Contents

1. Andreea C. Nicolae, Patrick D. Elliott, and Yasutada Sudo
   Introduction ................................................................. [1]
2. Dorothy Ahn
   ASL IX to locus as a modifier ........................................... [2]
3. Artemis Alexiadou
   Decomposing scalar approximatives in Greek .......................... [3]
4. Anna Alsop, Lucas Champollion, and Ioana Grosu
5. Anton Benz and Nicole Gotzner
   Quantifier irgendein and local implicature ............................ [10]
6. Jonathan David Bobaljik and Susi Wurmbrand
   Fake indexicals, binding, and the PCC .................................. [13]
7. Brian Buccola and Emmanuel Chemla
   Alternatives of disjunctions: when a disjunct contains the antecedent of a pronoun ... [16]
8. Luka Crnić and Brian Buccola
   Scoping NPIs out of DPs ................................................... [19]
9. Chris Cummins
   Some contexts requiring precise number meanings ........................ [22]
10. Patrick D. Elliott and Paul Marty
    Exactly one theory of multiplicity inferences ........................ [24]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Anamaria Fălăuș and Andreea C. Nicolae</td>
<td>Two coordinating particles are better than one: free choice items in Romanian</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Danny Fox</td>
<td>Individual concepts and narrow scope illusions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Danny Fox</td>
<td>Degree concepts and narrow scope illusions</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Nicole Gotzner</td>
<td>Disjunction, conjunction, and exhaustivity</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Martin Hackl</td>
<td>On Haddock’s puzzle and the role of presupposition in reference resolution</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Andreas Haida</td>
<td>Symmetry, density, and formal alternatives</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Nina Haslinger and Viola Schmitt</td>
<td>Strengthened disjunction or non-classical conjunction?</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Fabian Heck and Anke Himmelreich</td>
<td>Two observations about reconstruction</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Aron Hirsch</td>
<td>Modal adverbs and constraints on type-flexibility</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Natalia Ivlieva and Alexander Podobryaev</td>
<td>On variable agreement and scope reconstruction in Russian</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Hadil Karawani</td>
<td>The past is rewritten</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Manfred Krifka and Fereshteh Modarresi</td>
<td>Persian ezafe and proportional quantifiers</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Paul Marty</td>
<td>Maximize Presupposition! and presupposition satisfaction</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Lisa Matthewson, Sihwei Chen, Marianne Huijsmans, Marcin Morzycki, Daniel Reisinger, and Hotze Rullmann</td>
<td>Restricting the English past tense</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Clemens Mayr</td>
<td>On a seemingly nonexistent cumulative reading</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Marie-Christine Meyer</td>
<td>Scalar Implicatures in complex contexts</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Moreno Mitrović</td>
<td>Null disjunction in disguise</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Andreea C. Nicolae and Yasutada Sudo</td>
<td>The exhaustive relevance of complex conjunctions</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Rick Nouwen</td>
<td>Scalar vagueness regulation and locative reference</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
30. Robert Pasternak  
*Unifying partitive and adjective-modifying percent* ................................................................. 77

31. Hazel Pearson and Frank Sode  
‘Not in my wildest dreams’: a part time minimizer? ................................................................. 80

32. Orin Percus  
*Uli and our generation: some reminiscences* ........................................................................... 82

33. Jacopo Romoli  
*Why them?* ......................................................................................................................... 84

34. Fabienne Salfner  
*The rise and fall of non-conservatives* .................................................................................. 87

35. Petra B. Schumacher  
*Vagueness and context-sensitivity of absolute gradable adjectives* .................................... 90

36. Stephanie Solt  
*More or less an approximator* ................................................................................................. 93

37. Giorgos Spathas  
*Plural anaphoric reference and non-conservativity* ............................................................. 95

38. Benjamin Spector  
*An argument for the trivalent approach to presupposition projection* ............................... 97

39. Bob van Tiel  
‘The case against fuzzy logic revisited’ revisited .................................................................. 100

40. Lyn Tieu  
*A developmental asymmetry between the singular and plural* ........................................... 103

41. Tue Trinh  
*A tense question* ................................................................................................................... 106

42. Hubert Truckenbrodt  
*On remind-me presuppositions and embedded question acts* ............................................ 108

43. Michael Wagner  
*Disjuncts must be mutually excludable* ................................................................................ 111

44. E. Cameron Wilson  
*Constraints on non-conservative readings in English* ....................................................... 114

45. Susi Wurmbrand  
*Indexical shift meets ECM* .................................................................................................. 117
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-

tor.

(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 scalability 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 notamafe-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 \([\llbracket \text{yesterday} \rrbracket, \llbracket \text{tomorrow} \rrbracket]\)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. \(\llbracket \text{yesterday}, \llbracket \text{today}, \llbracket \text{tomorrow} \rrbracket \rrbracket\)time (cf. 6)
   b. \(\llbracket [5], [7], [10] \rrbracket^\text{N} \) (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; \([\text{two, (or) three, (or) four, } \ast \text{nineteen}] \).