and individual freedom. (Corpus of Contemporary American English, 2010, Anthropological Quarterly)
- (6) There was *much* embracing, *much* exclaiming. (Brown Corpus)

I argue that the affordability of an alternative to express the quantity meaning in the spoken language, i.e. (*a lot(s) of*), is what is behind the different degree of NPI tendency of *much* between the spoken and the written register. Because (*a lot(s) of*) can be used in the declarative without incurring a meaning or a stylistic difference, *much* in the spoken language was seen to accelerate in its development into an NPI than in the written register.

Secondly, a fine-grained analysis of *much* occurring in different NPI licensing contexts (negation, question, conditional etc.) lends further insight into the semantic shift that occurred as a result of *much* being confined to the NPI context.

Third, analysis of *much* by functional type (adjective, adverb and pronominal usage) added variety to the language change. While *much* in general was becoming an NPI, *much of* followed by a definite NP (*Much of my work is confidential*) was more inclined to be used only in the positive context in the written language, for example.

Lastly, a stronger NPI tendency was observed for *much* than for *many* both in the spoken and the written registers. Explanation for the difference is given by functional type analysis.

This study is meaningful in that it is one of the first studies to look into the historical development of NPIs and find explanation for this in terms of register variation. A bigger picture is available in an English-specific phenomenon of NPI-PPI pairs (*any-some*) and negation type (no-negation versus not-negation).