Topics of my talks: negation, various types of quantifiers and ambiguities or their lack in different constructions and languages.

**Topic/focus and an alleged lack of ambiguity:** some scholars claim that topic/focus articulation in some cases disambiguates sentences in a sense that overt focusing selects only one of two possible logical forms. So e.g. ambiguities arising from the presence of negation and other logical operator in (1) seem to disappear in (2). Slightly more complicated variation on the same theme comes with causal statements in (3). There are two basic schools concerning such type of data: (i) The topic/focus desambiguates the sentences and focused sentences are not ambiguous (at least for some quantifiers): Jackendoff (1972), Hajičová (1973), Büring (1997), Herburger (2000); (ii) The topic/focus makes one of the readings more salient but the effect is not-truth conditional, if we play with the discourse context, both readings are available even with focused variants: Kadmon & Roberts (1988), Roberts (1998), Glanzberg (2005).

I side with the second school and main claim of this part of talk is: topic/focus creates illusion of scope and makes one of the readings highly salient, but it doesn’t disambiguate the sentences. The real ambiguity lies in the semantic representations and focus just makes some context more or less likely to correspond with different logical scopes. I will use Landman (2000)’s language of plurality as formal theory for representation of the ambiguities.

(1) ambiguous:
   a. All politicians are not corrupt. \(\forall \rightarrow \neg \rightarrow \forall\)
   b. He does not hate most of the songs. \(\text{most} \rightarrow \neg \rightarrow \text{most}\)
   c. Mnoho šípů nezasáhlo terč. \(\text{many} \rightarrow \neg \rightarrow \text{many}\)

(2) allegedly non-ambiguous:
   a. All politicians are NOT corrupt. \(\neg \rightarrow \forall\)
   b. He does not hate MOST of the songs. \(\text{most} \rightarrow \neg\)
   c. Cíl nezasáhlo mnoho střel. \(\neg \rightarrow \text{many}\)

(3) a. ambiguous:
   Petr toho studenta nevyhodil, protože přišel pozdě. \(\neg (cause \Rightarrow effect) \neq (cause \Rightarrow \neg effect)\)
   Petr the student not-rejected, because (he) came late
   b. allegedly non-ambiguous:
   Petr toho studenta nevyhodil, protože přišel POZDĚ. \(\neg (cause \Rightarrow effect)\)

**Real lack of ambiguity:** the second part of my talk is more positive. If we can put aside topic/focus articulation as the reason of disambiguation of sentences with negation and another
quantifiers, there still exists surprising variation between languages and the way their quantifiers scope w.r.t. negation. I will focus on one case of language variation, which as far as I know wasn’t noticed before. Czech and English differ significantly with respect to their negative noun phrases and their scoping possibilities: English negative NPs must be interpreted distributively and cannot have cumulative/collective interpretation – see (4-a), which would be true in a situation where not a single mother gave birth to twins. But Czech negative NPs are mirror image of English negative NPs: they must be interpreted cumulatively (and allow the collective interpretation) but cannot be interpreted distributively. That is the reason why (4-b) (translation of (4-a)) sounds awkward or ungrammatical in Czech, because cumulative or collective interpretation forces speakers to interpret (4-b) to think about pluralities of women giving birth to twins which in our world is weird scenario. The same variation between Czech and English is observed in (4-c) and (4-d) – because Czech allows collective interpretation of negative NPs, they can be arguments of collective predicates like gather but obligatorily distributive English negative NPs elicit ungrammaticality in such a context. I will show how a conservative extension of Landman’s language of plurality can handle such variation.

(4) a. No women gave birth to twins.
   b. Žádné matky neporodily dvojčata.
   c. No students of mine gathered in Prague.
   d. Žádní můj studenti se nesešli v Praze.

References


Herburger, Elena. 2000. What counts: Focus and quantification. MIT.


