On the negative polarity sensitive indefinite determiner nakar ‘any’ in Faroese

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Abstract:
This paper reports on fieldwork undertaken during the NORMS dialect workshop in the Faroe Islands in August 2008. I present and discuss findings from a questionnaire study of the negative polarity sensitive indefinite determiner nakar ‘any.’ The questionnaire was constructed on the basis of the findings in Lindstad (1999) for the Norwegian polarity sensitive determiner noen ‘any’. The results indicate that Faroese nakar has a distribution that by and large mimics that of noen. This distribution is also very similar to that of Danish nogen ‘any’ and Icelandic nokkur ‘any,’ but differs considerably from Swedish någon ‘any.’ I did not find any dialectal variation in the distribution of nakar across licensing contexts, only minor variation at the individual level.

1. Introduction

Polarity sensitivity, and in particular the distribution of negative polarity items (NPIs), has been a fruitful field for the study of the syntax-semantics interface at least since Klima (1964). A polarity item is a lexical item with a restricted distribution:

(1) Polarity item (adapted from Giannakidou 1998: 17)
   
   A polarity item is an expression whose distribution is limited by sensitivity to some semantic property of the context of appearance.

   Typical examples of NPIs are indefinites of the any-type, as in (2a), and so called “minimizer” DPs, as in (2b). In (2) and throughout the paper, the licensor (or trigger) for the NPI is rendered in bold, while the NPI is in italics:

   (2)  
   a. I have *(not) seen anybody there.  
   b. He has *(not) lifted a finger to help her.

   The examples in (2) are ungrammatical if negation is removed. Polarity sensitivity in this case thus refers to the negative-affirmative distinction. As will become evident below, ‘negative’ is too strong to describe the class of licensors for NPIs: Klima (1964) introduced the term ‘affective’ to describe NPI licensing contexts. See Giannakidou (1998) for discussion. Typically, a word or phrase is an NPI if it cannot be in the

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1 I would like to thank the participants at the NVLN Workshop in Tórshavn for feedback on my talk before the fieldwork. Thanks also to all the informants.
scope of an episodic operator in an affirmative sentence. A sentence is episodic if it denotes exactly one event (Giannakidou 1998), or more exactly “a finite number of specific events” (Mathew and Katz 2009).

The “semantic property” mentioned in (1) has been approached in various ways in the literature. Ladusaw (1979) regards downward entailment (DE) as the crucial ingredient that NPI-licensing contexts have to satisfy. A typical NPI-licenser like negation is DE because it reverses the entailment pattern in sentences like John has eaten an apple, which entails John has eaten fruit (reasoning from sets to supersets). If these sentences are negated, the latter entails the former (reasoning from sets to subsets). Linebarger (1980) argues that the immediate scope of negation (at Logical Form) is the crucial restriction on the occurrence of NPIs. Not infrequently, NPIs may be indirectly licensed, entering the immediate scope of negation via a pragmatic implicature. Progovac (1994) takes a syntactic view on the issue, and concludes that being within the local syntactic binding domain of sentential negation is the crucial condition placed on NPIs.

Various refinements of these views have been pursued. Van der Wouden (1997) develops Ladusaw’s DE approach, while Giannakidou (1998) argues that (non-)veridicality (i.e., the (non-)preservation of truth relations among sentences) is the appropriate concept for explaining the distribution of NPIs vs. linguistic expression with a free(r) distribution. It should be kept in mind that polarity items come in many flavors, and many of the references cited above do not converge on what they consider an NPI, which sometimes depends on the analysis chosen. I will not dig into this issue here, but refer to the works cited for discussion.

The purpose of this article is twofold. I first describe an investigation of the distribution of NPI indefinites in Faroese. Second, the outcome of this investigation is compared to the situation in Norwegian, Icelandic, Danish and Swedish. I close with a brief discussion of the special property that NPI indefinites in Scandinavian have, i.e., only indefinites of the any-type in the singular appear to be polarity sensitive.

2. Background

2.1. Faroese

Holmberg and Platzack (1995: 3) consider Faroese to be representative of the ‘Insular Scandinavian’ languages, that is, grouping together with Icelandic (and Old Scandinavian). This means that Faroese shares some characteristics with Icelandic, for example, “a rich system of subject-verb agreement morphology and case morphology” (ibid.) that set the two apart.
from the ‘Mainland Scandinavian’ languages Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, which do not have these characteristics.\(^2\)

### 2.2. Indefinite pronouns and determiners

Turning to indefinite pronouns and determiners, the Faroese pair *onkur* ‘some(body)’ and *nakar* ‘any/some’ encode roughly the same difference as *some/any* in English (Thráinsson et al. 2004: 128):

(3) **Sentential negation**

Eg havi íkki fingið nakað/*okkur* kort enn.

