

# 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<sup>1</sup>

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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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.<sup>2</sup>

## 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 **ikki** fingið      nakað/\*okkurt      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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>3</sup> 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. negation 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 *nøkur grund* til at lata vera  
*he thinks not that it is any reason to<sub>Part</sub> to<sub>Inf</sub> let be*  
 ‘He doesn’t think that there is any reason to let it be.’

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<sup>4</sup> 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** nøkur grund til at...  
*it is hardly any reason to<sub>Part</sub> that...*  
 ‘That is hardly any reason for...’
  - b. eg havi **ongantíð** havt nakra grund til at klega  
*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. filmurin er **langt frá** nøkur vanlukka  
*the.movie is far from any disaster*  
 ‘The movie is far from any disaster.’
- (11) *Negative preposition uttan ‘without’*
- a. **uttan** nakra serliga grund...  
*without any particular reason...*  
 ‘Without any particular reason...’
  - b. **uttan** at tey tóku nakra avgerð, fóru tey heim  
*without that they took any decision, travelled they home*  
 ‘Without taking any decision, they went home.’
- (12) *Restriction of superlative*  
 tey funnu **tað størsta** vindeygað í nakrari kirkju  
*they found the biggest window in any church*  
 her 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 løntakari hefur 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 **vakrari enn** nøkur 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 móguleika* fyri at saksøkja okkum, ...  
*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.’

(21) *Non-negative contexts*

- a. í gjárvøldið sá eg *nakran* *tjóv* í garðinum  
*in last.night* *saw* *I* *any* *burglar* *in* *the.garden*  
 \*‘Yesterday, I saw any burglar in the garden.’
- b. hon hevur keypt *nakran* *bil*  
*she has bought* *any* *car*  
 \*‘She has bought any car.’
- c. eg las í nøkrum blaði  
*I read in any magazine*  
 at bensinprísurin skuldi hækka  
*that the.petrol.price should increase*  
 \*‘I read in any magazine that the petrol price will increase.’

**5. The distribution of *nakar***

The informants’ response to the task was mostly quite clear-cut. A typical response would be “it’s fine”, or “it’s impossible to say that”. When in doubt, the informants responded like “ok, but it sounds a little strange”. Thus, most responses were of the type “\*”, “√”, and a few “√?”. The informants sometimes commented that the sentences weren’t in idiomatic Faroese, possibly due to the fact that they were directly translated from Norwegian, so in Table 1 below, the “√”- and “√?”-responses have been conflated. Concretely, I have ascribed the uncertainty in the “√?”-responses to the examples themselves.

I found the pattern of acceptance displayed in Table 1. The first column lists the relevant trigger/licensing context. The second column is the number of examples tested per context, for example, three non-negative contexts were tested, six contexts with different adverbs were tested, and so on. In most cases, only a single example was tested per context. The third column shows the number of informants that accepted the sentence(s), while the next column shows the number of sentences judged to be unacceptable. The two last columns display the total number of examples for a context and the percentage of acceptance, respectively.

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.

Context	Tokens	√	*	Total	%
Sentential negation	1	16	0	16	100
Superordinate negation	1	16	0	16	100
Negative indefinite	1	13	3	16	81
Negative adverbs	6	83	13	96	86
Negative preposition	2	29	3	32	91
Superlative	1	5	11	16	31
Comparative	2	30	2	32	94
Antecedent of conditional	1	16	0	16	100
<i>Yes/no</i> -question	1	15	1	16	94
<i>Wh</i> -question	1	13	3	16	81
Negative predicates	2	25	7	32	78
Before	1	15	1	16	94
Universal quantifier	1	13	3	16	81
Focus adverb only	1	13	3	16	81
Non-negative context	3	0	48	48	0

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, Fuglafjørður, 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 Fuglafjørður. 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<sub>Part</sub> to<sub>Inf</sub> 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 to<sub>Part</sub> to<sub>Inf</sub> kill B.*  
 ‘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<sub>Part</sub> to<sub>Inf</sub> 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<sub>Part</sub> 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 book in the last*  
 ‘Have you read any books recently?’
- (31) *Constituent question (wh-question)*  
**Hvem** har *noen interesse* av det?  
*who has any interest of that*  
 ‘Who has any interest in that?’
- (32) “*Negative*” *predicates*
- a. Han **tviler på** at det blir *noen ny trend* her.  
*he doubts on that it becomes any new trend here*  
 ‘He doubts it will become any new trend.’
- b. *Noen tårevåt avskjed* vil han **frabe seg**.  
*any tear.wet good-bye will he refrain self*  
 ‘He will refrain from a tear-stained good-bye.’
- c. Han **avviser** at det er *noen fare*.  
*he rejects that there is any danger*  
 ‘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 takes any decision*  
 ‘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 as has any joy of it can get one*  
 ‘Everyone who will enjoy it may have one.’
- b. **Alle** som har *noen glede* av det kan få en.  
*everyone as has any joy of it can get one*  
 ‘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 percent of them had any gain of the deduction*  
 ‘Only 42 per cent of them had any gain from the deduction.’

(36) *Affirmative episodic context*

- \* Igår kveld så jeg noen tyv i hagen.  
*yesterday evening saw I any burglar in the.garden*  
 \* ‘Last night, I saw any burglar 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 påkörd 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<sub>Inf</sub> 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?’

- (45) *Antecedent of conditional* (Jensen and Lindstad 2001)  
 \* **Hvis** du ligger med *nogen student*, skyder jeg dig.  
*if you sleep with any student, shoot I you*  
 ‘If you sleep with any student, I’ll shoot you.’
- (46) Bare ‘*only*’ (Jensen and Lindstad 2001)  
 ? **Bare** Ole så *nogen student*.  
*only Ole saw any student*  
 ‘Only Ole saw any student.’

As the examples in (40)-(46) show, the distribution of *nogen* is somewhat more restricted than *noen*. See Jensen (1999) for a thorough discussion of negative polarity sensitivity in Danish. Nivre (2002) also discusses the Danish indefinite *nogen* in some detail.

#### 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*  
**án 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)  
 Ég 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.’

- (59) *Focus particle aðeins ‘only’* (Jónsson 2008)  
 Aðeins María á **nokkra möguleika** að vinna *nein verðlaun*.  
*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. Ég **efast** um að *nokkur maður* 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 ég 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 bjartsýnn **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 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.

Licensor	Swe <i>någon</i>	Nor <i>noen</i>	Dan <i>nogen</i>	Ice <i>nokkur</i>	Ice <i>neinnn</i>	Far <i>nakar</i>
Sentential negation	√	√	√	√		√
Negative indefinite		√		√	√	√
Negative adverb		√		√	√	√
Negative P <i>without</i>		√	√	√	√	√
Superlative		√				?
Comparative	√	√		√	* <sup>+</sup>	√
Conditional	√	√	*	√	* <sup>+</sup>	√
<i>Yes/no</i> question	√	√	*/??	√	* <sup>+</sup>	√
<i>Wh</i> -question		√	??			√
“Negative” pred.		√		√	√	√
“Negative” compl.		√	√	√	√	√
Univ. quantifier		√				√
Focus particle <i>only</i>		√	?	√	* <sup>+</sup>	√
Non-neg contexts	√	*	*	*	* <sup>+</sup>	*

Table 2: Distribution of NPI indefinite determiners in Scandinavian.

### 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:<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> 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 **nøkur ár**.  
 ‘He lived there a few years.’  
 b. Eg havi tikið **nakrar bøkur** við.  
 ‘I took a few books with me.’  
 c. Teir finga **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 do to 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.

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