Corpus research into *Some* and *Any*

with implications for pedagogical grammar description and teacher education

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Overview

• Descriptions of *some* and *any* in popular pedagogical grammars

• A comparison with evidence from the *Oxford English Corpus*
  ⇒ in negative clauses
  ⇒ in affirmative clauses after implicitly negative words and phrases
  ⇒ in affirmative yes-no questions and other non-assertive clause types

• What does this mean for learners of English?
  ⇒ findings from the *Cambridge Learner Corpus*
A COMPREHENSIVE GRAMMAR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Rodolph Quirk
Sidney Greenbaum
Geoffrey Leech
Jan Svartvik

THE CAMBRIDGE GRAMMAR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Rodney Huddleston
Geoffrey K. Pullum

LONGMAN GRAMMAR OF SPOKEN AND WRITTEN ENGLISH

Angela Downing
and Philip Locke

English Grammar
A University Course
Second Edition
Some in Negative Clauses

a standard grammar book view

Not normally possible after the negator (e.g. not, never) except:

→ **Contrastive use** – *some, but not all/others* - e.g. “He didn't reply to SOME of my letters”.

→ **External metalinguistic negation** - e.g. “He didn’t say SOME British people, he said some English people”.
The main uses of *some* after *not*:

evidence from the *Oxford English Corpus*

certain people or things - e.g.

- “But the stats sheet *doesn't show some things* like ... the finishing skills of Woewodin and Did-ak.”

a certain amount - e.g.

- “We did not locate *some of our group* at all that day.”

contrastive use - e.g.

- “I don't know some of them as well as others.”
Also, emphatic negation (with emotive noun phrases)

Intrinsically Pejorative NP - e.g.
• “I want to listen to the roar of the engines .. I don't want some poxy music over the top.”

Contextually Pejorative NP - e.g.
• “I didn't need some counsellor. I needed my mom.”

Positive NP for irony - e.g.
• “I haven't got some amazing new job lined up ... I [just] no longer find it either satisfying or interesting to sit in long meetings.”

Some appears in emphatic negation in ALL types of negative context-rhetorical questions, implicit negatives etc.
Multi-negative patterns:
a problem area

Patterns where negative elements cancel each other out:

Negative matrix + negative subordinate clause - e.g.
• “That *doesn’t* mean (..) that we *don’t* have *some* purpose.”

Implicit negative inside a negative verb phrase - e.g.
• “I *don’t mind* you giving me *some* constructive criticism.”

Some set phrases have a strong association with *some*:

I *couldn’t resist*/not afraid to*/doesn’t hurt to* etc.
Grammar books and implicit negatives

e.g. without/little/few/hardly/refuse/deny/before - clause

• Most say implicit negatives are used with any.

• Some (e.g. Hewings, 1999) say some is possible (but no distribution details).
Some with implicit negatives: evidence from the Oxford English Corpus

- A much wider range of implicit negatives.
- Usually possible with same range of meanings as in straight negatives.
- Different types of implicit negatives behave differently:
  - *some* is very rare after most limiting adverbs and quantifiers
    - Few of the landscapes had any people in them.
    - A commoner had hardly any chance to climb up the social ladder.
  - pattern specific uses in some cases- e.g *before some/any* and *without some/any*. 
Before... some, and before... any

*Before some*..... is used in “factual” before clauses, to sequence events or discourse and to describe imminent or inevitable future actions:

• “The car was seen being driven erratically before it collided with some bins.”
• “Before we talk about some of the things he discussed, we’ll first mention ...”
• “It was only a matter of time before I let some of the feelings out.”

*Before any .....* is used in “Counterfactual” before clauses to mean not until ..... or when...not:

• “We will fully assess the Government's response, before we make any decision.”
• “Remembering complicated equations and dates before you have answered any questions is a lot easier than trying to remember them after you have answered half of the test questions.

Phraseology:
• Only a matter of time before+SOME
• A long time before/Long before+ANY

Difficult area: *before some* and *any* to express avoidance or prevention. See handout.
Negative and implicitly negative *some*: just for advanced learners?

- Distinction between total negation ("not doing any") and partial negation ("not doing some") is basic. Students must be able to express both ideas.

- Main uses at lower levels: certain, certain amount and "some but not all".

- Other uses at higher levels – e.g. emphatic negation and multi-negative patterns.
Grammar books and yes/no questions

• _Any_ is the usual form
• _Some_ indicates positive expectations/attitudes, especially in offers and requests - e.g.
  
  Can I have some sugar, please?
yes/no questions: evidence from the *Oxford English Corpus*

*Any* is used in delicate face-saving offers and requests – e.g.

“Excuse me, do you need any help?”
“Could I have a copy of any of that documentation?”
Learners and the *some*/*any* distinction: Common problems as evidenced in the *Cambridge Learner Corpus*

Conditionals – e.g.

- “If you have *some* ANY problem with the accounts ask her”

- “It would be desirable if the person had *any* SOME experience in the real estate field.”

Questions – e.g.

- “Could you please give me *any* SOME directions?”

- “Is there *some* ANY kind of possibility for you to visit both schools?”
Common problems cont’d

Negatives and Implicit Negatives – e.g.

• “You shouldn't buy your study materials in any shops”

• “It prevents any diseases.”

Affirmative Sentences – e.g.

• “I would like to apologize to you for some ANY trouble.”

• “I hope my comments can be of any SOME help.”
Towards a new pedagogical description

- Drawing on evidence from the *Oxford English Corpus* and the *Cambridge Learner Corpus*.

- Giving more importance to semantic and pragmatic meaning and less to clause type distribution.

- Introducing lexical phrases with *some* and *any* as a complement to the grammatical description.

- Employing a *prototype/fuzzy grammar* approach: a partially simplified but ACCURATE prototype at lower levels; refinement of prototype at higher levels.

Approach must fit learners and teaching context.
Approach

• grammar practice: contextualized, personalized and reflective.

• Use of data-driven learning activities if they suit teaching/learning.

• teacher training: awareness-raising through data-driven activities.
Conclusion: «pan para hoy, hambre para mañana»

Complex rules are learnt gradually over time.

Some descriptive simplification may be necessary for lower level learners,

BUT

There’s no place at any point for fundamentally inaccurate rules such as those that grammar books provide for key aspects of the *some/*any distinction.
Thanks for listening!
References