*I have not received any/some card yet*

‘I haven’t received any card yet.’

(4) **Yes/no questions**

a. Er *nakar* inni? (≈*anybody*)

   *is anybody in*

   ‘Is anybody home?’

b. Er *onkur* inni? (≈*somebody*)

   *is somebody in*

   ‘Is somebody home?’

(5) **Non-negative context**

* Her hevur *nakar* verið. (≈*any*)

   *here has any been*

   ‘Anybody has been here.’

According to Sandøy (1992), *onkur*, together with a third indefinite pronoun *summur* ‘some’, entails existence of its referent. This means that it cannot be under the scope of sentential negation. As *nakar* is not committed to existence of its referent, it can be negated. This is quite close to an explanation in terms of veridicality (Giannakidou 1998), see §1. A similar state of affairs holds for the pronoun *somme* ‘some (plural)’ in certain Norwegian dialects, where *somme* cannot be negated, while *noen* ‘any/some’ can be (see Sandøy 1996 for discussion and examples).

### 2.3. Why study indefinite pronouns?

Considering the vast amount of literature that exists on the subject, little has been done on polarity sensitivity in the Scandinavian languages, and I would dare to claim that nothing has been written on the subject for Faroese. In and of itself, this warrants investigation.

\(^2\) The terms Insular and Mainland Scandinavian are attributed to Einar Haugen (ibid.).
Furthermore, little is known about dialectal variation with respect to negative polarity. Does the distribution of NPIs vary systematically from dialect to dialect (in the geographic sense of ‘dialect’), or does its distribution follow the division between ‘languages’ in the more political sense of the word?

Polarity sensitivity appears to be very deeply entrenched in the grammar, and disagreement on the grammaticality of a given NPI in a licensing context is usually in the details. Differences in what counts as an NPI indefinite in a given language usually follow from major differences in the grammar, such as an entirely different negation system. See Haspelmath (1997) for a typological study of indefinites.

Norwegian differs from Faroese in that Norwegian does not have a pair corresponding to nakar/onkur—Norwegian noen encodes both functions. Norwegian noen is negatively polar only in the singular. This holds also for Icelandic nokkur ‘any’ (Jónsson 2008), and Danish nogen ‘any’ (Jensen 1999, Jensen and Lindstad 2001). Thus, it would be of interest to figure out whether nakar also fits into this picture, or whether it aligns with Swedish någon ‘any,’ which has a wider distribution (Nivre 2002). I get back to a more detailed description of these items below.

Negation systems in the Scandinavian languages are basically very similar, so one would not expect to find any big differences with respect to NPI indefinites.

3. The study
As mentioned, no systematic investigation of polarity sensitivity has been carried out for Faroese. For this study, I used a questionnaire containing 22 sentences with the determiner nakar in the singular (in one of its inflected variants) in the 14 contexts listed in (6) below. The sentences were translations (some of them simplified) of Norwegian examples found in a text corpus, where all contexts were shown to license Norwegian polarity sensitive noen (Lindstad 1999).³

In addition, the questionnaire had three sentences with nakar in non-negative contexts, two of which were direct adaptations from Nivre (2002), in order to test whether nakar can also behave like Swedish någon (see below). The third of these examples had nakran tjóv ‘any burglar (ACC)’ as the direct object in an episodic sentence.

The sentences were put in random order before being presented to the informants. I (attempted to) read the sentences while informants looked at them on the computer screen, and informants were then asked whether the

³ Thanks to Jógvan í Lon Jacobsen for translating the examples.
relevant sentence was good, bad, or questionable. Roughly, based in part on how they responded, the sentences were given one of the evaluations ‘*’ (unacceptable), ‘?’ (questionable) or ‘✓’ (acceptable). In most instances, this was unproblematic. 16 informants participated, two in Tórshavn, five in Fuglafjørður (Eysturoy), five in Klaksvík (Borðoy), and four in Tvøroyri (Suðuroy).

