Negative Polarity Item “Renhe” in Chinese and “Koī” in Hindi

GAO Xirui  
Peking University, Beijing, China  
GAO Wencheng  
University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

This paper conducts a comparative analysis of negative polarity item “renhe” in Chinese and “koī” in Hindi. In the aspect of licensing conditions, it is found that both “renhe” and “koī” can be licensed by negative sentences, yes-no interrogative sentences, A-not-A interrogative sentences, and the antecedent clause of a conditional. Both “renhe” in Chinese and “koī” in Hindi are strong negative polarity items (NPIs). NPI “renhe” can be focalized by adding “ye” or “dou”; in this case, the modified noun phrase is moved from the right to the left of the negative marker, reinforcing negative effect. NPI “koī” can also be focalized by adding a modal particle “hī”, but the modified noun phrase is not moved, with “koī (-bhī)...hī” collocation reinforcing negative effect.

Keywords: negative polarity item (NPI), “renhe” in Chinese, “koī” in Hindi, comparative study

Introduction

Negative polarity refers to the grammatical character of a word or phrase, such as ever or any that may normally be used only in a semantically or syntactically negative or interrogative context (Collins English Dictionary, 2014). Words or expressions that either require or shun the presence of a negative element in their context are referred to as negative or positive polarity items (henceforth NPIs and PPIs), respectively. Often examples of NPIs in English are any and yet, while some and already are instances of PPIs. Many languages, perhaps all, have NPIs and PPIs, and their distribution has been the topic of a rapidly growing literature since the seminal work of Klima (1964) (Hoecksema, 2006). Negative polarity items also occur in Chinese existential sentences, for example:

(1) Gongyuan li mei you renhe ren  
Park  interior not-have any person  
“There isn’t anyone in the park”.

Example (1) is an existential sentence, where “renhe” is negative polarity item, occurring in a negative sentence, enhancing negative effect.

There also exist negative polarity items in Hindi, for example:

(2) Parka main koī bhī ādamī nahīn hai  
Park in any person not is  
“(There) is not anyone in the park”.

---

GAO Xirui, Junior, Hindi Language and Literature, College of Foreign Languages, Peking University, Beijing, China.  
GAO Wencheng, Professor, College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.
Example (2) is also an existential sentence, where “koī bhī” is negative polarity item, occurring in a negative sentence, also used to enhance negative effect. In this paper, we’ll conduct a comparative analysis of NPI “renhe” in Chinese and NPI “koī (bhī)” in Hindi, attempting to find similarities and differences in their licensing conditions and focalization.

**Literature Review**

Klima (1964) discovers that NPI should occur in “affective environment”. The studies of NPI licensing have been well known since Ladusaw (1979), as he proposes the semantic concept of “downward entailment” (henceforth DE). He thinks that only in the DE environment can NPI be licensed. The relevant definition is given below:

\[ \forall X \forall Y [X \subseteq Y \rightarrow f(X) \subseteq f(Y)] \]

Zwarts (1996) and van der Wouden (1997) further develop the idea and propose that NPIs can be divided into three types: weak, strong, and strongest. Different NPIs are licensed by different operators: (a) The licensing condition for weak NPIs is the DE environment. (b) The licensing condition for strong NPIs is the anti-additive context. (c) The licensing condition for the strongest NPIs is the anti-morphic context.

The anti-additive function is defined as: \( f(X \text{ or } Y) \leftrightarrow f(X) \text{ and } f(Y) \). And the anti-morphic function is defined as: \( f(\neg X) = \neg f(X) \). The strongest NPI should meet the anti-morphic function as well as anti-additive and DE environments.

The concept of polarity items is first introduced to China by Shen (1990), but that is a general and conclusive research on polarity words. Chai (2010) has explored the distribution of NPI “renhe” in Chinese, which corresponds to “any” in English. She points out that there is a difference between the licensing conditions of “renhe” and “any”, and “renhe” is licensed by anti-additive operators.

