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Need, Dare, and Negative Polarity

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1. Introduction

This paper constitutes an exploration of the relation between the modal auxiliary uses of the English verbs *need* and *dare* and the category of negative polarity items (henceforth, NPIs). Indeed, both these verbs and NPIs display similar distributional behaviors: They appear in contexts bearing negative presuppositions to produce inferences which involve a strengthening or a softening of negation. This general observation raises the issue of the properties that explain the peculiar distribution of the modal verbs being considered and of NPIs in general. In this paper we will argue that, far from constituting the defining characteristic of the category, the distribution of NPIs is simply one of their manifestations that is to be explained by the relevance of some aspect of their meaning to that of certain contexts. These semantic aspects have to do with evoking endpoints of scalar models, as argued by Fauconnier [7], Israel [10] and Larrivée [17], an exploitation of the meaning of NPIs which can only be made relevantly in contexts bearing appropriate negative presuppositions. It is therefore those aspects of meaning that this article will endeavor to find in *need* and *dare* in order to explain both its distribution and the common properties it shares with other members of the NPI category.

2. Negative Polarity Items

In their 1993 descriptive study, Von Bergen and Von Bergen [29] distinguish five different classes of NPIs, of which the most important one, the strengthening of negation, is divided into four subcategories:

1. Strengthening of negation
 - a. Denotative strengthening of negation
Ex.: I don't agree with you at all.
 - b. Affective strengthening of negation
Ex.: They don't know the hell what they're doing.
 - c. Strengthening of negation by means of minimal amounts
Ex.: Robert doesn't drink a drop.
 - d. Strengthening of negation by means of maximal amounts
Ex.: I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole.
2. Preference for plain or shorter expressions with negation
Ex.: It's not far from here.
It's a long way from here.
3. Nonreferential indefinites
Ex.: There aren't any left.
4. Understatement
Ex.: I'm not overly interested.
5. Presuppositionally marked verbal phrases (expressions which only make sense as corrections of an implicit assumption that the positive situation is normally the case)
Ex.: It doesn't matter if I miss my train.

As can be seen from Von Bergen and Von Bergen's classification, negative polarity items form a rather heterogeneous group. On first examination, the common thread which strings them together is the fact of appearing in various non-assertive contexts—and of therefore sounding odd or humorous when used in an affirmative context—as illustrated by *lift a finger* and *ever* in the following examples:

- (1) Affirmation
 - a. * She lifted a finger to help.
 - b. * She ever helped us.

- (2) Negation
 - a. She didn't lift a finger to help.
 - b. She hasn't ever helped us.
- (3) Questions
 - a. Did she lift a finger to help?
 - b. Has she ever helped us?
- (4) Restrictives
 - a. She hardly lifted a finger to help.
 - b. Only Mary ever helped us.
- (5) Comparative clauses
 - a. He is more interested in drinking beer with his friends than in lifting a finger to help us.
 - b. Standards are now lower than they ever were.
- (6) Superlative clauses
 - a. The last time he lifted a finger to help us was ten years ago.
 - b. These are the highest standards that were ever set.
- (7) Conditional clauses
 - a. If he lifts a finger to help them, he'll be in trouble.
 - b. If they ever followed their own standards, things would be better.
- (8) *Before*-clauses
 - a. Before I could lift a finger to help him, he was gone.
 - b. They would try all sorts of things before ever following their own standards.

However, the distributional consideration according to which NPIs, as their name indicates, are found exclusively in non-assertive contexts remains insufficient to define this class of items. It can be shown that canonical negatively polarised expressions such as *lift a finger* or *ever* appearing in canonical contexts such as *before*-clauses and superlative clauses can yield unacceptable results. In the following sentence,

- (9) * The President was prudent before lifting a finger to help his friends financially last month.

although it is placed in a formally appropriate environment, *lift a finger* does not seem to be acceptable, and thus appears to be responsible for the unacceptability of the sentence, as shown by the felicity of the same sequence with the non-polarised expression *make a move* instead of the NPI:

- (10) The President was prudent before making a move to help his friends financially last month.

