

Pragmatic scale analysis of *any*

Andreas van Cranenburgh (0440949)

Indefinites project, University of Amsterdam

January 11, 2011

Any

Fauconnier (1975)

- **any** can have universal or existential force. or both (ambiguous).
 - universal: Alfred will eat **absolutely/just** any food
 - existential: **There** isn't any noise he can stand
 - ambiguous: Can you hear any noise?
- Two theories:
 - Any is **ambiguous** between \exists and \forall
 - Unitarian-universalist: both meanings are \forall with different scope

Both of these theories are **wrong**.

Superlatives

Fauconnier notes a parallel with superlatives:

- My uncle would hear **any** noise
- = My uncle would hear **the faintest** noise
- = My uncle would hear **the hum of a bee**

Negation introduces a reversal:

- My deaf uncle wouldn't hear **any** noise
- = My deaf uncle wouldn't hear **the loudest** noise
- = My deaf uncle wouldn't hear **a jetplane taking off**

The **there is** and the **absolutely/just** test also work for these quantifying superlatives.

Scales

Reason for quantifying effect of superlatives:

- They imply a scale, e.g., loudest - x_1 - x_2 - faintest
- Scale principle: if R (e.g., bothers) holds for the lowest element on the scale, then it holds for all other elements as well
- Thus, if the faintest noise bothers him, any other noise will bother him as well.

Note also that the scale reverses with a negation, because if we have $R(x_2) \rightarrow R(x_1)$ then also $\neg R(x_1) \rightarrow \neg R(x_2)$

Minimum quantity

A restricted class of adjectives exist that violate the scale principle by applying to both the low and the high points of the scale:

Martha didn't hear any noise \Rightarrow

- Martha didn't hear even the loudest noise (implied: there was noise)
- Martha didn't hear even the faintest noise (suggests: there was no noise)

But in contrast:

- He did not eat the most delicious food
- *He did not eat the most awful food

These adjectives are **minimum quantity** adjectives, e.g., faint, remote, slight, small, tiny, least.

But: difficult to characterize this set (e.g., inaudible not a member).

Any as superlative

Superlatives shares properties with quantifiers. Two options:

- Reduce superlatives to quantifiers
- Explain **any** as a sort of superlative using the scale principle.
in this case **any** indicates the low point on an arbitrary scale.
⇒ I don't see any problem
paraphrased: I don't see the slightest/most obvious/easiest problem

Fauconnier argues for the latter.

NPI & FC any

Horn (2005)

- FC: I can catch any raven \Rightarrow even the most elusive raven
Non-reversed scale, in generic or non-episodic context associated with a kind scale (e.g., most difficult, very difficult, difficult)
- NPI: I didn't see any pigs \Rightarrow not a single raven
Reversed scale, minimal element on quantity scale
(one problem, two problems, ...)

Indiscriminacy

NPI & FC any often has the feature of indiscriminacy:

- anti-indiscriminacy: I didn't talk to just anyone
(implies: I did talk to someone)
versus: I didn't talk to anyone
- Supplementary any: I am looking for a bicycle, any bicycle, that works.

A diagnostic for indiscriminacy is **at all** and **whatsoever**.

⇒ No other universal or existential operator can be modified by at all or whatsoever.

⇒ universal character of **any** is epiphenomal, derivative of monotonicity of relevant scale

Exceptives

- Exceptives (except, but, ...) seem to combine only with universal quantifiers:
⇒ Anyone/everyone/no one/*someone but me
- This seems to indicate that FC any is universal, **but:** then NPI any would be universal as well!
⇒ I wouldn't vote for anyone but Arnold.
- FC any with exceptive also appears with clear existential meaning: ⇒
Pick any card but the ace of spades
- Horn: exceptives licensed if conventionally universal or scalar endpoint

Almost

Almost is often cited as diagnostic distinguishing between FC (OK) and NPI any (not OK).

But exceptions can be found:

- I don't like almost any boybands, but ...
- I don't like almost any of the food that is traditionally served on Thanksgiving
- She doesn't like almost any of her teachers

Rather it appears that almost is licensed in exact (e.g., almost 50) and in end-of-scale (almost any) contexts.

Conclusion

- There is a unified analysis of **any** as an indefinite, relying on pragmatic scales
- both NPI and FC **any** refer to an endpoint of a scale
- neither the ambiguity nor the unitarian-universalist theory is compatible with the data presented

Bibliography

- Fauconnier, Gilles (1975), Pragmatic scales and logical structure, Linguistic inquiry volume VI, Number 9, pp. 353–375.
- Horn, Laurence R. (2005), Airport '86 revisited: toward a unified indefinite any
In: Reference and quantification: the Partee effect.
Eds. Gregory N. Carlson & Francis Jeffry Pelletier.