NPIs in Hindi are composed of an indefinite and an emphatic particle “bhī” (even/also) (Bhatia, 1976; Mahajan, 1990; Vasishth, 1998; Lahiri, 1998; Kumar, 2003). Mahajan (1990) proposes that an obligatory displacement of negation takes place in Hindi, and thus offers an upward LF movement, allowing the negative licensor to be c-commanding with NPI.

Kumar (2003) argues that most of the analyses on NPI are concerned with c-commanding relationship. He gives several instances as follows: the hypothesis that NPIs are to the right of negative licensors, in the form of command, the Immediate Scope Constraint raised by Linebarger (1980), and Progovoc’s argument (1994) that the negative licensor and NPI should be in the same governing category. Kumar (2003) also argues that the elements “koī” (any) and “kisī” (any) are interpreted as NPIs in the presence of a negative licensor when the emphatic particle “bhī” is not suffixed. “Koī bhī” and “kisī bhī” do not require negative markers in certain contexts such as questions, modals, conditional and adversative predicate. Lahiri (1998) studies the licensing conditions of NPIs in Hindi; he proposes that some of the contexts in which NPIs are licensed are questions, conditionals, modals, adversative predicates, generics, and some cases of imperatives. NPIs in other languages, for example, in English, are also permitted in such contexts (Ladusaw, 1979; Linebarger, 1980). We attempt to compare the licensing conditions and focalization of NPI “renhe” in Chinese and “koī” in Hindi, which is seldom studied before, in order to seek some common rules about NPI in human languages.
A Comparative Analysis of NPI “Renhe” in Chinese and “Koī (-bhī)” in Hindi

Chinese “renhe” is adjective but it cannot function as a predicate, so it may be called non-predicate adjective (Liu, Pan, & Gu, 2015). “Renhe” can be only used as a modifier of nouns, but not a predicate or complement. “Renhe” is one of the most frequently used NPIs in Chinese ESs, whose counterpart is “any” in English. Negative polarity adjective “renhe” often occurs in a negative Chinese ES, which means something that is not existent. In this case it can only be used together with a negative marker. For example:

(3) Zheli meiyou renhe ren xiang changge.
Here not-have any person want sing.
“There is no one who wants to sing here”.

From Example (3), we can see that “renhe” is used as a modifier of noun “ren” (person), behind the Chinese negative marker “mei (you)” in Chinese ES. It is limited by the negative marker or operator in syntactic structure, that is, “renhe” must be c-commanded by a negative marker. Syntactically, the negative marker “mei (you)” is the licenser of NPI “renhe” in Chinese ESs. To compare:

(4) *Zheli renhe ren xiang changge.
Here any person want sing.
*“There is any person who wants to sing here”.

In Example (4), “renhe” is still used as a modifier of noun “ren”, but it is not constrained by a negative marker “mei (you)”, so the sentence is not acceptable. However, in some other cases, even though there is not a negative marker in Chinese ESs, NPI “renhe” can also be licensed; a question sentence is a case in point, for example:

(5) Zheli you renhe ren xiang changge ma?
Here have any person want sing  Q
“Is there any person who wants to sing here”?

(6) Zheli you-mei-you renhe ren xiang changge?
Here have-not-have any person want sing
“Is there any person who wants to sing here or not”?

In Example (5), NPI “renhe” is used as a modifier of the existential noun “ren”; it is not constrained by a negative marker “mei (you)”, but it is used in a yes-no interrogative sentence with the Chinese question sentence marker “ma”. This sentence is acceptable, that is to say, NPI “renhe” is licensed by the yes-no question sentence. In Example (6), NPI “renhe” is also used as a modifier of the existential noun “ren”, and it is licensed by the A-not-A interrogative sentence.

According to Klima (1964), the presence of morphosyntactic feature of [affective] acts as a trigger of NPIs, a question sentence (including A-not-A question sentence) is one of the markers of [affective] environments. That is why Examples (5) and (6) can be accepted.