It must be noted that, unlike the NPI, the expression *make a move* does not entail any strengthening of negation, and that therefore the commutation of expressions is not indifferent to the overall interpretation of the sequences.

This being said, *lift a finger* can be used acceptably in a sequence very similar to the one in (9), as evidenced by the following:

- (11) The President must be prudent before lifting a finger to help his friends financially.

A few remarks as to the differences between (9) and (11) must be made in order to try to determine what allows the use of the NPI in the latter but not in the former. First of all, let us mention that there is no significant change in the syntactic configuration of the two sequences, and that the reasons for the variation in the acceptability of the polarised item must therefore be found elsewhere. Indeed, these reasons appear to be essentially semantic in nature, having to do with the relation of the evoked states of affairs to a more or less restricted temporal setting: the event under (9) is limited to a well-defined temporal period by the modifier *last month*, and its removal greatly improves, although not entirely restores for every speaker, its acceptability:

- (9') (?) The President was prudent before lifting a finger to help his friends financially.

This restriction on the setting of the envisaged state of affairs is also determined, although less strongly so, by the simple past indicative main verb, and the change of perspective to a modal main verb, as well as to a generic subject, makes the use of the NPI entirely acceptable:

- (11) The President must be prudent before lifting a finger to help his friends financially.

- (11') A President must be prudent before lifting a finger to help his friends financially.

Therefore, it appears that the negatively polarised expression is semantically inconsistent with events that are set inside temporally restricted periods. Intuitively, it could be suggested that since, as described by Kadmon and Landman [13], the function of many NPIs seems to be to "widen" the range of referents to which the negation applies, it would seem appropriate that such a widening of reference be most relevantly used in a domain that is not overly restricted. These facts lead us to suppose that the distribution of an NPI such as *lift a finger* is dependent on a linguistic semantic condition of making a relevant contribution to the sentential context in which it occurs. In the same fashion that utterances are subjected to the pragmatic condition of being relevant to their context of exchange, words could be said to undergo a linguistic semantic condition of being relevant to the overall interpretation of the utterance. While the conditions under which a given item converges with its context of occurrence need to be substantiated to go beyond this informal description, it appears to be an intuitively appropriate rendition of the facts that can be observed with such expressions as *lift a finger*. This grammatical condition of relevance can be further illustrated by the behavior of *ever*, whose acceptability follows patterns similar to the preceding polarity item:

- (12) a. * This murder was the worst case that was ever reported last week in Kosovo.
 b. This murder was the worst case that was reported last week in Kosovo.
 c. This murder was the worst case that was ever reported in Kosovo.
 d. This murder is the worst case that was ever reported in Kosovo.
 e. This murder must be the worst case that was ever reported in Kosovo.

and will vary according to the consistency of its meaning with the evocation of a more or less restricted state of affairs.

It may therefore be provisionally stated that the distribution of NPIs does not depend on formal parameters alone, involving its command by a definite series of forms, but rather on the semantic convergence between the item and the context of its occurrence.

That the distribution of NPIs is not solely governed by formal parameters is also established by a number of other facts.

First, certain NPIs occur in strongly assertive contexts (see Sedivy [25]) containing no direct trace of a negative presupposition, but which can be understood as parasitic on a negative perspective in the preceding context (M. Israel, personal communication):

(13) She didn't even lift a finger to help Joe.

But she *did* lift a finger to help, when there was work for her to do.

A purely distributional definition of NPIs is also seen to be incomplete in that some items occur exclusively in negatively polarized contexts while not demonstrating any of the interpretative features of NPIs in general; this is the case of the French forms *vergogne* ('shame'), *ambages* ('detours, circumlocutions'), *tambour ni trompette* (lit. 'drum nor trumpet'), which are lexicalized as complements of the preposition *sans* ('without'): *sans vergogne*, 'shamelessly,' *sans ambages*, 'outright, straightforwardly,' *sans tambour ni trompette*, 'discreetly,' without demonstrating any softening or strengthening of the negative effect.

Most importantly however, the main reason why NPIs cannot be defined only with reference to their distribution is that many items which occur in polarized contexts with the expected interpretation occur also in other contexts with a different resultative meaning. In the following examples, for instance:

(14) Boy, were we ever confused!