(6)  
   a. Sentential negation (‘local negation’)  
   b. Sent. neg in superordinate clause (‘non-local negation’)  
   c. Negative indefinite  
   d. Negative adverbs  
   e. Negative preposition uttan ‘without’  
   f. Restriction of superlative  
   g. Restriction of comparative  
   h. Antecedent of conditional  
   i. Yes/no question  
   j. Constituent question  
   k. ‘Negative’ predicates  
   l. ‘Negative’ complementisers  
   m. Restriction of universal quantifier  
   n. Focus particle bara ‘only’

4. The negative polarity sensitive indefinite determiner in Faroese

Examples (7)-(21) lists all sentences (with specification of context) in the questionnaire I used in the survey. The trigger and the NPI were not singled out with bold and italicized letters in the questionnaire (see comment above (2)), neither was the information regarding licensing context.

(7) Sentential negation  
eg havi ikki sæð nakran bil
I have not seen any car
‘I haven’t seen any car.’

(8) Sentential negation in superordinate clause  
hann heldur ikki at tað er nökur grund til at lata vera
he thinks not that it is any reason topar, topinf let be
‘He doesn’t think that there is any reason to let it be.’

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4 To save space, some examples with negative adverbs have been removed in (10).
(9) **Negative indefinite**
eingin kann geva nakra góða frágreiðing um tað
*nobody can give any good explanation on that*
‘Nobody can give any good explanation for it.’

(10) **Negative adverbs**
   a. tað er *neyvan* nökur grund til at...
      *it is hardly any reason to*<sub>Part</sub> *that…*
      ‘That is hardly any reason for…’
   b. eg havi *ongantið* havt nakra grund til at klaga
      *I have never had any reason to*<sub>Part</sub> *to<sub>Inf</sub> complain*
      ‘I’ve never had any reason to complain.’
   c. Norra er *sjáldan* nakar trendsetari innan móta
      *Norway is seldom any trendsetter within fashion*
      ‘Norway is seldom any trendsetter in fashion.’
   d. filmurí er *langt frá* nökur vanlukka
      *the movie is far from any disaster*
      ‘The movie is far from any disaster.’

(11) **Negative preposition** uttan ‘*without*’
   a. uttan nakra serlíga grund…
      *without any particular reason…*
      ‘Without any particular reason…’
   b. uttan at tey tóku nakra avgerð, föru tey heim
      *without that they took any decision, travelled they home*
      ‘Without taking any decision, they went home.’

(12) **Restriction of superlative**
teý funnu tað *stórsta* vindeygað í nakra kirku
    *they found the biggest window in any church*
    here í landinum
    *here in the country*
    ‘They found the biggest window in any church in this country.’

(13) **Restriction of comparative**
   a. tað er *meir enn* nakar vanligur löntakari hevur fingið
      *that is more than any regular employee has received*
      ‘That’s more than any other regular employee has received.’
   b. hon er fyri mær *vakra* *enn* nökur onnur kvinna
      *she is for me more beautiful than any other woman*
      ‘She is more beautiful to me than any other woman.’
(14) **Antecedent of conditional**

*um* tey hava nakran møygleika fyri at saksøkja okcum, …

*if they have any reason for to sue us, …*

‘If they have any reason to sue us, …’

(15) **Yes/no question**

hevur tú lisið nakra bók í seinastuni?

*have you read any book in latest*

‘Have you read any books lately?’

(16) **Wh-question (constituent question)**

*hvør* hevur nakran áhuga í tí?

*who has any interest in that*

‘Who has any interest in that?’

(17) **“Negative” predicates**

a. hann **ivast** í um sportbilar eru blivnir

*he doubts in that sport.cars has become*

nakar nýggjur trendur

*any new trend*

‘He doubts that sports cars have become any new trend.’

b. hann **avvísir** at tað er nakar vandi

*he rejects that it is any danger*

‘He rejects that there is any danger.’

(18) **“Negative” complementiser áðrenn ‘before’**

hann vil hava fleiri upplýsingar áðrenn hann tekur

*he will have more information before he takes*

nakra avgerð

*any decision*

‘He wants more information before he takes any decision.’

(19) **Restriction of universal quantifier**

øll sum hava nakra gleði av tí kunnu fáa ís

*everyone as has any pleasure of it can have ice*

‘Everyone who has any pleasure from it can have an ice cream.’