Apart from a negative sentence, a yes-no question, A-not-A question, NPI “renhe” can also be licensed by another kind of sentence, for example:

(7) Ruguo zheli you renhe ren xiang changge, qing gaoshu wo.
If here have any person want sing please tell me
“If there is any person who wants to sing here, please tell me”.

In Example (7), NPI “renhe” is used as a modifier of noun “ren” in Chinese ES, which is introduced by “ruguo” (if) constituting a conditional clause, followed by a main clause. This sentence is acceptable, i.e., NPI “renhe” is licensed by the antecedent clause of a conditional. Why is Example (7) accepted? Klima (1964) thinks that the presence of morphosyntactic feature [affective] can function as a trigger of a negative polarity item, and the antecedent clauses of conditionals are markers of [affective] environments. NPI “renhe” is licensed in Example (7), because this existential sentence, which is introduced by the marker of a conditional “ruguo”, forms the antecedent clause of a conditional. Another similar example can be shown as below:

(8) Ruguo banli you renhe ren yao jie na ben shu, qing gaoshu wo.

If class interior have any person want borrow that CLF book. Please tell me
“If there is any student in our class who wants to borrow that book, please tell me”.

Example (8) is an ES introduced by the marker of a conditional “ruguo”; NPI “renhe” is licensed by the antecedent clause, which is a supposed proposition. However, if NPI “renhe” occurs in the consequent clause of a conditional, it is not licensed. For example:

(9) *Ruguo women ban de Zhangsan yao jie na ben shu, qing mashang gaoshu renhe ren.

If our class DE Zhangsan want borrow that CLF book, please immediately tell any person
**“If Zhangsan in our class wants to borrow that book, please tell any person immediately”.

NPI “renhe” in Example (9) is used in the main clause of a conditional, but it is not licensed because the main clause is not a proposed proposition but a conclusion clause instead. In terms of semantic characterization, many of the contexts in which NPIs are acceptable have the property of downward entailment. Ladusaw (1979) makes such a proposal as: A negative polarity item is acceptable only if it is interpreted in the scope of downward-entailing expression. He identifies the property of being “affective” (licensing NPIs) with the property of downward-entailing. According to Ladusaw, downward-entailing can be defined as below:

“An expression is affective [= downward entailing] if it licenses inferences from superset to subsets” (Linebarger, 1980, p. 190).

NPI “renhe” in Chinese ESs may occur in a context of downward entailment. For example:

(10) a. Zhieli meiyou cidian.

Here not-have dictionary
“There are not dictionaries here”.

b. Zheli meiyou hanying cidian.

Here not-have Chinese-English dictionary
“There is not a Chinese-English dictionary here”.

(11) Zhieli meiyou renhe cidian.

Here not-have any dictionary
“There are not any dictionaries here”.

Example (10)a is a proposition with a superset of existential entity “cidian” (dictionary), and the existential entity in example (10)b is a subset of “hanying cidian” (Chinese-English dictionary), so proposition (10)a entails proposition (10)b. Therefore, Example (11) is a downward-entailing context, in which NPI “renhe” is licensed.

In terms of pragmatic effect, NPI “renhe” can be focalized by changing its syntactic structure from a postverbal position to a preverbal one with the concurrent occurrence of focus adverb “dou” (all) or “ye” (too) in Chinese ESs. For example:
(12) a. Zheli meiyou renhe xiaoxi.
Here not-have any news.
“There is not any news here”.
*b. Zheli renhe xiaoxi meiyou.
Here any news not-have.
“There is not any news here”.
*c. Zheli renhe xiaoxi dou/ye meiyou.
Here any news DOU/YE not-have.
“There is not any news at all here”.

In Example (12)a, NPI “renhe” is licensed by the negative marker “mei (you)”, whereas in Example (12)b, “renhe” and its modified noun “xiaoxi” (news) is moved from the right to the left of the negative marker, but it is not licensed since this sentence is not acceptable. In Example (12)c, NPI “renhe” is focalized, as we can see, the existential entity “renhe xiansuo” (any clue) is moved from the right to the left of the negative marker “mei (you)”, together with the focus adverb “dou” or “ye”. To compare Example (12)b and (12)c, it is observed that the focalization of NPI “renhe” is allowed in a negative ES with the concurrent occurrence of focus adverb “dou” or “ye”.