(15) She lifted a finger as a signal to him.

the items *ever* and *lift a finger* neither occur in a non-assertive context nor do they carry the implication that they bring about in negative contexts.

These last examples raise the more general question of the way in which the meaning of an NPI contributes to the overall interpretation of an utterance in which it occurs, which is crucial to substantiate the claim made above that the contextual value of linguistic forms must be commensurate with that of the context of their occurrence. If we consider those NPIs examined here that have the contextual effect of strengthening negation, we observe that one characteristic common to many is that they may be seen as the extreme points on scales. The largest group of intensifiers of negation evoke a minimal amount, as *He wouldn't drink a drop* Fauconnier [7,8]

shows that expressions of minimal amounts function as end-points of pragmatic scales: conceptually speaking one cannot drink any less than a drop. In negative contexts, this allows an inference from the end-point to the whole scale, whereby if someone does not drink even as little as a drop, this implies that they do not drink at all. This is also what seems to occur in *He didn't lift a finger to help her*, where lifting a finger is conceptually envisaged as the minimal action that might be accomplished. The negation of this minimal accomplishment extends to the entire scale of relevant actions, leading to the inference that no action was undertaken whatsoever. It is worth noting that the scalar status of *lift a finger* in its NPI use, where it is exploited for its bottom-of-the-scale value among the manifestations of human exertion, readily explains its difference in meaning with the use of the verb phrase *lift a finger* as illustrated in (15) above, which does not trigger any scalar-based presuppositions and can therefore be used as a normal referential expression in a variety of contexts, and not only in polarised ones. Expressions which strengthen negation by associating it with phrases denoting maximal amounts also seem to involve scales. Thus in *I wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole* the chain of inferences runs as follows: if it is true that I wouldn't touch it with something as long as a ten-foot pole, this implies that I wouldn't touch it with anything shorter; since most poles are assumed to be shorter than that, this implies that I wouldn't touch it at all. Von Bergen and Von Bergen observe that the term 'maximal amount' is not completely accurate in all cases of this type [29: 156]: the example above shows that any element which is exceptionally high on the scale will do as an archetype of an ideal or maximally favourable condition. The negation of the subject's willingness to undertake the action even under maximally favourable circumstances is used to imply unwillingness to perform it under any circumstances at all. Similarly, in an example like *He wouldn't help Jim for all the tea in China*—all the tea in China being conceivably a most favorable incentive to help someone—if no help is to be provided with that incentive being considered, then no support will be ensured under any less favorable condition, and by implication it is conveyed that no help of any kind whatsoever would be provided. As for items such as *any* and *ever* that may be found in examples such as *Bill wouldn't drink any alcohol* and *He doesn't imagine that Jane would ever help Jim*, they strengthen negation by the evocation of the arbitrary choice of a random occurrence of the relevant nominal or temporal set. As an arbitrary choice potentially covers all the occurrences of a given set of values including the scalar end-points, the application of negation to a randomly selected item will imply the rejection

of all possible relevant occurrences. Given that at whatever moment in the future, no matter what the circumstances pertaining at that moment, Jane will not help a given person and that for whichever conceivable type of alcohol, Bill would refuse to drink it, it can be safely inferred that no help will be provided and that no alcohol will be drunk.

We have claimed in this section that NPIs cannot be defined solely with respect to their distribution, but rather on the basis of their semantic value, which is that of evoking an extreme point on a scalar model or a random choice which covers all imaginable cases. These values must appear in a context consonant with their own reference, i.e., in a context where these notions are exploited for the result obtained through their interaction with negation. Consequently, they yield agrammatical sequences when no such consonance can be established.

