

snippets

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Null disjunction in disguise

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While null conjunction is cross-linguistically very common, null disjunction is not.

- (1) a. I saw John (**and**) Mary.
b. I saw John ***(or)** Mary. (Middle Egyptian may be an exception.)

There is, however, a type of disjunctive meaning which tends to be expressed using a null disjunct.

- (2) Uli looks 40 (**or/**) 45 (at most).

Dropping the disjunction marker is possible (contra Winter 1998; Szabolcsi 2015) if the disjuncts are scalar and non-exclusive. The relationship between scalarity and inclusivity is automatic: if two disjuncts are members of a single scale, then disjunction is vacuous, i.e. in violation of Hurford's Constraint (HC, Hurford 1974). Null disjunction is therefore necessarily inclusive ((3) allows for an exclusive non-interval reading) when the disjuncts are scalar, i.e. ranging over a single scale. Note also the linear irreversibility of the disjuncts (which would retain the scalar and inclusive interval reading):

- (3) I'll see you in **6** ***(or)** **5** minutes.

The fact that the contraposition constraint on relative word order in (null) disjunctions (3) also holds in interval expressions ('5 to 10 grapes' vs. ***'10 to 5 grapes'**) can be taken as evidence that null disjunctions and intervals indeed share a common core. Furthermore, the distance between the scalar end-points needs to be reasonably dense or small (cf. (5); Viola Schmitt & Nina Haslinger, pers. comm.), involving a linear increment. (While the interval in (5) is linear, it is not sufficiently dense.)

- (4) I need 5 (**or/**) 10 Euros.
(5) ***I** need 50 (**or/**) 500 Euros.

Interval-marking null disjunction is not only licensed with numeral disjuncts: scalar temporal terms also feature in null disjunction in Classical Japanese (taken from *Taketori Monogatari* [TM], ca. 10th c.). Reviewers tell me that this is also a productive expression in Romanian and even English ("I'll submit this Thursday, Friday").

- (6) **Kinofu kefu** mikado-no notamaf-an koto
yesterday today emperor-GEN say.HON-TENT/ATTR thing
 ‘what the Emperor says yesterday [**or**] today’ (TM 56.2–3; Vovin 2003, 85; cf. TM 33.4–5)

Note that we do not come across null scalar disjunctions with reverse linear order (3), where the left disjunct would not be entailed by the right one. Evidence from density also comes from the fact that I could not find null disjunctions with time intervals involving $\langle \llbracket \text{yesterday} \rrbracket, \llbracket \text{tomorrow} \rrbracket \rangle^{\text{time}}$ in Classical Japanese or elsewhere. For Classical Japanese, I also take it as evidence that time-referring expressions are indeed scalar, i.e., belonging to a fixed and dense scale (7a), just like (natural) numbers (7b).

- (7) a. $\langle \llbracket \text{yesterday} \rrbracket, \llbracket \text{today} \rrbracket, \llbracket \text{tomorrow} \rrbracket \rangle^{\text{time}}$ (cf. 6)
 b. $\langle \llbracket 5 \rrbracket, \llbracket 7 \rrbracket, \llbracket 10 \rrbracket \rangle^{\mathbb{N}}$ (cf. 4)

Interval-marking null disjunction (whether it turns out to be disguised or not) is therefore scalar, asymmetric, and (consequently) HC-violating. While it is not clear under a disjunction analysis how “5-10” acquires a meaning that is stronger than “at least 5” (the latter being a meaning of an unstrengthened Hurford disjunction), it appears that whatever builds disjunctive meaning can build interval expressions. Under a disjunction analysis, we would also expect disjunction of more than two disjuncts, which appears felicitous as long as the arguments are dense and linearly incremental:

- (8) Dunno, pick as many cakes as you want; [two, (**or**) three, (**or**) {four, *nineteen}].

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