snippets

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Jacopo Romoli – *Macquarie University*
Strong NPIs and Neg-raising desire predicates

jacopo.romoli@gmail.com

Strong NPIs (e.g., *until Thursday*, *in weeks*) exhibit a more restricted distribution than weak ones (e.g., *any*, *ever*) (Zwarts, 1998). Gajewski (2011) and Chierchia (to appear) propose to account for this difference by postulating that while both strong and weak NPIs are licensed in D(ownward) E(ntailing) environments, the former are also sensitive to presuppositions. The gist of the idea is that in evaluating DEness for strong NPI licensing we should look at the conjunction of assertion and presuppositions. This can account for the contrast between (1) and (2), as the latter, but not the former, is presuppositional (see Geurts 2007 a.o.).

(1) Mary didn't leave **until Thursday**.
(2) *Every student who left **until Thursday** missed the class on presuppositions.

The two components of the meaning of (2) can be schematized as (3a) and (3b) (where D is the domain of quantification).

(3) a. **presupposition**: $\exists x \in D$ [[[left until Thursday]](x)]
    b. **assertion**: $\forall y \in D$ [[[left until Thursday]]$(y) \to Q(y)$]

Indeed, in (4), *until Thursday* is not in a DE environment. In other words, (4) does not entail (5), for any predicate *P*, hence the infelicity of (2) is predicted.

(4) $\exists x \in D$ [[[left until Thursday]](x)] $\wedge$
           $\forall y \in D$ [[[left until Thursday]]$(y) \to Q(y)$]

(5) $\exists x \in D$ [[[left until Thursday]]$(x) \wedge P(x)$] $\wedge$
           $\forall y \in D$ [([[left until Thursday]]$(y) \wedge P(y)) \to Q(y)$]

    A problem for this approach arises, however, when we look at sentences like (6), where a strong NPI appears felicitously in the scope of a negated Neg-raising desire predicate (see Horn 1978, Gajewski 2005, 2007).

(6) John doesn't want Mary to leave **until Thursday**.

To illustrate, consider (a simplified version of) the semantics of *want* by von Fintel (1999) (nothing hinges on this and the same argument applies to the non-monotonic semantics by Heim (1992)). What (7) says is that in all *a*'s doxastic worlds, *f(a,w)*, the

best ones according to a's desires, $g(a,w)$, are p-worlds -- and crucially it presupposes that p and its negation are possible in a's doxastic worlds.

(7) $[[\text{want}]](f)(g)(p)(a)(w)$

        a. **presupposition**: $\exists w' \in f(a,w) [p(w')] \wedge \exists w'' \in f(a,w) [\neg p(w'')]$
        b. **assertion**: $\forall w''' \in \text{BEST}_{g(a,w)}(f(a,w)) [p(w''')]$

Applying this semantics to (6), the conjunction of assertion and presupposition, represented schematically in (8), is such that the context in which *until Thursday* occurs is not DE. In particular, the problematic part is the first conjunct (i.e., it's possible for John that Mary leaves until Thursday): this disrupts the DEness of the context in which *until Thursday* occurs, thus (6) is wrongly predicted to be infelicitous.

(8) $\exists w' \in f(j,w) [\phi_{\text{NPI}}(w')] \wedge \exists w'' \in f(j,w) [\neg\phi_{\text{NPI}}(w'')] \wedge$
                            $\neg\forall w''' \in \text{BEST}_{g(j,w)}(f(j,w)) [\phi_{\text{NPI}}(w''')]$

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