With respect to negative polarity items of the type to be explored in this paper, van der Wouden [28: 12] holds that "notwithstanding the fact that many polarity items may be seen as end-points of scales, this doesn't hold for all of them, for example Dutch *hoeven* 'need' and its German counterpart *brauchen*." Our objective will not be to determine whether or not *need* and *dare* do belong to the class of NPIs, as there is a justified consensus in the literature on this point from the more traditional works (Poustma [23: 115-119], Jespersen [12: 173], Quirk et al [24: 138]) to full-fledged linguistic studies (see Klima [14], Horn [9] for earlier mentions). Our main objective is rather to verify van der Wouden's assumption that polarised modals do not evoke scalar endpoints, which we hope to show is not entirely founded for the modal uses of the English verbs *need* and *dare*. The principle which appears to be operating with *need* and *dare* is not as obvious as that underlying the uses referred to above, however, and so the general puzzlement as to what governs the NPI-like behaviour of *need* and *dare* in their modal uses is quite justified.

3. The modal uses of *need* and *dare*

Let us begin by recalling the essentials of the data concerning the modal uses of these two verbs in English (for a full treatment, the reader is referred to Duffley [4]). *Need* and *dare* are found with the morpho-syntactic characteristics of the modal auxiliaries—absence of -s in the third person singular, direct negation by *not*, simple inversion in questions—in a variety of contexts, all of which are somehow non-assertive. A list of the main types is given below:

(12) Negation

- a. She needn't come.
- b. She dare not even mention it.

(13) Questions

- a. Need I say more?
- b. Dare I interrupt you?

(14) Restrictives

- a. I need hardly say how glad I am.
- b. I just sat there and it seemed I hardly dare breathe for a minute or two. [19: 280]
- c. He need only state his opinion clearly.
- d. Only politicians dare do such things.

(15) Comparative clauses

- a. Standards are lower than they need be.
- b. It is more than they dare do to give the fugitive up. [20: ANDERS 1, BK, 3597]

(16) Superlative clauses

- a. His book covers most that need be said on the topic.
- b. But launching a new cigarette in today's climate of disapproval requires finesse. The company is advertising its Premiers as 'a cleaner smoke', the furthest it dare go. (*The Economist*, Sept. 17, 1988: 33)

(17) Conditional clauses

- a. If you need borrow money at all, borrow as little as possible.
- b. "The living have never used this road since the coming of the Roherrim," said Aragorn, "for it is closed to them. But in this dark hour the heir of Isildur may use it, if he dare." [26: 812]

(18) *Before*-clauses

- a. I have half an hour to spare before I need go.
- b. It was a long time too before I dared go back to Mrs Tompkin's. [6: 99]

In all of these cases, in the words of Jacobsson [11: 62] speaking of the auxiliary uses of *need*, "the existence of the necessity or obligation is not

asserted but denied, questioned, conceded (in concessive clauses), or represented as a mere conception rather than a positive fact." This resembles the behaviour of negative polarity items in that modal usage does not occur in straightforward assertive contexts and does not present what *need* and *dare* evoke as actually existing events. The problem is to relate the modal uses of *need* and *dare* to other categories of NPIs and to uncover the reasons why such usage only makes sense in non-assertive contexts.

In Duffley [4: 224] it is argued that the modal use of *dare* contrasts semantically with its non-modal usage in that whereas the modal use evokes the notion of there being certain risks which call into question the very possibility of daring (19), non-modal use involves either the action of going ahead and doing something in the face of certain risks (20) or the state of possessing sufficient courage to do so (21):

(19) The genesis of human life is a sacrosanct domain which dare not be invaded by human hands or 'rationalized', that is, subjected to utilitarian considerations. (De Valk [2: 10])

(20) ...he stood near the sweet-smelling stall and dared to pat her muzzle. (Brown U. Corpus [1: K06 1480 3])

(21) He felt it would be best to pop the question while he still dared to put it to her.

The relation between these two senses is summarized by the following table:

Modal <i>dare</i>	Full verb <i>dare</i>
What conditions whether an action itself or state of daring can exist: the risks attendant upon the action envisaged not being prohibitively high.	The realization or existence of the daring
What makes daring possible, the conceivability of daring.	The reality of an action or state of daring.
The possibility of the subject possessing or exercising daring and, consequently, the possibility of the subject of <i>dare</i> realizing the infinitive's event at all.	

As for *need*, the same sort of contrast obtains. The full verb use evokes the reality of the existence of a *need* itself:

(22) I need to take a break.

