The internal structure of FEW/MANY:
Cross-linguistic explorations
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The aim of this talk is to contribute to our understanding of scalar quantifiers (SQs) (Horn 1989:247) or Q-adjectives (Solt 2015), more in particular FEW and MANY, by identifying which building blocks they consist of from a cross-linguistic perspective.

In English SQs like few look opaque at first sight. However, few and other scalar negative quantifiers like seldom and rarely have something in common with sentential negation: they can trigger positive question tags as well as inversion, and they can license NPIs:

(1) a. Jack rarely/seldom goes out, does he/doesn’t he? (McCawley 1998:507)
   b. Very few people would they admit to their club. (Collins & Postal 2014:138)
   c. The IRS rarely audits anyone. (Ladusaw 1979:76)

These effects are absent from their positive SQs counterpart MANY. I want to explore the hypothesis, present already in Klima (1964:269-272), that it is the presence of a covert Neg-feature in FEW, and its level of embedding, which explains the data in (1).

Another piece of evidence comes from Dutch weinig and French peu, both of which mean (noncount) FEW, and which can only be combined with positive gradable adjectives, not negative ones. Weinig/peu share this property with the negative affixal marker on-/iN ‘un-’.

(2) a. on-gelukkig *on-droef weinig gelukkig/*droef
    un-happy un-sad little happy/sad
   b. in-actif *im-passif peu actif/*passif
    in-active im-passive little active/passive

De Clercq & Vanden Wyngaerd (2016) argue that both of these restrictions are due to the presence of a covert negative feature in negative adjectives, the negative prefix un-, and the SQ weinig/peu (which is the noncount counterpart of English few). Two negative features cannot be structurally adjacent, whence the pattern in (2).

A third source of evidence is typological in nature. I shall discuss data from different languages (Malagasy, Japanese, Malayalam, Hixkaryana, French), and present some cases where the morphology provides evidence for an underlying Neg-feature in negative SQs like FEW, as well as its absence in MANY.