

Free choice and theories of implicatures

Jacopo Romoli (Ulster University)
based on joint work with Paolo Santorio

As is well known, sentences involving disjunction and possibility modals give rise to a conjunctive inference, typically called "free choice" (Kamp 1974). For instance, a sentence like John might be in Paris or London suggests that John might be in Paris and that he might be in London. As is also well known, free choice doesn't follow from a standard semantics of modals combined with a boolean analysis of disjunction. A prominent approach in the literature derives choice as a scalar implicature (Fox 2007, Klinedinst 2006, Santorio and Romoli 2018 a.o.). This approach has been successful at capturing cases like the above and related data point. Recent experimental findings involving negative and non-monotonic quantifiers have, however, challenged this approach (Chemla 2009, Gotzner, Romoli and Santorio 2018). On the basis of these results, Bar-Lev & Fox (2017) have proposed a novel approach based on a different theory of implicatures, which can account for those data. In this talk, I explore this debate further, by looking at another case in which the predictions of the traditional and novel approaches diverge. In particular, I will look at sentences in which a universal modal or quantifier appears in between the possibility modal and the disjunction. These sentences also give rise to robust free choice inferences: John might be required to be in London or Paris this summer also suggests that John might be required to be in London and that he might be required to be in Paris. As I will show, this inference is not predicted by traditional implicature accounts of free choice, but can be accounted for by the novel approach by Bar-Lev and Fox 2017. I will also briefly discuss how non-implicature accounts of free choice fare with the data above and address some possible worries about this and related data point discussed in Nouwen (2018). In sum, if correct, the case above suggests that if we want an implicature account of free choice, we should base it on a theory of implicatures like the one suggested in Bar-Lev and Fox (2007).