



snippets

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4.

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And, or, and ∅

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In English coordinate structures with more than two coordinates, either all coordinators can be pronounced or all but the last coordinator can be dropped:

- (1) a. Weapons, (and) drugs, and money were found at the sight of the crime.
- b. Weapons, (or) drugs, or money were found at the sight of the crime.

Dropping a coordinator is illicit if the coordinators are not identical in meaning, or if the structure is not a ‘flat’ coordinate structure with an associative interpretation and prosodic boundaries of equal strength separating the coordinates (cf. Lasersohn 1995, Wagner 2005, Winter 2007):

- (2) a. John or Mary and Sue ≠ John, Mary and Sue.
- b. Both John *(and) Mary and Sue.

A common assumption in work on coordination is that the dropped coordinators correspond to the overt coordinators ‘and’ and ‘or’ respectively. Zoerner (1995, 27-29), e.g., analyzes the additional instances of ‘and’ and ‘or’ as identical copies of the head, which are pronounced only if optional overt head movement through the coordinate structure takes place. The interaction of negation with coordinator-drop, however, shows that this is not so. In the case of ‘and,’ dropping the first instance of the coordinator is possible, as would be expected:

- (3) No weapons, (and) no drugs, and no money were found there.

The relative scope between the coordinator and negation is not affected:

- (4) $(\neg a) \wedge (\neg b) \wedge (\neg c)$

In the case of ‘or,’ however, dropping a coordinator and using a bare coordinate changes the syntactic structure in a fundamental way, e.g., it is impossible to license an NPI from a coordinate including a negative quantifier into a bare coordinate:

- (5) a. No weapons or any drugs or any money were found there.
- b. * No weapons, any drugs, or any money were found there.

(According to a reviewer, some speakers prefer the use of the coordinate ‘nor’ in (5a). Instances of the pattern in (5a) are readily found in text corpora and seem to be fairly widespread, and at least the native speakers I consulted for this paper found the examples reported here entirely acceptable.)

The difference between (5a) and (5b) is not due to a difference in the c-command relation between the first two coordinates, which remains unaffected:

- (6) Until an award is paid, no participant, (or) his beneficiary or any other person shall have any vested right or interest in such award.

The difference resides in the interpretation of the first coordinator.

A coordination with a single coordinator similar to (5b) can express the meaning of (5a) if the negative quantifier is repeated in the second coordinate, as in (7b). The version with two overt coordinators (7a), however, means something entirely different:

- (7) a. \neq (5a): No weapons, or no drugs or any money were found there.
b. = (5a): No weapons, no drugs, or any money were found there.

The meaning of (7b) is identical to that of (8), where the first coordinator is ‘and’:

- (8) No weapons, and no drugs or any money were found there.

The unpronounced coordinator in (7b) behaves just as if it was ‘and,’ taking wide scope over negation, as illustrated in (9a). It is not interpreted as low scope ‘or,’ (illustrated in (9b)), as would be expected if it was a deleted instance of underlying ‘or’:

- (9) a. $(\neg a) \wedge \neg (b \vee c)$
b. $\neg (a \vee b \vee c)$

One property that distinguishes (7b) from (8) is that the former requires a ‘flat’ prosody, while the latter seems to require an articulated prosody, with a stronger boundary after the first coordinate, similar to the examples in (2).

The observed facts suggest that ‘Ø’ cannot serve as an elided version of ‘or’, and the interaction of coordinator drop and scope provides a puzzle for current theories of coordination.

References

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