

Many facets of a determiner
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1. A puzzle

French has two main epistemic anti-specific determiners, *quelque* and *un quelconque*, which are not compatible with any indication that the speaker knows the referent of the NP (Jayez & Tovena 2002).

- (1) a. Marie a lu un livre quelconque / quelque livre
‘Mary read some book’
b. * Marie a lu un livre quelconque / quelque livre, David Copperfield
‘Mary read some book, David Copperfield’

Jayez & Tovena (2006) have shown that *un quelconque* inherits the properties of the indefinite *un* and, as a result, is not compatible with abstract nouns (??*une honnêteté* ‘an honesty’, ??*une honnêteté quelconque* ‘some honesty or other’).¹ Note, however, that *quelque* is compatible with certain abstract nouns (??).

- (2) a. Quand je lui ai posé la question, Marie a montré quelque agacement / réserve ‘When I asked her, Mary showed some irritation / restraint’
b. Marie a fait preuve de quelque intelligence dans la résolution du problème
‘Mary showed some intelligence in solving the problem’
c. ?? Au concert d’hier, au début, le jeu du pianiste souffrait de quelque lenteur
‘At yesterday’s concert, the playing of the pianist suffered from some slowness at the beginning’
d. ?? Le paysage que je voyais par la fenêtre recelait quelque beauté
‘The landscape I was looking at through the window had some beauty in it’

Sentence (??c) would be natural if the pianist’s slowness were seen as a disposition, an interpretation which conflicts with the temporal restriction ‘at the beginning’. As expected, all the examples with abstract nouns are perfect under interpretations of epistemic indetermination.

- (3) J’imagine que le jeu du pianiste a dû souffrir de quelque lenteur
‘I guess that the playing of the pianist must have suffered from some slowness’

The selective compatibility observed in (??) is a new puzzle on the stage of sensitive determiners. Does it show that the epistemic anti-specificity of *quelque* has to be substantially revised?

2. Tropes

Leaving aside many fine-grained distinctions on abstract nouns (see Flaux et al., 1992 for French and Schmid, 2000 for English), we note that the nouns under consideration are mass nouns in French and denote external qualities (beauty, slowness), feelings (irritation) and dispositions (intelligence). Intuitively, the NP complements in (??) denote property degrees exhibited in particular spatio-temporal settings. We recall that these instantiations of properties are usually analysed as *tropes* (Williams 1953/1997, Campbell 1990, Maurin 2002), i.e. particular entities that can enter similarity classes corresponding to abstract properties, like John’s kindness (in the kindness class) or the colour of my car (in the colour class). So, *quelque lenteur* in (??c) refers to the degree of a ‘particular’ (= spatio-temporally localised) slowness.

Then, we come to the contrast in (??) and say that the key to unravel it is to look at the ways in which tropes are perceived by agents. *External* tropes are directly observed by agents. This is the case for beauty or slowness, for instance. *Internal* tropes correspond to internal states or processes of which only certain effects can be directly observed. For instance, irritation may show in gestures, intonation, posture, etc. As a result, although an agent witnesses the symptoms of an internal trope, she may not know what trope it is. Since *quelque* is epistemically anti-specific, we conjecture it is not compatible with NPs denoting an external trope and entailing that the agent perceptually identifies the trope. In contrast, it is compatible with

¹Usual reservations apply: *un* and *un quelconque* are compatible with abstract nouns under type or occurrence interpretations, see Chierchia (1998).

NPs denoting an internal trope, which convey no such entailment. The distinction between two kinds of tropes has lexical correlates exemplified in (??).

- (4) a. ?? Marie a montré de la beauté ‘Mary showed beauty’
 b. Marie a montré de l’irritation / de l’intelligence ‘Mary showed irritation /intelligence’

3. Epistemic anti-specificity

For space reasons, we adopt here a notably simplified version of anti-specificity (see Jayez and Tovena (2006:df. 28) for details), which amounts to imposing a *de dicto* reading.

- (5) Adopting the perspective of agent *a*, *Quelque* is not appropriate under an interpretation of the form $\exists x(\Box_{bel,a}\phi(x))$, where $\exists x$ is introduced by *quelque* and $\Box_{bel,a}$ is the epistemic belief operator relativised to *a*.

For instance, (??b) is ruled out because it corresponds to the form $\exists x(x = DC \ \& \ \Box_{bel,sp}read(Mary, x))$, where the relevant agent is the speaker *sp*.

A peculiarity of *quelque* is that it can access degrees with certain types of nouns, see (??). We capture this fact in (??) by imposing that *quelque* N quantify over degrees of N-ness whenever N denotes certain abstract entities.

- (6) $\llbracket quelque \rrbracket_w = \lambda P, P'. \exists x(h(P)(x) \ \& \ P'(x))$, where $h(P) = P\text{-degree}$ if *P* denotes internal (feelings, dispositions) or external tropes, and $h(P) = P$ otherwise.

From an epistemic point of view, the assertion contributes a modal operator $\Box_{bel,sp}$ whose scope depends on the interaction between the lexicon and the context. E.g. perceptual verbs lead in most cases to a *de re* interpretation, as shown in (??). The preferred reading is (??b) and the sentence is natural only under an interpretation of ignorance, for instance if the speaker forgot which friend she saw.

- (7) a. # J’ai vu quelque ami ‘I saw some friend’
 b. $\exists x(\Box_{bel,sp}[friend(x) \ \& \ saw(sp, x)])$

Coming back to the contrast between external and internal tropes, it finds its origins in the lexical content of nouns and can be captured by meaning postulates. Constraint (??) says (1) that any agent that perceives an internal property instance infers the existence of some indeterminate property-degree and (2) that, for external properties instances, the agent infers the existence of a determinate property-degree.

- (8) Let *P* be a property giving rise to tropes, then
 1. $\forall x, y((P(x) \ \& \ perceives(y, x)) \Rightarrow \Box_{bel,y}[\exists z(P\text{-degree}(z) \ \& \ manifestation(x, z))])$, if the tropes are internal and,
 2. $\forall x, y((P(x) \ \& \ perceives(y, x)) \Rightarrow \exists z(\Box_{bel,y}[P\text{-degree}(z)])$, if the tropes are external.

Our proposal also accounts for the observation that *quelque* is often slightly derogatory or cautious with trope denoting nouns. For instance *Marie a montré quelque intelligence* is weaker than *Marie a montré de l’intelligence* ‘Mary showed intelligence’ or *Marie a montré qu’elle était intelligente* ‘Mary showed that she is intelligent’. By emphasising that she cannot assess directly the degree of the property, the agent communicates that evidence for asserting that the property degree is superior to a standard or norm is lacking; otherwise, instead of the *quelque* form, she would have used an adjective (Kennedy 1999) or a bare noun.

Main References

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