(20) **Focus adverb bara ‘only’**

*bara* tveir av gestunum høvdu nakra gleði av døgurðanum

*only two of the.guests had any joy of the.dinner*

‘Only two of the guests actually enjoyed the dinner.’
A few comments are in order. Sentential negation, sentential negation in a superordinate clause, and the antecedent of conditionals were accepted as licensing contexts for nakar by all informants, while all informants rejected the non-negative contexts. For the remaining negative contexts, the acceptance rate was between 80 and 95 percent, roughly. The exception was restriction of superlatives, which was accepted by a low 31 percent of the informants. I suspect this is because the sentence I used was not particularly well constructed.
Table 1: Pattern of acceptance for nakar ‘any’ in different contexts.

For the negative preposition uttan ‘without,’ three informants rejected the example with the NPI embedded in a finite complement, while all accepted the NPI as a DP complement to the preposition. All rejections of the negative predicates as licensors were with the verb ivast ‘doubt’; all informants accepted avvísa ‘deny’.

When an informant did not accept a particular example, s/he almost always suggested (sometimes with encouragement) that the plural of nakar, or either onkur ‘some’ or the indefinite article, could felicitously replace nakar. Another option sometimes mentioned was to simply remove the determiner.

I did not find any evidence of dialectal variation for nakar. No systematic pattern among the licensing contexts that the informants accepted or rejected in the four places we visited (Tórshavn, Fuglafjörður, Klaksvík, and Tvøroyri) emerged in the data. For example, the informants in Klaksvík didn’t systematically reject nakar in superlatives as opposed to the informants in Fuglafjörður. The limited variation I found appears to be at the individual level. As a first conclusion, then: the distribution of NPIs (in Faroese) does not vary dialectally.

Second, the investigation showed that the determiner nakar in the singular most clearly is an NPI. As we will see in the next section, it patterns more or less like its Norwegian counterpart noen ‘any.’ I turn directly to a comparison of nakar with similar indefinites in the other Scandinavian languages.
6. Polarity sensitive indefinites in the Scandinavian languages

This data-heavy section can be regarded as a first attempt, based on existing literature, at an inventory of NPI indefinites in the Scandinavian languages.

6.1. Norwegian noen ‘any’

The singular determiner noen ‘any’ in Norwegian is an NPI. With a few exceptions ((22), (26), (29), (30), and (34)), the following examples are either attested or modified versions of attested examples (Lindstad 1999). I have found examples with noen in all the contexts listed, except for the restriction of the universal quantifier. The problem with listing the attested examples here is plainly the fact that they are usually very long.

(22) Clausemate sentential negation
Jeg har ikke sett noen bil.
*I have not seen any car
‘I haven’t seen any car.

(23) Sentential negation in a superordinate clause
Han kan ikke se at det er noen grunn til å la være.
he can not see that there is any reason to let be
‘He cannot see that there is any reason to let it be.’

(24) Negative indefinite
Ingen kunne gi noen god forklaring på det.
nobody could give any good explanation on it
‘Nobody could give any good explanation for it.’

(25) Various ‘negative’ adverbs
a. Jeg vil gjenta at jeg aldri har hatt
I will repeat that I never have had
noen grunn til å drepe B.
any reason toPar, toInf let be
‘I repeat that I have never had any reason to kill B.’

b. Det er neppe noen fare for det.
it is hardly any danger for it
‘There is hardly any danger for that.’

c. Lille Norge er sjelden noen trendsetter i mote.
little Norway is seldom any innovator in fashion
‘Little Norway is seldom any innovator in fashion.’

d. Filmen er langtfra noen katastrofe.
the movie is far from any disaster
‘The movie is far from being any disaster.’
(25) e. **Hverken** regnet **eller** søla hadde **noen negativ effekt.**
    *Neither the rain nor the mud had any negative effect*
    ‘Neither the rain nor the mud had any negative effect.’

(26) **Complement of negative preposition uten ‘without’**
    a. **Uten** at de tok **noen avgjørelse**, gikk de hjem.
       *without that they took any decision*, went they home
       ‘Without taking any decision, they left.’
    b. **Uten** å **ta noen avgjørelse**, gikk de hjem.
       *without to take any decision*, went they home
       ‘Without taking any decision, they left.’
    c. **Uten** **noen spesiell grunn** gikk de til angrep.
       *without any specific reason went they to attack*
       ‘Without having any particular reason, they attacked.’

(27) **Restriction of superlative**
    De fant det **best** bevarte golvet fra **noen middelalderkirke**
    *they found the best kept floor from any medieval church*
    her i landet.
    *her in country.the*
    ‘They found the best kept floor of any medieval church in this country.’

