

# Divergent pathways between motivational source and target: the ‘neither X nor Y construction’ in English and Croatian.

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**Keywords:** spatial relations, intermediaries, antonymy, motivation, metaphorization

Spatial relations cannot be conceptualized without spatial opposites, often organized around the three main spatial planes *up-down*, *left-right*, *forward-backward/front-back*. The intermediary point between the two (e.g., neither *up* nor *down*) has psychological reality both perceptually (Bianchi et al. 2017) and conceptually (Tribushinina 2009). In English and Croatian, the intermediary point may be expressed through the antonymic construction neither X nor Y, where X and Y are syntagmatic positions filled by pairs of directional antonyms (Jones et al. 2012). Thus, neither *left* nor *right* (Cro. *ni/niti lijevo* *ni/niti desno*) may refer to an intermediary point between two directional antonyms, either physically (e.g., referring to straight movement) or metaphorically (e.g., referring to a centrist political position). However, there are also examples without directional antonyms, e.g., neither *here* nor *anywhere* (Cro. *ni/niti ovdje* *ni/niti nigdje*) ‘nowhere’ (physically and metaphorically), where the intermediary point is excluded. In this paper we explore the conceptual motivation (Panther & Radden 2011) behind the neither X nor Y construction in Croatian and English, specifically the role that antonymy, the intermediary point and metaphorization play in it.

To do that, we conducted a contrastive study of the two constructions in the English enTenTen20 corpus and the Croatian hrWaC corpus, and a native speaker rating study. The corpus study (a random sample of 500 examples for each language coded on dimensions including meaning, part of speech, metaphoricality, evaluation, and several others) showed that the intermediary point sense prevails in English and is primarily used with directional antonyms. In contrast, the non-intermediary sense prevails in Croatian. In both languages, the construction paired with directional antonyms frequently carries metaphorical meaning. We also conducted a native speaker study with speakers of English and Croatian (N = 100 each), where participants were asked to (1) rate the level of oppositeness between the X and Y term, (2) rate the metaphoricality of the construction, and (3) decide whether the construction features and intermediary point, both in isolation and in typical sentential contexts. Preliminary results suggest that speakers of English rate the construction as more “opposite” and less metaphorical than speakers of Croatian, suggesting its closer relation to the spatial source.

The differences between English and Croatian are a natural result of divergent constructional histories and paths. However, they also raise an issue with the spatial motivation of the neither X nor Y construction. To wit, whereas spatiality and the intermediary point seem to be clearly available in English, the Croatian construction seems to be further away from its spatial motivational source. Diachronically, even constructions with clear morphosemantic links to their motivational source need not feature source-domain meanings (Raffaelli & Kerovec 2008). This suggests that motivational paths for different languages – even in examples that may seem as transparent as the Croatian and English neither X nor Y construction – should not be conflated. In other words, it may be time that we explore (rather than idealize) the pathways from the (potentially universal) psychological mechanisms (e.g., the psychological reality of intermediary points) to their linguistic targets (and back), as is currently being done in metaphor studies (Piata & Soriano 2022).

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