

FC and Indeterminacy

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Two well-known problems in the semantics of Free Choice-any are the partitive (1) and the subtriggering cases (2). We do not have a unified account for them at this time:

- 1a. Bill may/*must read any of these books.
- b. Bill may/must read any book he finds.
- c. Bill may/must read any book that is on his reading list.

- 2a. Bill read any book *(he found).
- b. Bill read any book *(that was on his reading list).

I explore an account that starts with the intuition that Free Choice Items signal, as a conventional implicature, a declaration of ignorance on the part of the speaker. This intuition can be demonstrated in the context of an interview where precise information is being sought:

- 3a. Speaker A: Which books did Bill read?
- b. Speaker B: *#That's easy, he read any book on his reading list.
- b'. Speaker B: That's easy, he read every book on his reading list.

We can take the truth conditional import of an any-statement to be the same as that of a regular universal statement but with an additional implicature that the speaker is not in a position to give an exhaustive answer to the corresponding question because there is no answer that holds across all the relevant worlds. The challenge of accounting for the distribution of any then reduces to identifying the contexts in which the truth conditional contribution of an any-statement entails such an answer. Any-statements will be ruled out in those contexts because the two aspects of meaning will clash.

To the extent that this attempt is successful, it could replace notions like widening, quantification over possible individuals, vagueness, strengthening, exclusiveness etc that are empirically and/or conceptually problematic. It may also provide a fresh angle on how to approach the issue of variation within and across languages with respect to the inventory of Free Choice Items. For example, English wh-ever statements or some-N-or-other are fully compatible with there being a single answer that holds across all relevant worlds. There is only the weaker requirement that the speaker lack full knowledge of it.