

Or, wh-, and not: Free choice and polarity in Malagasy

Cross-linguistically, negative polarity items (NPIs) and free choice items (FCIs) are frequently expressed using the same element (e.g. English *any*) (Haspelmath 1997). To avoid this overlap, linguists often turn to languages that distinguish between NPIs and FCIs, e.g. Modern Greek (Giannakidou 2001). Malagasy, like English, uses the same items for both NPIs and FCIs (1). The form of these pronouns, however, bears a more transparent relation to their meaning than *any*. In particular, these pronouns are overtly disjunctive. In this paper, I argue for the importance of analyzing NPIs and FCIs in languages such as Malagasy: these data are relevant to current theories of the semantics of FCIs as well as to theories of the connection between syntax and LF (Ludlow 2002).

First, the proper analysis of FCIs is the subject of much debate, but with growing support for the view that FC *any* is a special kind of indefinite determiner (Jespersen 1933, Vendler 1967, Horn 2000, Giannakidou 2001). FCIs are choice-invoking elements. Crucially, these elements are expressed in Malagasy using the disjunction *na* (1b). It is the disjunction that overtly evokes the indiscriminate choice associated with FCIs. As in English, FCIs in Malagasy are limited to particular syntactic contexts, such as with the abilitative prefix *maha-* in (1b). Changing the verb results in ungrammaticality, as seen in (2). Crucially, disjunctive wh-words in Malagasy are not simple indefinites like ‘someone’, ‘something’. Such indefinites are expressed in Malagasy using the existential construction (3a) or common nouns such as *olona* ‘person’ or *zavatra* ‘thing’ (3b) and have a freer syntactic distribution.

Second, Ludlow (2002) argues that determiners such as ‘no’, ‘some’ and ‘all’ do not have meaning in and of themselves. Instead, determiners control structure building. For example, ‘no’ contains certain features (negation and disjunction) that must be checked during the syntactic derivation. As a consequence, a sentence containing a DP headed by ‘no’ will contain the appropriate Polarity Phrase (PolP) as well a Conjunction Phrase (ConjP). Ludlow’s argument is based on the logical inferences associated with these determiners. Turning now to Malagasy, this language appears to have no determiner equivalent to ‘no’. Instead, negation (*tsy*) plus a disjunctive wh-phrase is used, as illustrated in (1a) and (4). *Na iza na iza* ‘or who or who’ and other disjunctive wh-phrases thus look like NPIs. Note that unlike English, but like some other languages, Malagasy permits NPIs in subject position (4a) (see Lee and Horn 1995). We see from these data that Malagasy expresses in the overt syntax the features posited by Ludlow as constituting the determiner ‘no’: negation plus disjunction. The Malagasy data are expected under a view of syntax where cross-linguistic variation arises from differences in how features are bundled together to form lexical items (Chomsky 1995).

As well as appearing in argument and adjunct positions, disjunctive wh-phrases can be modifiers, as illustrated in (5). Moreover, these are not fixed expressions, but can be productively created and vary in form, as shown in (6). This productivity suggests that these elements are not grammaticalized disjunctions, but they are syntactically disjunctive. In the future such forms may become syntactically and semantically inert and even develop into a new kind of indefinite (Haspelmath 1997).

In sum, in the case of NPIs and FCIs Malagasy wears its semantics on its syntactic sleeve. The semantic features of polarity and free choice are overtly expressed by the syntax.

- (1) a. Tsy matahotra na inona na inona izy.
 NEG fear or what or what 3(NOM)
 ‘He fears nothing.’
 b. Na inona na inona mahatahotra azy.
 or what or what CAUSE.fear 3(ACC)
 ‘Anything can frighten him.’ [Dez 1990: (1865), (1837)]
- (2) *Na iza na iza manao izany.
 or who or who do that
 (lit.) ‘Anyone does that.’
- (3) a. Misy mandondona ambaravarana. b. Nahita zavatra ve ianao?
 exist knock at-door see thing Q 2SG(NOM)
 ‘Someone is knocking on the door.’ ‘Did you see something?’
 [Dez 1990: (1207), (1251)]
- (4) a. Tsy mahatakatra izany na iza na iza.
 NEG CAUSE.do that or who or who
 ‘No one can do that.’
 b. Tsy hitako na aiza na aiza ny ondriko.
 NEG find.1SG or where or where DET sheep.1SG
 ‘I can’t find my sheep anywhere.’ [Dez 1990: (1857), (1871)]
- (5) Ento aty ny mpianatra na firy na firy.
 bring here DET student or how-many or how-many
 ‘Bring here however many students there are.’ [Dez 1990: (1848)]
- (6) a. na iza na iza mpivarotra
 or who or who merchant
 ‘whichever merchant’
 b. na iza mpivarotra na iza mpivarotra
 c. na mpivarotra iza na mpivarotra iza
 d. ny mpivarotra na iza na iza [Dez 1990: (1834)]

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