One indefinite scopes out of islands: an experimental study of long-distance scope in English and German

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Background

• Indefinites, unlike other quantifiers, can scope out of islands, obtaining long-distance wide-scope readings (Fodor & Sag 1982 & much subsequent literature):

  Jennifer read every book that a professor assigned.

• Test instrument: web-based Truth-Value Judgment Task (TVJT)

  Narrow-scope reading (NSR, \(a\) vs. \(\text{ONE}\)): Jennifer read every book that any professor assigned.

  Wide-scope reading (WSR, \(a\) vs. \(\text{ONE}\)): There exists a specific professor, such that

  There exists a specific professor, such that

  • German version:

    (clitic) vs. \(\text{EIN}\)

  • Many different theoretical accounts of long-distance WSRs (e.g., Reinhart 1997, Kratzer 1998, Schwarzschild 2002); on most accounts, WSRs are assumed to be freely available to different indefinite types, regardless of determiner form.

  • Endriss (2009): a link between long-distance scope, topicality, and stress pattern:

    Topical indefinites have long-distance WSRs, non-topical ones do not

    • In German, topicality is marked by stress on the determiner: indefinites with stressed \(\text{EIN}\) (‘one’) can occur in topic position and have long-distance WSRs, more readily than indefinites with unstressed ‘(alone)’
    • What about English? Is the relevant factor determiner form (\(a\) vs. \(\text{ONE}\)), stress on the determiner, or both?

Experiment 1 (English and German)

• Goal: to examine whether long-distance WSRs are facilitated by determiner form and/or stress pattern, in English and in German

• Test instrument: web-based Truth-Value Judgment Task (TVJT)

  At least one and exactly one: 

  • English version: a vs.\(\text{ ONE}\)

  • German version: ‘n’ (clitic) vs. \(\text{eIN}\)

  • 36 target items (6 conditions, 6 tokens per condition) + 36 fillers

  • 80 items; focus on 4 categories, 8 tokens each (4 with \(a\) and 4 with \(\text{ONE}\))

  • Test instrument: web-based Acceptability Judgment Task (AJT)

    • Sentences presented in written form, in isolation, and rated on a scale from 1 (unacceptable) to 7 (acceptable)

    • 16 target items (4 conditions, 4 tokens per condition) + 34 fillers

AJT results: 13 native English speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>WSR</th>
<th>NSR</th>
<th>mean rating with a</th>
<th>mean rating with (\text{ONE})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>impossible</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>5.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a</td>
<td>non-sensical</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b</td>
<td>non-sensical</td>
<td>impossible</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For an indefinite: the WSR is available (compare 1b to 1a), even though it is dispreferred in Exp. 1 & 3; the NSR is the default interpretation, but not the only one.

For one indefinites: NSR is unavailable (compare 2a to 2b), supporting the proposal that one indefinites are topical and require WSRs (at least on non-contrastive readings).

Experiment 2 (English, pilot study)

Goals: to determine whether WSRs are available for an indefinite, or only dispreferred to determine whether one indefinites allow the NSR when the WSR is infelicitous

• Test instrument: web-based Acceptability Judgment Task (AJT)

  • Sentences presented in written form, in isolation, and rated on a scale from 1 ( unacceptable) to 7 (acceptable)

  • 80 items; focus on 4 categories, 8 tokens each (4 with \(a\) and 4 with \(\text{ONE}\))

  • Test version: 16 target items (4 conditions, 4 tokens per condition), 34 fillers

AJT results: 13 native English speakers

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>WSR</th>
<th>NSR</th>
<th>mean rating with (a)</th>
<th>mean rating with (\text{ONE})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>ok</td>
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Experiment 3 (English)

• Goal: to tease apart scope readings from the interpretation of one as exactly one vs. at least one

• Test instrument: web-based Truth-Value Judgment Task (TVJT)

  At least one and exactly one:

  • English version: a vs.\(\text{ ONE}\)

  • German version: ‘n’ (clitic) vs. \(\text{eIN}\)

  • 36 target items (6 conditions, 6 tokens per condition) + 36 fillers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>truth-value on WSR</th>
<th>truth-value on NSR</th>
<th>English: (%\text{TRUE})</th>
<th>German: (%\text{TRUE})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>TRUE</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>at least one: TRUE</td>
<td>FALSE</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>at least one: TRUE</td>
<td>exactly one: FALSE</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In English, WSR is facilitated by determiner form: \(\text{ONE}\) vs. \(a\)

In German, WSR is facilitated by stress: \(\text{EIN}\) vs. \(\text{eIN}\)

Consistent with Endriss (2009), if \(\text{ONE}\) vs. \(\text{EIN}\) are markers of topicality, differences among determiners not expected on choice-function approaches to WSRs. Relative inaccessibility of WSRs for indefinites consistent with prior findings by Ionin (2010). Open question: is \(\text{ONE}\) vs. \(\text{EIN}\) being interpreted as exactly one? (see Experiment 3)

References


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