The modal use of *need*, on the other hand, focusses on whether the conditions necessary for the constitution of a real need are fulfilled. This seems to occur in three forms: (1) referring to whether an external authority has asked for something to be done or whether sufficient reasons exist to give rise to a real need to act (23)–(24); (2) judging whether some cause exists which would make some event fated to occur (25); (3) weighing whether the facts of the case make it necessary to conclude that a given proposition is true (26).

(23) Oh, he needn't bother.

(24) "Oh, I doubt if we need get there before half past," he replied... [6: 98]

(25) Your mother need never find out.

(26) He may be there, but he needn't be.

The relation between the modal and full verb uses of *need* can be depicted in a similar way to that describing the two uses of *dare*:

Modal <i>need</i>	Full verb <i>need</i>
What conditions whether a real need must be posited as existing: the impossibility of dispensing with some action due to the will of an authority or the weight of the reasons for doing it; the impossibility of conceiving something as not happening or not being true.	The actual state of need itself.
What makes a need recognizable, the conceivability of the existence of need.	The reality of the existence of need.

The necessity of positing the subject to be in a state of needing to perform the infinitive's event and, consequently, the necessity of the subject realizing the event at all.

The analysis of *need* and *dare* sketched above allows one to show the semantic relation between these two verbs and the modal auxiliaries *may*, *can*, *will*, *shall* and *must*, and, consequently to explain why *need* and *dare* show the morphosyntactic behaviour of modals in certain uses. In modal usage these verbs do not evoke the reality of daring or needing but merely whether the conditions necessary for daring or needing to exist are fulfilled. This makes *need* and *dare* into verb forms which evoke potentiality rather than reality and so places them on the same level as the modals. *Need* is related to *must* as involving a state of potentiality due to which the infinitive's event is viewed from the perspective of its necessity, though *need* and *must* envisage different aspects of this necessity (Duffley [31]). *Dare* is related to *can* as denoting a state of potentiality due to which the infinitive's event is seen from the standpoint of its possibility.

This peculiar behaviour of *need* and *dare* shows that the morphosyntactic behaviour of the modal auxiliaries themselves obeys semantic rather than formal principles; when *need* and *dare* approach the modals semantically, they also occur with some or all of the morphological and syntactic characteristics of these auxiliaries. One question which remains to be explored, however, is whether this behaviour is relatable in any principled way to the behaviour of other elements which have an affinity for non-assertive contexts.

4. Modality and Polarity

A first point which can be made in this respect is that the modal uses of *need* and *dare* with negation would seem to involve a deeper or more radical form of negation than negation with the full verb use of these verbs. This is particularly perceivable with *dare*, as can be seen by comparing (27) and (28):

(27) He dared not interrupt the boss during the meeting.

(28) He didn't dare to interrupt the boss during the meeting.

While (28) is either a description of what the person referred to thought of doing but did not do, or asserts that he did not have the daring needed to perform this event, (27) negates the very conditions necessary for daring to exist and so presents interrupting the boss as something viewed by the subject as strictly impossible because of the enormity of the risks attendant upon its performance. Similarly with *need* in (29) and (30) below the negative modal use seems to preclude any possibility of any form of a need, while the negation of the full verb produces a more factual, descriptive statement that no concrete need to perform the event exists:

(29) You needn't come to the next meeting.

(30) You don't need to come to the next meeting.

Where the full verb construction above simply suggests that the item requiring the hearer's presence has been taken off the agenda, the more absolute negation involved in the modal use may create impressions either of benevolent authority ('don't worry, there is really no need at all to come') or of haughty dispensation ('we have absolutely no need of your presence at all').

These impressions suggest that the modal uses of *need* and *dare* can be compared in certain respects to the use of expressions denoting minimal amounts in order to strengthen the force of negation. In cases such as (31), the speaker achieves the effect of an absolute negation by negating the actualization of an idealized absolute minimal case:

(31) He didn't lift a finger to help me.

