

snippets

Issue 31

March 2017

Contents

1. Lisa Bylina. *Count lists cross-linguistically vs bootstrapping the counting system.*
2. Isabelle Charneval and Emmanuel Chemla. *More hybrid agreement: simultaneous agreement with two competing triggers.*
3. Kleanthes Grohmann, Markus Pöchtrager, Tobias Scheer, Michael Schiffmann and Neven Wenger. *The Apex Paradox.*
4. Nina Haslinger and Viola Schmitt. *Stressed non-Boolean und (and) in German.*
5. Sara S. Loss. *Two types of subordinate subject contact relatives.*
6. Andreea Nicolae, Patrick D. Elliott and Yasutada Sudo. *Do superiority-violating multiple singular which-questions have pair-list readings?*
7. Hazel Pearson. *He himself and I.*
8. Uli Sauerland. *A note on grammaticality and analyticity.*
9. Tatjana Scheffler. *Root infinitives on Twitter.*
10. Yasutada Sudo. *Another problem for alternative-based theories of plurality inferences: the case of reduplicated plural nouns in Japanese.*
11. Yasutada Sudo. *De re readings of nested which-phrases in embedded questions.*



6.

Andreea Nicolae¹, Patrick D. Elliott², Yasutada Sudo² – ¹ZAS, ²University College London

Do superiority-violating multiple singular which-questions have pair-list readings?

andreea.nicolae@gmail.com, patrick.d.elliott@googlemail.com, y.sudo@ucl.ac.uk

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7358/snip-2017-031-nico>

Sentences like (1) with multiple singular *which*-phrases give rise to a *pair-list* (PL) and *single-pair* (SP) reading.

(1) Which boy likes which girl?

A complete answer to the PL reading of (1) determines for each boy which girl he likes. A complete answer to the SP reading is about a single boy-girl pair.

Kayne (1983) and Pesetsky (1987), among many others, point out that multiple *wh*-questions with *which*-phrases tolerate superiority violations, as in (2).

(2) Which girl does which boy like?

While the grammaticality of (2) is unquestionable, there is disagreement among scholars as to whether questions like (2) have PL readings. Specifically, Barss (2000) and Bošković (2001) claim that they only have SP readings, while Pesetsky (2000) and Kotek (2014) assume that they also allow PL readings, just like their superiority-obeying counterparts.

We conducted an online experiment to investigate which hypothesis is correct. The task of our experiment was to judge the felicity of question-answer pairs on a scale of 1 (very unnatural) to 5 (very natural). There were 12 critical items, 6 of which involved superiority-obeying questions like (1) and 6 of which involved superiority-violating questions like (2). All of them were paired with a PL answer. They were presented with 6 filler items and 24 items from a separate experiment. The order of presentation was randomized for each participant, except that the first two items were always filler items.

34 self-claimed native speakers of English were recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk and paid \$0.40 for their participation. The data from six of them were excluded from the analysis, as they did not provide correct answers to more than two filler items (where the correct answers are those that fall into the interquartile range calculated with all the subjects). For three of the fillers, the median rating was 5, and for two, it was 2 and for one, it was 1.

The results (available on <https://github.com/patrl/superiorityExperiment>) are summarized in Figure 1. The median rating (indicated by a thick horizontal bar) is 5 for both conditions, suggesting that PL readings are possible for both superiority-obeying and superiority-violating multiple singular *which*-questions. This runs counter to Barss’s and Bošković’s view.

However, we also observe a significant difference between the conditions such that superiority-violating questions are judged as less natural with PL answers than superiority-obeying ones (Wilcoxon signed-rank test: $W=1033$, $Z=-4.463$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, a by-subject breakdown of the data indicates that this difference is driven by a subset of the subjects, suggesting inter-speaker variation. Specifically, as shown in Figure 2, a number of subjects judged the superiority-violating questions with PL answers worse than the superiority-obeying questions, while others judged them more or less equally good. If such inter-speaker variation exists, a theory of PL readings needs to be able to explain the existence of speakers for whom superiority-violating questions do not have PL readings.

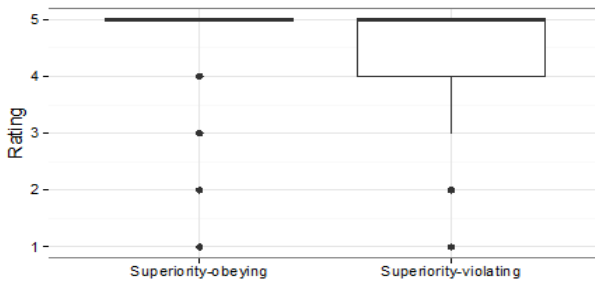


Figure 1: The ratings for the two conditions of the experiment.

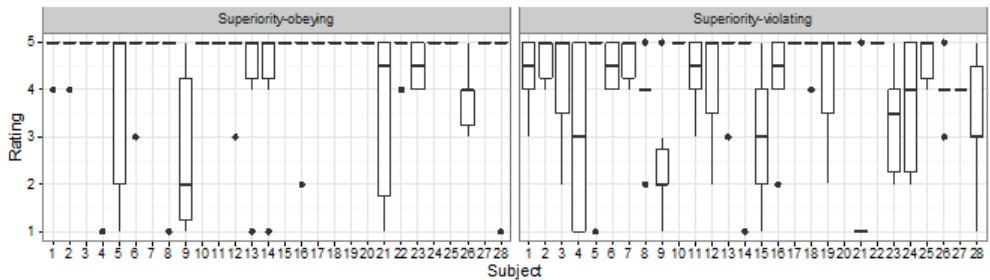


Figure 2: A by-subject breakdown of the data in the two conditions. Each subject is identified by a number on the x-axis.

References

Barss, A. (2000) “Minimalism and asymmetric *wh*-interpretation,” in *Step by Step: Essays on Minimalism in Honor of Howard Lasnik*, ed. R. Martin, D. Michaels, and J. Uriagereka. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 31–52.

- Bošković, Ž. (2001) “On the interpretation of multiple questions.” *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* 1, 1–15.
- Kayne, R. (1983) “Connectedness.” *Linguistic Inquiry* 14, 223–249.
- Kotek, H. (2014) *Composing Questions*. Ph.D. dissertation, MIT.
- Pesetsky, D. (1987) “*Wh*-in-situ: movement and unselective binding,” in *The Representation of (In)definiteness*, ed. E. Reuland and A. ter Meulen. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 98–129.
- Pesetsky, D. (2000) *Phrasal Movement and Its Kin*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.