PPI Predicates - comparing novel Afrikaans data with English and Dutch data

Positive polarity items (PPIs) like "some" are licensed in contexts without negation (cf. (1)), and anti-licensed by negation (cf (2)):

(1) Edna wants some spinach.

(2) * Edna doesn't want some spinach. (Israel, 2011: 22)

All PPIs can occur in veridical contexts (where the speaker is committed to the truth of the statement). Furthermore, some PPIs can occur in non-veridical contexts as well (see Israel 2011: 222; Zwarts 1995).

Hoeksema (2018) compared Dutch and English PPI predicates: (i) "have his N" constructions, (ii) minimisers, (iii) inherently negative predicates, (iv) maledictory predicates, (v) high degree predicates, and (vi) constructions meaning "in a tough spot". This paper will firstly illustrate the extent to which Afrikaans exhibits similar structures. The Afrikaans data comprises a combination of my own native-speaker intuitions and examples from various sources on the internet. All examples and judgements about distribution were checked with two other native speakers of Afrikaans.

Secondly, the Afrikaans data will be compared to the English and Dutch data, especially in terms of their distribution in (non)-veridical contexts. The main focus of this cross-linguistic comparison will be to determine whether, and if so, to which extent PPIs with a similar form and function (e.g. the minimiser PPI 'n speld hoor val / hear a pin drop / een speld horen vallen) have a similar distribution in different non-veridical contexts (e.g. with weak negation, questions, conditionals, etc.).

One example of a cross-linguistic contrast is that "have his N" PPIs in English and Dutch cannot occur with higher negation (cf 3a and 3b), whilst it is acceptable for the Afrikaans PPI in (3c):

- (3) (a) * *I* don't think *I* have my moments.
 - (b) * *Ik denk niet dat ik zo mijn voorkeuren heb.*
 - (c) *Ek dink nie dat hulle hulle redes het waarom hulle die datum verander het nie.*
 - "I don't think that they have their reasons for changing the date."

The interaction between PPIs and speaker/hearer-related items is also of interest. Whilst "have his N" PPIs cannot occur in unmarked questions, they can occur in negated questions, as speakers use these for confirmation, rather than information:

(4) (a) Didn't the soldiers have their problems with the war?
(b) Het hulle nie ??(dalk) hulle redes waarom hulle die datum verander het nie?
"Don't they maybe have their reasons for changing the date?

Micro-comparative discussion like this also paves the way to answering bigger questions such as how and why polarity items and their distribution differ between closely-related languages.

References

Hoeksema, J. 2018. Positive polarity predicates. *Linguistics*, 56(2): 361-400.

Israel, M. 2011. *The Grammar of Polarity: Pragmatics, Sensitivity, and the Logic of Scales.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zwarts, F. 1995. Nonveridical contexts. *Linguistic Analysis*, 25: 286 – 312.