Since the minimal form of realization of an event is the condition for all the other forms of realization of that event, by negating it one excludes all conceivable forms of realization of the event in question. With *need* and *dare*, it would appear that the speaker implies the non-existence of need or daring by negating the minimal form of existence which need and daring can have, namely their existence as possibilities, e.g., as things for which merely the conditions for existence are fulfilled. Negation thus bears not just on the existence of need or daring themselves, but on the very conditions necessary for need or daring to exist. By negating the conditions necessary for daring or need to exist, one excludes the existence of any conceivable form of the daring or need required in order for the event expressed by the infinitive to have a claim to actualization.

The form of negation just described involves backing up into the semantic domain occupied by the modals, which discuss the basic forms which the potentiality for some event can take. Thus, if even the conditions for the existence of the least little need for an event's actualization do not exist, any necessity for this event's occurrence is cancelled out. Similarly if the conditions for even the minimal willingness of the subject to face the risks involved in performing some action are not fulfilled, all possibility of the realization of that event by that subject is negated. This "upstream" application of negation or interrogation to call into question the conditions for the existence of something so fundamental to an event's claim on existence as need or daring can therefore be shown to be related to other processes at work with the class of items designated as having negative polarity. The difference between *need* and *dare*, on the one hand, and an expression such as *lift a finger*, on the other, lies in the nature of what is negated or questioned. In the latter case, the realization of a gesture construed as representative of a minimal effort is negated in order to emphasise the totality of the absence of effort on the part of the person concerned, this action being conceived in an indefinite mode as a mere possibility. In the former, the most basic conditions necessary for a need to exist or for an act requiring daring to be performed are negated, thereby negating any form of necessity for the event or any possibility of its performance by a given subject; again, no actual event is envisaged, only its eventuality.

The end result of obtaining a more absolute form of negation is thus similar in both cases. However the means used to obtain this result are different: in one case a minimal form of actualization is negated; in the other, it is the very possibility of existence of the event which is denied. In addition, the motivation for obtaining a more absolute form of negation does not seem to be the same in both cases: with minimal amount expressions, the goal appears to be to strengthen negation; with *need* and *dare*, it is rather to negate or question the possibility or necessity of the event expressed by the infinitive following *need* and *dare*. The relation between these two cases could perhaps best be summed up by a diagram. Since *lifting a finger* is representative of the minimal effort that can be made by a human being, negating it cancels out any form of effort at all:

lift a finger	do more than lift a finger
CONDITION	REALITY DEPENDENT ON THIS CONDITION

In a similar way, negation with modal *need* and *dare* bears not on the reality of need or daring but on the existence of the conditions necessary for need or daring to exist:

CONDITIONS FOR DARING OR NEED TO EXIST	EXISTENCE OF DARING OR NEED
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Negating the conditions cancels out the existence of any form of daring or need by saying that the latter are utterly inconceivable.

5. Further considerations

One question that arises is why English employs this more absolute form of negation, which involves applying the negative notion to the conditions necessary for what the verb denotes to exist, only with the verbs *need* and *dare*. In other words, why does one not find uses of the type illustrated in (32) below to evoke absolute absence of want, for example, by negating the existence of any condition(s) necessary for wanting to exist?

(32) *You wantn't eat so much.

The answer to this question would seem to lie in the very basic nature of needing and daring themselves as things that are extremely fundamental requirements for another event to exist. Indeed, an event can be seen as having no claim on existence at all if no form of need for its occurrence exists; as regards events which require daring on the part of their potential agent for their performance, if the proportion between the risks foreseen and the subject's courage is such that the minimal conditions for daring are not felt to be fulfilled, then the event can only be represented as impossible for that particular subject. Consequently, it would seem to be because the speaker wants to strike at the existence of even something as fundamental for the existence of the infinitive's event as need or daring that he questions or negates the existence of the conditions necessary for need or daring themselves to exist.

The fact that full verb usage of *need* and *dare* is construed with the *to* infinitive shows that daring and need are indeed conceived as things which lead to or call for the actualization of the infinitive's event (see Duffley [5: 16-21]). This would explain why the verb *risk* does not manifest the modal-like behaviour observed with *dare* in non-assertive contexts. The former is followed by a gerundive direct object, a construction which merely represents the complement's event as that which is risked, and not as something whose realization is dependent upon the prior realization of an act of audacity (or the prior possession of sufficient audacity), as in the case of *dare*.

