

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

Summary of ongoing corpus investigation using the Oxford

Pulse para añadir texto  
English Corpus

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# 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**

# Functions and examples for *if...any*

## 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 qus using spoken corpora.

Why spoken corpora?

-Importance of qus in face to face conversation

- Ideal for looking at “face”.

- Some pragmatic purposes may be realized mainly in conversation.

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

3) Text type comparison of “persuasive some qus”.

# 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-qs 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.