Towards a New Pedagogical Approach to *Some* and *Any* Based on Large Scale Corpus Analysis

Summary of ongoing corpus investigation using the Oxford English Corpus
Contents

. Why *some* and *any*?
. Corpus Research (Oxford English Corpus)
. *Some* and *any* in if clauses
. *Some* in negative sentences and after implicitly negative words
. *Some* and *any* in questions
. Pedagogical Recommendations
Why *some* and *any*?

Very difficult words because:

1) No perfect 1 to 1 equivalents in major world languages.
2) Poorly described in grammar books:

“In declarative clauses, *some* occurs with affirmatives but does not occur with negatives” *Cambridge Grammar of English*

“We use *any* instead of *some* in negative sentences (…) with *if* (..)”

How English Works

*Lewis and Gethin: Lexical Meaning/Lakoff: Pragmatic Meaning*

Good stuff. But not enough!

We need better explanation ➔ better understanding ➔

*Corpus Research*
Main Reference Corpus: The Oxford English Corpus (OEC)

Access-Sketch Engine; Permission OUP

Why OEC?

- Size (over 2 billion words) ➞ rarer uses.
- Different varieties and range of text types/topic domains ➞ Comparison of language varieties and genres (So far whole corpus.)

Problem with OEC: No spoken texts (some informal genres)

Solution: Supplement with Spoken Corpora
Research Procedure

- CQL for Main Searches: reduces dud examples
- Simple search lang for wildcard searches
- Random Samples for main uses

Problems ➞ Solutions

1) SE expanded context not always enough info on speaker intention etc ➞ Google (with varied success)

2) Interpretation problems: ambiguous readings/matching examples to uses ➞ Interrater Research (linguists and non-linguists)
If Sentences: Background

1) Grammar Books:
   “any not some in Conditionals.” OR “some with positive expectations”; “any with negative or neutral expectations”

2) More elaborate view from Lakoff, R (1969):
   Some for positive attitudes as well as positive expectations.
   Promises: If you eat some spinach, I'll give you ten dollars
   Any for negative attitudes as well as neutral or negative expectations.
   Threats: If you eat any candy, I'll whip you.
Research confirms Lakoff's claims

But:

1) More functions than just promises and threats.
2) Covert pragmatic uses of some and any.
3) Data on Set Phrases/Collocations.
4) Interaction between lexical meaning and pragmatic functions.

(But remember: corpora not part of zeitgeist in 1969)
If ..some functions : exhortation in
negative if clauses

● Typical Use: To urge action/warn against inaction

Examples
- Search engines (..) can cause no end of grief if you don't know some simple tricks that will vastly improve your search results.
- Diamond basically informs us how we are fucking up our world (..) and how it will fuck us in the end if we don't make some serious changes.
If..some functions (cont): expressing the desirability of likely or impossible conditions:

Use:
- Normally any with negative expectations BUT some is used to foreground positive desire.

Examples:
- It would be nice if we had some way of knowing what the next twelve months will hold. But it just isn't going to happen.
- "If we had some of the young players playing rugby it would be good for the sport."

Two more functions: recommendations and requests
1) Giving warnings:
(..) people have **been warned to stay well** away from the water if they have been drinking

2) Indicating undesirability of proposition expressed in if clause:
   We are on the extreme frontier and **if there is any trouble**, we must suffer first.

3) Making politer face-saving requests
(..) **if Tasawar was to be honoured in any way** the family would really appreciate it.
Covert Uses: Playing with positive* expectations

Example 1 (Context: discussing false accusations)

(..) the people (...) and their families have to live with that burden if some of the mud sticks.

Explanation: assumption of lasting effect adds force to the writer's comments.

Example 2

President Barack Obama rallied House Democrats for an election-year fight, urging them to work with Republicans if they show some willingness to put politics aside. (..)

Explanation: Some supports call for collaboration; any would cast doubt

*Under research: Negative expectations and pragmatic effects
Set Phrases (Collocation work discussed via email)

-Set phrases occurring 80% or more with some:
  if you fancy, it would be nice if, would be great if, would be good if, it would help if, and would not be surprised if

Common thread: “positivizing expressions”

-Set phrases occurring 80% or more with any:

  1) Negatively oriented quantifying phrases: few if any, little if any, not many/much.. if any, (quantifying) what if
  2) Negative emphatic phrases: at all; whatsoever
  3) Singularizing phrases: if any single+singular noun; if any one+singular noun  if any one of+plural noun or pronoun
  4) Miscellaneous set phrases: if...any consolation; if ..any indication; if (you have/there is/are) any doubt(s)
Interaction between lexical and pragmatic meaning

- Lexical meanings of *some* and *any* usually match pragmatic meaning:
  - Main lexical meanings of some - “a certain amount” “a certain person or thing” ➔ positive expectation and attitudes.
  - Lexical meanings of any - e.g. no matter which, arbitrary, unlimited amount, ➔ negative or neutral expectation/attitudes

But...
Force majeure rule

If lexical meaning does not match pragmatic meaning, lexical meaning takes precedence.