(28) **Restriction of comparative**
    a. **For meg er hun** **vakrere enn noen annen kvinne.**
       *for me is she more beautiful than any other woman*
       ‘To me, she is more beautiful than any other woman.’
    b. **Det er mer enn noen vanlig lønnstaker** har fått.
       *that is more than any regular employee has become*
       ‘That’s more than any regular employee has become.’

(29) **Antecedent of conditional**
    a. **Har de noen interesse av å saksøke oss,**
       *have they any interest of Part to Inf sue us,*
       får de bare gjøre det.
       *get they just do it*
       ‘If they have any interest in suing us, just let them do it.’
    b. **Hvis de har noen interesse av det,**
       *if they have any interest of Part it,*
       får de bare gjøre det.
       *get they just do it*
       ‘If they have any interest in suing us, just let them do it.’
(30) Yes/no question
Har du lest noen bok i det siste?
‘Have you read any books recently?’

(31) Constituent question (wh-question)
Hvem har noen interesse av det?
‘Who has any interest in that?’

(32) “Negative” predicates
a. Han tviler på at det blir noen ny trend her.
   ‘He doubts it will become any new trend.’

   b. Noen tårevåt avskjed vil han frabe seg.
      ‘He will refrain from a tear-stained good-bye.’

   c. Han avviser at det er noen fare.
      ‘But he rejects that there is any danger.’

(33) “Negative” complementiser
Han trenger mer informasjon før han tar noen avgjørelse.
‘He needs more information before he makes any decision.’

(34) Restriction of universal quantifier
a. Enhver som har noen glede av det kan få en.
   ‘Everyone who will enjoy it may have one.’

   b. Alle som har noen glede av det kan få en.
      ‘Everyone who will enjoy it may have one.’

Since I did not find attested examples with enhver or alle licensing NPIs in Lindstad (1999), the examples in (34) are constructed (and checked with native speakers). This demonstrates the limitations of corpus studies, and the usefulness of having access to different data types that complement each other.

(35) Focus particle bare ‘only’
Bare 42 prosent av dem hadde noen glede av fradraget.
‘Only 42 per cent of them had any gain from the deduction.’
(36) **Affirmative episodic context**  
* Igår kveld så jeg noen tyv i hagen.  
  * ‘Last night, I saw any burglars in the garden.’

(36), the ungrammatical example, is of course constructed.

### 6.2. Swedish någon ‘any’

Swedish någon ‘any/some’ has a less restricted distribution than nakar and noen. Nivre (2002) discusses någon and argues that it is interpreted as English any in traditional NPI-licensing contexts like sentential negation (37) and yes/no-questions (38):

(37) **Sentential negation** (Nivre 2002)  
Han har inte gjort någon kaninbur.  
he has not made any rabbit.cage  
‘He hasn’t made a rabbit cage.’

(38) **Yes/no-question** (Nivre 2002)  
Fick de något kaffe?  
got they any coffee  
‘Did they get any coffee?’

Nivre (2002: 8) claims that någon is also compatible with conditional and comparative contexts. However, he goes on to show that någon can also appear felicitously in non-negative (i.e., upward entailing or veridical) contexts, but that this results in a different interpretation for the indefinite, namely as ‘some:’

(39) **Någon interpreted as some** (Nivre 2002)  
  a. Hon har köpt någon bil.  
  * she has bought some car  
  ‘She has bought some car.’

  b. Jag talade med någon medicinsk expert.  
  * I spoke with some medical expert  
  ‘I spoke with some medical expert.’

  c. Hon åt någon smörgås til lunch.  
  * she ate some sandwich for lunch  
  ‘She had some sandwich for lunch.’

  d. Jag fick prata med någon assistant eller (någon) sekreterare.  
  * I got talk with some assistant or (some) secretary  
  ‘I got to talk with some assistant or secretary.’
e. Jag läste i någon tidning att bensinpriset skulle gå upp.
   *I read in some newspaper that petrol price should go up*
   ‘I read in a/some newspaper that the petrol price was to rise.’

f. Hon skulle gå ut med någon överklasstönt.
   *She should go out with some upper class jerk*
   ‘She was to date some upper class jerk.’

g. Jag blev påkord av någon jävla idiot på cykel.
   *I was run over by some bloody idiot on bicycle*
   ‘I was run over by some bloody idiot on a bicycle.’