Another point that arises is why modal uses of *need* and *dare* should be restricted to negatively polarized contexts, while the other modals, which also refer to the conditions necessary for the existence of an event, are not so restricted in their distribution. A first hypothesis could be that since *need* and *dare* also have a non-modal use, the distributional restrictions on their modal use is a strategy limiting potential ambiguities. However, this hypothesis must be abandoned in view of the French verb of necessity *devoir*, which also has both modal and non-modal uses without being submitted in the latter case to distributional restrictions comparable to those on English modal *need*. A possible solution to this problem may lie in the fact that the verbs *need* and *dare* evoke notions which are inherently actual and positive but which are so fundamental to the existence of other events that, when negated or questioned, they can be construed as involving negation or questioning of the necessity or possibility of these events. The core modals on the other hand are inherently non-actual in meaning, and so do not have to be negated in order to be situated on the level of potentiality. The type of meaning which they possess does however lay certain restrictions on their uses which resemble those characteristic of the distribution of negative polarity items in some ways. Regarding *can* and *will*, it has been observed (Palmer [21, 22]) that the past-tense form of these modals is not used when the speaker wishes to express the actuality of the infinitive form's event: *be able to* or *agree to* are used in such cases rather than the modals:

(33) *After trying for two hours, he could finally get the car door open and drive home.

(34) After trying for two hours, he was finally able to get the car door open and drive home.

(35) *I asked him to do it and he would.

(36) I asked him to do it and he agreed to.

If the context is negative, however, the modal auxiliary can be used:

(37) He tried for two hours, but he couldn't get his car door open.

(38) I asked him to do it, but he wouldn't.

It is noteworthy that the corresponding verbs in French show no such restriction:

(39) Après avoir essayé pendant deux heures, il a finalement pu ouvrir la portière de sa voiture et retourner à la maison. ((33))

(40) Je lui ai demandé de m'accompagner et il a bien voulu le faire. ((35))

This shows one manifestation of the special sensitivity which English seems to have to the non-actual nature of its modals (other manifestations include the absence of *-s* ending, their ability to denote *irrealis* outside of *if*-clauses, and their construal with the bare infinitive, as noted in Duffley ([3: 79-80])). The special status of the modals in English explains why the conceiving of *need* and *dare* as pure potentialities for other events (i.e., with a conceptual status equivalent to that of the modals) precludes the assertion of the existence of need and daring as realities in their own right.

These points illustrate the particular difficulty of the study of the problem under discussion in this paper, given that it affects only a small set of items. This poses a problem since linguistic investigation rests on the comparison of data, and only a comparative enterprise applied to a large base of data can ensure the full plausibility of correlations drawn between distinct properties of linguistic units. In the present case, it is difficult to establish with a high level of certainty why in English only *need* and *dare* have modal interpretations aside from their non-modal ones, and why they have a distribution limited to polarized contexts. Since one's first concern must be to explain what does exist and not what does not, we have focussed on seeking to grasp in greater depth the workings of these two verbs in modern English. It is to be hoped that further data from other forms of English—social, geographical, historical varieties—may help researchers to understand better the nature of the phenomenon described here on a broader plane.

6. Conclusion

In any case, we hope to have shown that *need* and *dare* do share certain common traits with some types of negative polarity items; more specifically with expressions evoking minimal amounts. With expressions of this latter type, the negation of the absolute minimum conceivable produces a strengthening of negation, with no room at all being conceded to the actualisation of the negated event. *Need* and *dare* have also been shown to involve a more radical form of negation in their modal uses. Here, however, it is the minimal conditions required for the existence of need or daring which are negated rather than the actuality of the need or daring themselves. This has the consequence of negating the necessity or riskability of the event expressed by the infinitive following *need* or *dare*. It has been argued that that this type of construal occurs with *need* and *dare* because they evoke things which are extremely fundamental to the existence of other events, so that negating or calling into question need or daring can be tantamount to negating or calling into question the very necessity or possibility of another event which depends for its existence on the existence of need or daring.

7. References

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