Bhatia (1976) proposes that the NPIs in Hindi are made up of two parts. The most frequently used NPI koī (-bhī) thus consists of koī and a particle bhī. However, koī alone can also act as NPI, and under some conditions, we use koī rather than koī bhī. So, I propose that NPI koī (-bhī) should be divided into two categories: a bare one and a cluster one. Koī is the bare NPI, while koī bhī is the cluster NPI.

In this part, the author will examine NPI koī (-bhī) in four conditions and determine whether it is licensed. The NPI koī (-bhī) in Hindi usually precedes a noun and functions as a modifier, which can also be used as a pronoun as well. The context we provide involves both conditions.

The NPI koī appears with a negative marker nahīn in Hindi ESs. For instance:

(13) tumhain jane kī koī zrūrat (*-bhī) nahīn
you-to going any need (*even) not
“(There is) not any need for you to go”.

From Example (13), we can see that koī (*-bhī) is used as a modifier of noun “zrūrat” (need). It’s before the negative marker “nahīn” in Hindi ES. The predicate “hai” is omitted after “nahīn” in negative sentences, so “nahīn (hai)” is actually the VP (verb phrase), and “koī zrūrat” is NP. Hence NPI “koī” is c-commanded by negative marker “nahīn”, and they are in the same governing category. Syntactically, the negative marker “nahīn” is the licensor of NPI “koī (*-bhī)” in Hindi ESs. To compare:

(14) *tumhain jane kī koī zrūrat (*-bhī)
you-to going any need (*even)
*“(There is) any need for you to go”.

In Example (14), “koī” is still used as a modifier of noun “zrūrat”, but it’s not constrained by a negative marker “nahīn”, and thus the sentence is not licensed. However, in some other cases, even though there is not a negative marker in Hindi ESs, NPI “koī” can also be licensed; a question sentence is a case in point, for instance:

(15) tumhain jane kī koī zrūrat (*-bhī) hai?
you-to going any need (*even) is
“Is there any need for you to go”?

(16) tumhain jane koī zrūrat (*bhī) hai ya nahīn (hai)?
you-to going any need (*even) is or not (is)
“Is there any need for you to go or not”?  

In Example (15), NPI “koī” used as a modifier of the existential noun “zrūrat”. It is not constrained by a negative marker “nahīn”, but it is used in a yes-no interrogative sentence. Sentence (15) is accepted and thus NPI “koī” is licensed by yes-no question sentence. Example (16) is A-not-A interrogative sentence in Hindi, and the “hai” after “nahīn” is again emitted as in negative sentences. In Example (16), NPI “koī” is used as a modifier of noun “zrūrat”, and this sentence is accepted. So, NPI “koī” is licensed by the A-not-A interrogative sentence.

Again, as Klima (1964) has argued, a question sentence, including A-not-A question sentence, is one of the markers of [affective] environments. That’s why Examples (15) and (16) can be accepted.

Apart from a negative sentence, a yes-no question, A-not-A question, NPI “koī” can also be licensed by another kind of sentence, for example:

(17) agar tumhain jane koī zrūrat (*bhī) hai, mujhe batāo.
if you-to going any need (*even) is, me tell
“(If there is) any need for you to go, tell me”.

In Example (17), NPI “koī” is used as a modifier of noun “zrūrat” in Hindi ES, which is introduced by “agar” (if) constituting a conditional clause, followed by an imperative main clause. This sentence is accepted, i.e., NPI “koī” is licensed by the antecedent clause of conditional in Hindi. According to Klima (1964), NPI “koī” is licensed in Example (17) since this existential sentence, initiated by the marker of the conditional “agar”, consists the antecedent clause of a conditional.