Examples

- *If you eat any* processed foods, you are likely to be consuming GM material (Positive Expectation but any=no matter which)

- *(..)if some* want to draw lots to choose a sacrificial victim, may they force everyone to join in? (Negative expectation but some= “certain people but not others”.)
Text Type preferences for if..some and if..any

Raw frequencies of if..some and if..any
  . Whole Corpus: if some=32.18%; if any=67.82%
  . Legal Texts: if some=17.48%; if.. any =82.52%
  . Medical Texts: if some=17.63%; if..any=82.37%
Possible reasons for prevalence of *any* in legal and medical texts

- Need for Caution and Exhaustiveness

-(Legal texts) To cover all and every legal contingency: if any party to any proceedings in a county court is dissatisfied with the determination of the judge or jury, he may appeal.

-(Medical texts) To warn against all and every possible symptom or side effect: put the seed applied fungicide on if you have any of the following conditions (..)

Discussion of further reasons via email.
Work Pending on *some* and *any* in conditionals

- Research on other conditional conjunctions—*unless, providing, let's say* etc.

- More research on:
  - Text Types
  - Collocation and Set Phrases
Negative Sentences with some: Main Findings

- *Some* IS used inside the scope of negation: over 8,000 cases in the corpus.

*Some* in object position does not only mean “some but not others” e.g. (Context: discussing a film) I *didn't like some* of the food snobbery

Lexical Meaning is paramount in distinguishing between *some* and *any* in negatives: *They don't like some of the things Congress has done*/*I don't like any of the candidates*

Confirms importance of some “*neg-some*” uses discussed in generative grammar-e.g rhetorical denial (“external negation”).
Implicit negatives: main results so far

1) *Some* is perfectly possible after most implicit negatives e.g. without, negative adjectives and negative verbs. *Any* is more common but *some* can be necessary -e.g."he denied some of the claims" or "I was *unable to* pay some bills".

2) *Some* is very rare after *hardly, barely and scarcely* because of their emphatic, negatively oriented meaning: *I had scarcely any pain* = virtually no pain.
Questions 1: Offers and Requests

Grammar books say:

*Some* for positive expectations or desire, esp offers and requests. The corpus says this is true except:

- Any for face-saving requests especially with *Do you happen to, I don't suppose* and in fixed phrase *is there any way you could*

- Any for face-saving offers, e.g. 64 cases of *Do you need any help; 24 cases of do you need some help?*

The contexts for *some* are different but there is some overlap.
Questions 2: Wh qus

*Some* more common in real information *wh-* questions.

*Any* more common in:

1) Counterfactual rhetorical questions, which bring the proposition into doubt: *Who has any* time to sit down and talk anymore?

2) Rhetorical Comment Questions, which comment on the action/situation but do not bring it into doubt: *why does anybody believe anything any Republican says these days?*

Distribution of *some* and *any* across *wh* qus matches their main meanings:  
- *Some* = more concrete meanings = real qus  
- *Any* = more emphatic or negatively oriented meanings = rhetorical qus.

**But: force majeure again applies!**
Pending work on questions

1) More work on yes-no and wh quas using spoken corpora. Why spoken corpora?
   - Importance of quas in face to face conversation
   - Ideal for looking at “face”.
   - Some pragmatic purposes may be realized mainly in conversation.

2) Work on negative quas: important area covered in detail in some grammar books.

3) Text type comparison of “persuasive some quas”.
Pedagogical Conclusions

1) All levels: stop treating *neg some* as a rarity.
2) Beginners: basic lexical meanings in preparation for presupposition later on.
3) Intermediate Level: range of speech functions in conditionals and basic principles of wh-qus with *some* and *any*.
4) Higher Levels: some of the more complex uses.

Presentation Style
- It depends on learner style, teaching context etc.
- However less directive styles - e.g. Observe-Hypothesize-Experiment and consciousness-raising probably fit more complex uses.