The examples in (39) are strictly ungrammatical with Norwegian noen. The interpretation of the indefinite determiner in these examples can be paraphrased as ‘some or other’ or as ‘some kind of.’ Nivre (2002) argues that it is the inability or unwillingness of the speaker to identify the referent that triggers the use of någon in these non-negative contexts.

6.3. Danish nogen ‘any’

The distribution of the Danish indefinite determiner nogen ‘any’ is similar to the distribution of Norwegian noen:

(40) *Sentential negation* (Nivre 2002)

   Hun mødte ikke nogen studerende.
   *She met not any student*
   ‘She didn’t meet any students.’

(41) *Yes/no-question* (Nivre 2002)

   *Mødte hun nogen studerende?*
   *met she any student*
   ‘Did she meet any student?’

(42) *Negative preposition* uden ‘without’ (Jensen and Lindstad 2001)

   John døde uden at se nogen bil.
   *John died without to_inf see any car*
   ‘John died without (ever) seeing any car.’

(43) *Complementiser før ‘before’* (Jensen and Lindstad 2001)

   John døde før han så nogen bil.
   *John died before he saw any car*
   ‘John died before (ever) seeing any car.’

(44) *wh-question* (Jensen and Lindstad 2001)

   *Hvem har set nogen student?*
   *who has seen any student*
   ‘Who has seen any student?’
6.4. Icelandic neinn ‘none’

In contrast to the Mainland Scandinavian languages, Icelandic has two series of indefinite determiners which are sensitive to negative polarity. These two determiners (neinn ‘none’ and nokkur ‘any/some’) differ with respect to the contexts that license them. Neinn is licensed in a subset of the contexts that license nokkur.

(47) **Negative adverb** (Jónsson 2008)

Jón þekkir varla neinn á Akureyri.
John knows hardly anyone in Akureyri

‘John hardly knows anyone in Akureyri.’

(48) **Negative indefinite** (Jónsson 2008)

Enginn hefur hafnað neinni hugmynd.
nobody has rejected any idea

‘Nobody has rejected any idea.’

(49) **Negative preposition** án þess að ‘without’ (Jónsson 2008)

Sumir nemendur fengu bókina
some students got the book

áð þess að borga neitt fyrir hana.
without paying anything for it

‘Some students got the book without paying anything for it.’

(50) **“Negative” predicates** (Jónsson 2008)

a. Ég efast um að neinn maður viti um þetta.
I doubt that any man knows about this

‘I doubt that any man knows about this.’
(50) b. Það er ólíklegt að neinum búðum verði lokað.
   *it is unlikely that any shops will be closed
   ‘It is unlikely that any shops will be closed.’

(51) Complementiser áður ‘before’ (Jónsson 2008)
   Þeir voru farnir áður en ég gat gert neitt.
   *they were gone before I could do anything
   ‘They were gone before I could do anything.’

(52) Yes/no question (Jónsson 2008)
   *Heldur þú að ég muni segja neinum manni frá þessu?
     think you that I will tell any man about this
     ‘Do you think I’ll tell any man about this?’

(53) Antecedent of conditional (Jónsson 2008)
   *Þú ert bjartsýnn ef þú heldur
     you are optimistic if you think
     að neinn hafi áhuga á þessu.
     that anyone has interest in this
     ‘You’re optimistic if you think anyone is interested in this.’

(54) Restriction of comparative (Jónsson 2008)
   *Ég elska þig meira en neinn getur ímyndað sér.
     I love you more than anyone can imagine self
     ‘I love you more than anyone can imagine.’

(55) Focus particle aðeins ‘only’ (Jónsson 2008)
   *Aðeins María á möguleika að vinna nein verðlaun.
     only Mary has chance to win any prizes
     ‘Only Mary has a chance of winning any prize.’

“Parasitic licensing” (by nokkur ‘any’) renders (52)-(55) grammatical:

(56) Yes/no questions (Jónsson 2008)
    Heldur þú að nokkur muni segja neinum frá þessu?
    think you that anyone will tell anyone about this
    ‘Do you think that anyone will tell anyone about this?’

(57) Antecedent of conditional (Jónsson 2008)
    Þú ert bjartsýnn ef þú heldur að nokkur muni gera neitt.
    you are optimistic if you think that anyone will do anything
    ‘You’re optimistic if you think that anyone will do anything.’

