

Freedom of Choice

This paper deals with the interpretation and distribution of Free Choice (FC) items of the *any*-type. I put forward a new account that (i) derives the right interaction between FC items and possibility modals and (ii) accounts for the distributional properties of FC items.

Cross-linguistically, *any*-type FC items can be characterized as follows: First, their distribution is restricted. They are licensed in possibility sentences but ruled out in episodic and necessity sentences. (The examples in (1) through (3) illustrate this property for FC *any* and Spanish *cualquiera*.) Second, they express what Vendler (1967) dubbed ‘freedom of choice: the sentences in (1) convey the information that Juan is free to pick whichever card(s) he wants.

Under standard assumptions, the truth-conditions of the possibility sentences in (1) are taken to be captured by formalizations in which a universal quantifier ranging over individuals has wide scope over the possibility modal. That is, ‘for every x such that x is a combination of cards in the discard pile, there is an accessible world in which Juan takes x’. A number of different ways of deriving paraphrases that essentially boil down to this structure have been proposed in the literature (see Aloni 2002, Dayal 1998, 2005, Chierchia 2004 and Saeboe 2001, among others.)

However, this type of formalization does not give us the right truth conditions for sentences like (1). In particular, it predicts these sentences to be true in situations where there is no complete freedom of choice. Take, for instance, the following scenario: in the card game Canasta, when a player has two cards that match the top card of the discard pile, she has just the following two options: (i) take all the cards from the discard pile or (ii) take no card from the discard pile. Given this situation, the wide-scope universal paraphrase above predicts (1) to be true in a situation where Juan is a Canasta player that has two cards that match the top card of the discard pile (since for every combination of cards x there is an accessible world in which Juan takes x – namely the world in which he also takes all of the other cards). This is contrary to our intuitions.

I contend that this problem can be solved by adding an exhaustivity requirement to the paraphrase above. On this proposal, (1) expresses the proposition that is true in a world w iff for every x such that x is a combination of cards in the discard pile, there is a world accessible from w where (i) Juan takes x and (ii) Juan does not take any cards that are not part of x. This correctly predicts (1) to be true only in situations where freedom of choice is not limited.

This analysis also accounts for the distribution restrictions of FC items by assigning impossible truth-conditions to sentences like (2) and (3) (Following Gajewski 2002, I assume that sentences that express contradictions in virtue of their logical structure are ungrammatical.) The episodic sentence in (2) denotes the proposition that is true in a world w iff for every x such that x is a combination of cards in the discard pile, in w, Juan takes x and he does not take any cards that are not part of x. Since there cannot be a world in which this proposition is true, the sentence in (2) is deemed unusable. Necessity sentences like (3) are ruled out in the same way: (3) denotes the (contradictory) proposition that is true in a world w iff for every world w’ accessible from w, for every x such that x is a combination of cards in the discard pile, in w’ Juan takes x and he does not take any cards that are not part of x.

The compositional implementation of this proposal is cast in the Hamblin semantics put forward in Kratzer and Shimoyama (2002). The main pieces of the formal analysis are: (i) FC items are indeterminate pronouns, and as such, they introduce alternatives; (ii) the propositional alternatives generated by the interaction of the FC items with other elements in the sentence are mapped into a set of mutually exclusive propositions (‘exhaustification’); (iii) FC items must agree with a universal quantifier over propositional alternatives. Putting (i) through (iii) together with a standard semantics for modals and episodic aspect, we arrive at the truth conditions above.

To sum up, I show that a standard wide-scope universal paraphrase for *any*-type FC items does not guarantee freedom of choice, and I argue that adding an exhaustivity requirement both yields the right truth-conditions for possibility sentences that contain FC items and accounts for the restricted distribution of these items.

EXAMPLES

- 1) (a) Juan may take any of the cards in the discard pile.
(b) Juan puede coger cualquiera de las cartas del mazo.
Juan may take any of the cards in the discard pile.
- 2) (a) *Juan took any of the cards in the discard pile.
(b) *Juan cogió cualquiera de las cartas del mazo.
Juan took-pfv. any of the cards in the discard pile.
- 3) (a) *Juan must take any of the cards in the discard pile.
(b) * Juan tiene que coger cualquiera de las cartas del mazo.
Juan must take any card of the cards in the discard pile.

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