However, if NPI “koī” appears in the consequent clause of a conditional, it’s not licensed. For instance:

(18) *agar tuhain jane koī zrūrat hai, koī ādamī batāo.
if you-to going need is, any person tell
“(If there is) need for you to go, tell any person”.

NPI “koī” in Example (18) is used in the main clause of a conditional, but it’s not licensed because the main clause is not a proposed proposition but a conclusion clause instead. From a semantic view, many of the contexts in which NPIs are acceptable have the feature of DE. Thus, NPI “koī” isn’t licensed in this sentence because it’s not interpreted in the scope of DE environment.

Vasishth (1998) divides the NPIs in Hindi into three groups based on their suffixations. In terms of NPI “koī (-bhī)”, it should be divided into a bare NPI “koī” and a cluster NPI “koī bhī”. The cluster NPI “koī bhī” will be examined in different contexts and determine whether it’s licensed in four contexts as NPI “koī” is.

The NPI “koī bhī” also appears with a negative marker nahīn in Hindi ESs. For instance:

(19) koī bhī (ādamī) nahīn gayā
any even (person) not went
“Anyone did not go”.

Example (19) is a negative sentence, and “nahīn” is the negative marker. We can see that “koī bhī” is used as a modifier of noun, and the noun “ādamī” is omitted in this sentence. Syntactically, “koī bhī” is in the c-commanding relationship with the negative marker. And thus, the negative marker “nahīn” is the licensor of NPI “koī bhī” in Hindi. To compare:
(20) *koī bhī ādamī gayā
   any even (person) went
   “Anyone went”.

In Example (20), “koī bhī” is still used as a modifier of the omitted noun “ādamī”, but it’s not constrained by a negative marker “nahīn”, and thus it’s not licensed. Here is another example:

(21) a. Kakṣa main koī bhī ādamī nahīn hai
    Classroom in any man not is
    ‘(There is) not anyone in the classroom’.
   *b. Kakṣa main koī bhī ādamī hai
    Classroom in any man is
    ‘(There is) not anyone in the classroom’.

In Example (21)a, NPI “koī bhī” is the modifier of noun “ādamī”, and it’s constrained by the negative marker “nahīn”, thus this sentence is licensed. But (21)b is obviously not acceptable.

Lahiri (1995) gives an example to prove that NPI “koī bhī” is licensed in yes-no questions:

(22) tumhain koī bhī kitāb pasand āyī kya?
    you any book like Q
    “Did you like any book”?

This sentence is acceptable. It proves that NPI “koī bhī” is licensed by yes-no questions. However, the question marker “kya” appears at the end of the sentence, and this sentence expresses exclamatory emotion as well. So this sentence is somehow special.

We now investigate the cluster NPI used in other types of sentence, including yes-no questions and A-not-A questions, for example:

(23) Kya kakṣa main koī bhī ādamī hai?
    Q classroom in any man is
    ‘(Is there) anyone in the classroom’?

(24) Kya kakṣa main koī bhī ādamī hai ya nahīn?
    Q classroom in any man is or not
    ‘(Is there) anyone in the classroom or not’?

In Example (23), NPI “koī bhī” is used as a modifier of noun “ādamī”. This is a yes-no interrogative sentence with the Hindi question sentence marker “kya”. There is no negative marker “nahīn” in this sentence. This sentence is acceptable, that is to say, NPI “koī bhī” is licensed by the yes-no question sentence. In example (24), NPI “koī bhī” is also licensed by the A-not-A question sentence.

In addition, the cluster NPI can also be licensed by a conditional. Here is the example:

(25) agar kakṣa main koī bhī ādamī hai, mujhe batāo.
    If classroom in any man is me tell
    ‘If (there is) anyone in the classroom, tell me’.

