

Dependent Definites:
On The Semantics Of Free Relatives with *-ever*

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Free relatives with *-ever* have been called ‘free-choice items’ (FCIs), presumably because phrases of the form *wh-ever P* can appear in imperatives and under permission-granting modals (1), in which case they have the familiar “any P is fine” implication:

- (1) (You may) Pick whatever flower (you like)!

In addition, *wh-ever* appears to contribute domain-widening in generic contexts and can be used, in particular in episodic contexts, to convey that the speaker is unable to further identify the referent of the free relative. Much like other FCIs, *wh-ever* phrases have been analyzed, variously, as modalizing the asserted proposition (Dayal (1997)), carrying a modal or conditional presupposition (von Stechow 2000) or as invoking alternative sets (Condoravdi 2005) that get ‘discharged’ in order to yield a modal proposition.

This talk starts from the realization that endowing *wh-ever* with a modal meaning is overkill, and indeed gives the wrong predictions in cases like (2), where the sentence containing the free relative arguably carries no modal implication whatsoever, and for which the analysis cannot be salvaged by stipulating that *wh-ever* quantifies over situations, occasions, times or other kinds of intensional entities instead of possible worlds (which has been proposed for sentences like (3)).

- (2) *Context: A group of friends was waiting at Tokyo airport at the end of their trip to Japan.*

Everyone threw whatever Yen they had left on the table, and we used the money to buy a round of beer.

- (3) There is a lot of violence in whatever Parker writes.

Instead, I propose that *-ever* should be analyzed as a marker of quantificational dependence, i.e. as conveying that the referent of the free relative co-varies with a quantified variable, be it a world or situation variable, or an individual variable (as in (2)). This talk shows how this intuitive characterization can be formally implemented in a way that is sufficient to explain the varying contribution *wh-ever* makes to the interpretation of sentences as the result of the interplay of the definite meaning of the free relative, the quantificational dependence required by *-ever*, and general pragmatic principles.

References

- Condoravdi, C. (2005). Not knowing or caring who. Talk at the LSA Workshop on "Context and Content", MIT/Harvard.
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