

Exhaustivity and free choices

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early draft

Abstract

This is only an observation concerning the relation between apparent breakdown of exhaustivity as we have in so called *mention-some* interpretations of questions and free choice readings of disjunction and *any*.

Free choice contexts In certain contexts disjunction can obtain a F(ree) C(hoice) reading (see Zimmermann, *JoS* 2001):

FC disjunction: $\alpha(A \vee B) \equiv \alpha(A) \wedge \alpha(B)$

I will call FC contexts, contexts which allow FC disjunction. Typical examples are sentences granting permission or expressing epistemic possibility:

- (1) a. John may invite Bill or Mary. \Leftrightarrow
b. John may invite Bill and John may invite Mary.

Contrast with the following:

- (2) a. John invited Bill or Mary. $\not\Leftrightarrow$
b. John invited Bill and John invited Mary.

FC contexts also license (FC) *any*.

- (3) John may invite anyone.
- (4) *John invited anyone.

Negative polarity items in general seem to be licensed in FC contexts (see Zwarts (1998) which characterizes NPI licensing contexts as anti-additive).

Questions seem to be FC contexts. Question (5a) has a reading sometimes called alternative reading under which it is equivalent to (5b), and (5c) is grammatical of course.

- (5) a. Did John invite Bill or Mary? \Leftrightarrow
b. Did John invite Bill? And did John invite Mary?
c. Did John invite anyone?

Mention-some readings Questions normally obtain exhaustive interpretations. Question (6a) can completely been answered only by giving an exhaustive list of the invited persons.

- (6) a. Who did John invite?
- b. Bill. \Leftrightarrow
- c. Bill and nobody else.

Sometimes however a wh-question can be completely answered by mentioning just one of the positive cases. A famous example is the following, where (7b) seems to completely resolve question (7a), but still does not imply (7c) (see G&S, *PhD*, 1984).

- (7) a. Where can I buy an Italian newspaper?
- b. At the station. \nrightarrow
- c. At the station and nowhere else.

Hypothesis: An interrogative ϕ ? can have a mention-some reading only if ϕ is a FC licensing context.

Some evidence:

- (8) a. Where can I buy an Italian newspaper?
- b. You can buy an Italian newspaper at the station or at the market. \Leftrightarrow
- c. You can buy an Italian newspaper at the station and you can buy an Italian newspaper at the market.
- d. You can buy an Italian newspaper anywhere.

In contrast with:

- (9) a. Who did John invite?
- b. John invited Bill or Mary. \nrightarrow
- c. John invited Bill and John invited Mary.
- d. *John invited anybody.

Our hypothesis is that mention-some readings are possible only if the wh-expression occurs in a FC position, i.e. a position where FC *any* is allowed. If we assume that quantified expressions in FC position range over sets of *disjoint alternatives* we could explain the apparent failure of exhaustivity in these cases along the line of Butler's contribution to this workshop. As noted by Butler, *only* seems to restore 'absolute' exhaustivity.

- (10) a. Where can I buy an Italian newspaper?
- b. Only at the station. \Leftrightarrow
- c. At the station and nowhere else.

However *only* does not cancel the FC effect. (11b) has a reading on which it is equivalent to (11c), I am not sure whether Butler's definition of *only* can account for this.

- (11) a. Where can I buy an Italian newspaper?
- b. Only at the station or at the market. \Leftrightarrow
- c. At the station *and* at the market and nowhere else.

In contrast with:

- (12) a. Who did John invite?
- b. Only Bill or Mary. \Leftrightarrow
- c. Bill and nobody else or Mary and nobody else.

Conclusion We have hypothesized a close relation between free choice readings and apparent violations of exhaustivity. The task now is to test this hypothesis and in case it is sustained to arrive at a compositional analysis which explains why (i) questions and sentences expressing possibility set up FC contexts (in distinction with positive assertions and necessity statement) (see Aloni (in preparation)); (ii) questions applied to FC contexts obtain a mention-some interpretation; and (iii) *only* applied to FC contexts restores exhaustivity, but still does not distribute on disjunction.