In Example (25), NPI “koī bhī” is used as a modifier of noun “ādamī” in Hindi ES. The conditional clause is introduced by the marker “agar” (if), followed by the main clause. This sentence is acceptable, i.e., NPI “koī bhī” is licensed by the antecedent clause of a conditional in Hindi. However, the NPI “koī bhī” cannot be licensed by the consequent clause of a conditional in Hindi, for example:
NEGATIVE POLARITY ITEM “RENHE” IN CHINESE AND “KOĪ” IN HINDI

(26) *agar kakṣa main ek ādamē hai, koī bhī ādamē batāo.
If classroom in one man is, any man tell
* ‘If (there is) someone in the classroom, tell anyone’.

In Example (26), NPI “koī bhī” is employed in the consequent clause of a conditional. This sentence is not accepted, that is to say, the cluster NPI cannot be licensed by the consequent clause.

In addition, the cluster NPI “koī bhī” has an inflection and is changed into a form of “kisī ko bhī” when a postposition “ko” occurs after “koī” in the sentence. The postposition “ko” is used to indicate that “koī” is the subject. However, the inflected cluster NPI “kisī ko bhī” can be licensed syntactically like the cluster NPI “koī bhī”. Examples are as follows:

(27) a. mainne kisī ko bhī nahīn dekhā
“I didn’t see anyone”.
*b. mainne kisī ko bhī dekhā
“I saw anyone”.

c. kya tumne kisī ko bhī dekhā?
Q “Did you see anyone”?
d. kya tumne kisī ko bhī dekhā yā nahīn?
Q “Did you see anyone or not”?
e. agar kakṣa main tum kisī ko bhī dekhade hain, mujhe batāo.
If classroom in you anyone to even see me tell
“If you see anyone in the classroom, tell me”.
*f. agar kakṣa main tum us ko dekhade hain, kisī ko bhī batāo.
If classroom in you him to see anyone to even tell
“If you see him in the classroom, tell anyone”.

From the above examples we can see that the suffixed cluster NPI “kisī ko bhī” functions syntactically as same as the cluster NPI “koī bhī” does.

In terms of the focalization in Hindi, since it’s a SOV language, the NP together with NPI cannot be moved further to the left. Hence the pragmatic function is enhanced by adding a wide range of modal particles to the sentence to express different emotions.

The post modal particles “hī” (even) is usually used together with NPI “koī” to further enhance the pragmatic function of being emphatic. Here is the example:

(28) a. tumhain jane kī koī zrūrat nahīn
you-to going any need not
“(There is) not any need for you to go”.
b. tumhain jane kī koī zrūrat hī nahīn
you-to going any need MP not
“(There is) not need for you to go at all”.

In Example (28)b, as we can see, the negative effect about the modified noun “zrūrat” (need) is stronger
than that in (28)\(a\) due to the added modal particle “\(hī\)”. So the focalization is realized by adding the modal particle “\(hī\)” to the sentence, even though the NPI and its modified noun is not moved in terms of syntactic structure (unlike Chinese, where the NPI and its modified noun are moved from the right to the left to the negative marker); possibly due to the fact that Hindi is a kind of SOV language, the object is already put on the left to the negative marker.

**Conclusion**

We conclude that NPI “\(renhe\)” in Chinese and NPI “\(koī (-bhī)\)” in Hindi have some similarities. First, they both act as a noun modifier of the noun indicating indefinite quantity. Second, both can be licensed by four licensing conditions: negative sentences, yes-no interrogative sentences, A-not-A interrogative sentences, and the antecedent clause of a conditional. Third, they are both strong NPIs which can be used to reinforce the negative effect of the sentence. There is one difference between NPI “\(renhe\)” in Chinese and NPI “\(koī (-bhī)\)” in Hindi. The Chinese NPI “\(renhe\)” needs to collocate with the focus adverb “\(dou\)” or “\(ye\)” to realize focalization, and the existential entity is moved from the right to the left of the negative marker. However, in Hindi, a modal particle “\(hī\)” is added before the negative marker to form “\(koī (-bhī) ... hī\)” collocation enhancing the negative effect, but there is no movement of the NP; possibly because Hindi is SOV language, the object is already put on the left of the negative marker.

**References**