(58) Restriction of comparative (Jónsson 2008)
    Íg elska þig meira en nokkur getur elskað neinn.
    I love you more than anyone can love anyone
    ‘I love you more than anyone can love anyone.’
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(59) Focus particle aðeins ‘only’ (Jónsson 2008)
Aðeins Maria á nokkra möguleika að vinna nein verdlaun.
only Mary has any chances to win any prizes
‘Only Mary has any chance to win any prizes.’

6.5. Icelandic nokkur ‘any/some’

Like Danish nogen, Faroese nakar, and Norwegian noen, Icelandic nokkur is a negative polarity item in the singular (Jónsson 2008):

(60) Sentential negation (Jónsson 2008)
Hann öfundar ekki nokkurn mann.
he envies not any man
‘He doesn’t envy any man’

(61) Negative indefinite (Jónsson 2008)
Enginn hefur hafnað nokkurri hugmynd.
nobody has rejected any idea
‘Nobody has rejected any idea’

(62) Negative adverb (Jónsson 2008)
Jón þekkir varla nokkurn á Akureyri.
John knows hardly anyone in Akureyri
‘John hardly knows anyone in Akureyri’

(63) Negative preposition án þess að ‘without’ (Jónsson 2008)
Sumir nemendur fengu bókina
some students got the book
án þess að borga nokkuð fyrir hana.
without paying anything for it
‘Some students got the book without having to pay anything for it.’

(64) “Negative” predicates (Jónsson 2008)

a. Óg efast um að nokkur madur viti um þetta.
   I doubt that any man knows about this
   ‘I doubt that any man knows about this.’

b. Það er ólíklegt að nokkrum búðum verði lokað.
   it is unlikely that any shops will be closed
   ‘It is unlikely that any shops will be closed.’

(65) Complementiser áður ‘before’ (Jónsson 2008)
Þeir voru farnir áður en óg gat gert nokkuð.
they were gone before I could do anything
‘They were gone before I could do anything.’
(66) Yes/no question (Jónsson 2008)
Heldur þú að ég muni segja nokkrum manni frá þessu? 
think you that I will tell any person about this
‘Do you think I should tell anyone about this?’

(67) Antecedent of conditional (Jónsson 2008)
Þú ert bjartsýn ef þú heldur að nokkur hafi áhuga á þessu.
you are optimistic if you think that anyone has interest in this
‘You are optimistic if you think that anyone is interested in this.’

(68) Restriction of comparative (Jónsson 2008)
Ég elska þig meira en nokkur getur Ímyndað sér.
I love you more than anyone can imagine self
‘I love you more than anyone can imagine.’

(69) Focus particle aðeins ‘only’ (Jónsson 2008)
Aðeins María á möguleika að vinna nokkur verðlaun.
only Mary has a chance to win any prizes
‘Only Mary has a chance to win any prizes.’

7. Distribution summary

If we summarize the data in the last section, and combine them with the findings from the investigation in the Faroe Islands, the picture in Table 2 emerges. The cells with a black background indicate contexts which I do not have data for. A “+” indicates that the relevant context licenses the NPI parasitically (recall the contrast between (52)-(55) and (56)-(59) above).

For the Swedish examples, it can be assumed that någon is felicitous in all the contexts listed (see Nivre 2002 for discussion and an analysis). The grammaticality of neinn under sentential negation is inferred from the discussion in Jónsson (2008).

The clearest contrast among the various determiners holds between någon and all the others (the last row in the table). Second, neinn clearly stands out as more restricted in its distribution than the others.
8. Scandinavian ‘any’ and singular count nouns

Only the singular determiner noen, nogen, nokkur, and nakar (all ‘any’) appended to countable nouns is polarity sensitive in Norwegian, Danish, Icelandic and Faroese, respectively:

— An exception to this in Norwegian are expressions like (i):

(i)  Dette har i noen grad/utstrekning blitt ansett som et problem.
    this has in any degree/extent been viewed as a problem
    ‘To a certain degree/extent, this has been regarded a problem.’

A similar exception is found in Faroese (examples from Thráinsson et al. 2004, 128):

(ii)  a.  Hann búði har nokur ár.
      ‘He lived there a few years.’
   b.  Eg havi tikið nakar bokur við.
      ‘I took a few books with me.’
   c.  Teir fingu nakað av fiski.
      ‘They got some (a bit of) fish.’

Thráinsson et al. (ibid.) note that these exceptions holds for senses like ‘‘several, a few’ or ‘a little, a bit’.” This is clearly related to the Norwegian exceptions noted in (i).
(70) Han har *(ikke) noen bil.  
he has (not) any car  
‘He doesn’t have any car(s).’

