Scalar NPIs in questions

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In this talk, I survey existing theories of NPI-licensing in questions and present two new puzzles based on the distribution of scalar NPIs; these are expressions like *lift a finger* and *even ONE article,* whose distribution is assumed to be restricted by the presupposition contributed by an implicit or overt *even.*

Puzzle 1

Scalar NPIs in embedded polar questions are sensitive to the question-embedding predicate, as shown by the acceptability contrast between the *even ONE* variants of (1a-b).

(1) a. Sue *asked* Mary [whether Bill had read {any article, even ONE article} on the reading list]
b. Mary *told* Sue [whether Bill had read {any article, *even ONE article} on the reading list]

Scalar NPIs differ in this respect from weak NPIs like *any* and *ever*, which are uniformly licensed in embedded polar questions. I shown that existing accounts of NPI-licensing in questions do not predict the contrast between these two classes of NPIs.

Puzzle 2

In declarative sentences, Hebrew *afilu* ('even') behaves like *even* in that it associates with strong elements in upward entailing environments and weak elements in downward entailing environments.

(2) a. Dani (#lo) ana afilu al ha-she'ela haxi kasha
Dani NEG answer.PST even on the-question the.most hard
"Dani answered even the HARDEST question"

b. Dani #(lo) ana afilu al ha-she'ela haxi kala
Dani NEG answer.PST even on the-question the.most easy
"Dani didn't answer even the EASIEST question"

Unlike English scalar NPIs formed with *even,* however, Hebrew scalar NPIs formed with *afilu,* like in (2b), are not licensed in matrix questions, and *bixlal* is used instead.

(3) a. #Dani 'ana afilu al ha-she'ela haxi kala?
Dani answer.PST even on the-question the.most easy

b. Dani bixlal 'ana al ha-she'ela haxi kala?
Dani even answer.PST on the-question the.most easy
"Did Dani answer even the EASIEST question?"

I show that it is difficult to reconcile the well-formedness of (2b) with the oddness of (3a) under the account of scalar NPI-licensing in questions developed for English.