(71) Jeg har *(ikke) læst nogen bog. (Jensen and Lindstad 2001)  
I have (not) read any book  
‘I haven’t have any book(s).’

(72) Hann öfundar *(ekki) nokkurn mann. (Jónsson 2008)  
he envies (not) any man  
‘He doesn’t envy any man.’

(73) Han har inte någon bil. / Han har någon bil.  
he has not any car / he has some car  
‘He doesn’t have any car(s).’ / ‘He has some (kind of) car.’

If the head noun car in (70) is plural, the example is fine without sentential negation:

(74) Han har (ikke) sett noen biler.  
he has (not) seen any/some cars  
‘He has (not) seen (any)/some cars.’

Also, mass nouns are fine with (a version) of the determiner noen outside of negative contexts:

(75) Jeg har (ikke) noe smør.  
I have (not) any/some butter  
‘I don’t have any butter/I have some butter.’

I will stick to distributional issues here, and not go into very specific detail about the semantic properties that distinguish any in the singular and the plural, just offering a few remarks. First, the interpretation of noen biler in (74), when negation is absent, is essentially ‘a few cars.’ This is in contrast to the interpretation of någon bil in (73), which can be paraphrased as ‘some kind of car’ or ‘some car or other.’ In Danish and Norwegian, this meaning can be expressed with the complex phrase en eller anden/en eller annen ‘one or other.’ Nivre (2002: 16) also notes that någon can be used as an “approximate numeral;” thus någon vecka ‘some week’ would mean something like “about a week.”

One obvious question with respect to the pattern is what status should be attributed to the role of the singular. It is often noted in the literature that polarity items--positive and negative--typically denote end points on pragmatic scales (see Giannakidou 1998 and van der Wouden 1997 for discussion). Negative polarity items frequently denote the lower endpoint on a scale. For example, consider the polarity status of so-called minimizer
DPs, as in (2b) above, where *lift a finger* is the least (i.e., nothing) one can to do help somebody.

It is obvious that one instance of a concept is closer to the endpoint on a quantificational scale than two or more instances. Thus, the fact the indefinite determiners *nakar*, *nogen*, *noen*, and *nokkur* are negatively polar only in the singular fits the pragmatic scale idea quite well. The problematic aspect of this is that, as far as I know, such a patterning of NPI indefinite determiners has not been reported for any other languages. Furthermore, it is questionable to which extent a morphological feature can affect polarity sensitivity. It remains to carve out the picture more clearly for the Scandinavian languages, and moreover it is of interest whether the described pattern connects with any other properties of the respective languages.

Another point that should be addressed is the fact that Swedish *någon* behaves considerably differently from its Danish, Faroese, Icelandic, and Norwegian counterparts *nogen*, *nakar*, *nokkur*, and *noen*. It could be that this is a matter of pure coincidence, and that Swedish has simply developed in a different direction than the other languages with respect to this phenomenon. Given that the languages are quite similar in many other major respects (word order, negation system, etc.), a full comparative study of the indefinite determiner systems of the Scandinavian languages, perhaps among the lines of Haspelmath (1997), might give rise to some ideas about where the source for the differences between the languages lies. This may also shed some light on the source of NPI *any*’s restriction to the singular, as discussed in the previous paragraph.

9. Conclusion and possibilities for future research

This questionnaire study of the indefinite singular determiner *nakar* ‘any’ in Faroese showed that it is a negative polarity item. No systematic dialectal variation in its distribution was found. I have shown that *nakar* behaves on a par with similar NPI singular indefinite determiners in Danish, Icelandic, and Norwegian, and that *nakar*--like its cognates in the relevant languages--contrasts with Swedish *någon* in its distribution.

To carve out a clearer picture of indefinites’ properties in the Scandinavian languages, the distinction between *nakar* and *onkur* in Faroese evidently needs further investigation, and a closer look at the distributional properties of *neinn* and *nokkur* in Icelandic is also essential.

Övdalian, which apparently has at least some) negative concord properties (Garbacz 2006, 2008), is another interesting case. Furthermore, a restricted variety of negative concord with *ikke aldri* ‘not never’ has been reported for the Nordreisa dialect in Northern Norway (Sollid 2005). This
is possibly due to Finnish influence. A detailed study of these languages/varieties might shed some further light on the properties of Scandinavian indefinite determiners.

References

