

A Semantics for Free Choice Indifference in French

Youri Zabbal, University of Massachusetts Amherst

This paper presents a compositional analysis of the N'IMPORTE + WH series of Free Choice (FC) items in French, which are formed by combining the lexical item *n'importe*, literally *no matter*, with a WH-item. A typical use of N'IMPORTE + WH is illustrated in (1): the speaker requests that the addressee press a key to continue with the added meaning that it doesn't matter which key is chosen (indifference). The additional meaning of indifference is a characteristic effect of *any*-type FC items and is commonly referred to as the FC effect in the literature.

- (1) Appuyez sur **n'importe quelle** touche pour continuer
 press-2S.PRES on *N'IMPORTE* which.FEM key to continue
 'Press any key to continue'

Current accounts of the FC effect induced by FC items, as well as disjunction under a possibility modal, argue that the FC effect is derived from the mechanisms that derive scalar implicatures (Kratzer and Shimoyama 2002, Alonso-Ovalle 2005, Fox 2006). Kratzer and Shimoyama (2002) show that, for the German *IRGEND*- series of FC items, the FC effect disappears in downward entailing contexts and they conclude that it is a conversational implicature.

In contrast, the FC effect introduced by N'IMPORTE + WH does not disappear under negation but is negated as part of the regular semantic meaning. The sentence in (2a) receives an indefinite interpretation. That is, Paul will buy a bottle of wine. It also receives the additional meaning conveyed by the FC effect: it doesn't matter to Paul which bottle of wine he buys. In (2b), the FC effect of indifference is negated and not cancelled: in other words, it does matter to Paul which bottle of wine he buys. This sentence is true in a context where Paul will buy a bottle of wine and he will not be indiscriminate or else he will not buy a bottle of wine. In other words, he will not buy any old bottle of wine.

- (2) a. Paul achètera **n'importe quelle** bouteille de vin
 P buy-3S.FUT *N'IMPORTE* which bottle of wine
 'Paul will buy any bottle of wine'
 b. Paul n' achètera pas **n'importe quelle** bouteille de vin
 P NEG buy-3S.FUT NEG *N'IMPORTE* which bottle of wine
 'Paul will not buy just any bottle of wine'

The N'IMPORTE + WH series of FC items provides four puzzles for a compositional semantics of FC items: (i) this series is built around the class of interrogative WH-items in French; (ii) N'IMPORTE + WH is licensed in the scope of a modal; (iii) the FC effect introduced by N'IMPORTE + WH appears in negative contexts in which it is negated; (iv) if the modal scopes over negation, the free choice effect escapes the scope of negation. This last puzzle is illustrated in (3b-c).

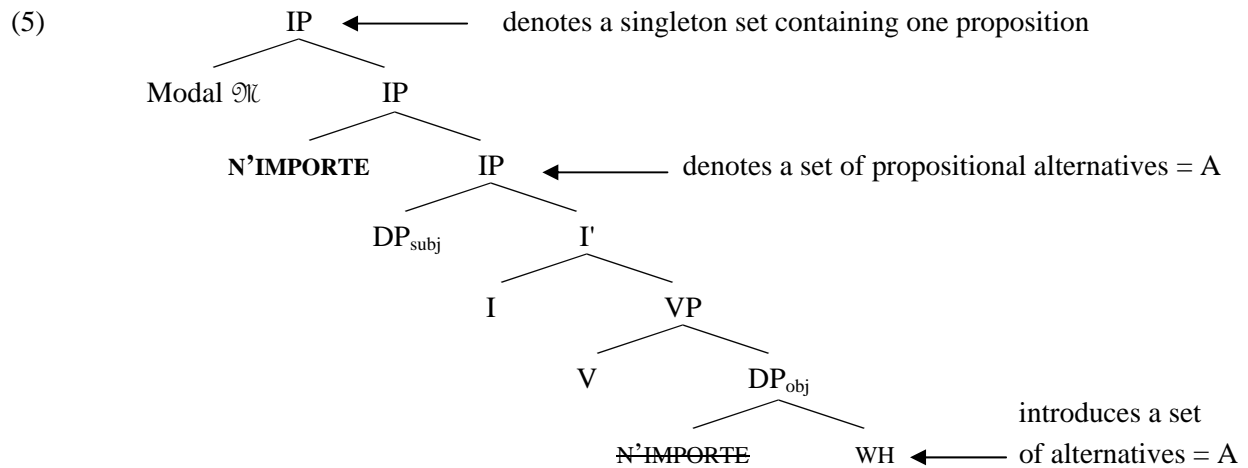
- (3) a. Marie peut défaire **n'importe quel** nœud
 M can-3S.PRES solve *N'IMPORTE* which knot
 'Marie can undo any knot'
 b. Marie ne peut pas défaire n' importe quel nœud
 M NEG can-3S.PRES NEG undo NEG matter which knot
 'Marie cannot undo just any knot'
 c. Marie peut ne pas défaire n' importe quel nœud
 M can-3S.PRES NEG NEG undo NEG matter which knot
 'Marie is able (allowed) NOT to undo any knot'

A solution to these puzzles presents itself by interpreting N'IMPORTE + WH as the composition of two distinct elements: a FC-particle N'IMPORTE contributing a lexicalized free choice meaning (*it does not matter*), and an interrogative element WH contributing the semantics of an indeterminate pronoun.

Following Kratzer and Shimoyama's (2002) analysis, I adopt a Hamblin Alternative Semantics for questions. The WH-item is an indeterminate phrase and its interpretation introduces a set of individual alternatives of type e into the semantics. The set of alternatives composes with the rest of the sentence and the alternatives expand until they interact with a modal operator. Modals operate on a set of propositional alternatives, each of type $\langle s, et \rangle$. The FC effect is given as a distributivity requirement over alternatives illustrated in (4): free choice is equivalent to every propositional alternative being accessible. For Kratzer and Shimoyama (4) is a conversational implicature.

- (4) Distribution Requirement (Kratzer and Shimoyama 2002)
 $\{\lambda w'. \forall p [p \in A \rightarrow \exists w'' [w'' \text{ is accessible from } w' \ \& \ p(w'') = 1]]\}$.
For every propositional alternative there is an accessible world in which it is true

My analysis deviates from Kratzer and Shimoyama in that the FC-particle *N'IMPORTE* directly encodes the meaning of (4). Given the semantics in (4), the FC-particle *N'IMPORTE* must interact with a set of propositional alternatives A . However, since *N'IMPORTE* is base-generated adjacent to the WH-item of incompatible type, the type mismatch triggers movement of *N'IMPORTE* to a higher position. Movement is restricted to a position lower than the modal because the modal operator is what reduces the set of alternatives to a singleton set. Consequently, *N'IMPORTE* must tuck in below the modal. The movement is shown in (5). If negation is below the modal \mathcal{N} the resulting meaning is exemplified (3c), where the FC-particle escapes from the scope of negation.



- (6) $N'IMPORTE = \lambda A. \lambda \mathcal{N}. \{\mathcal{N}(A) \cap \textit{it-doesn't-matter}'(A)\}$, where
 $\textit{it-doesn't-matter}'(A) = \{\lambda w'. \forall p [p \in A \rightarrow \exists w'' [w'' \text{ is accessible from } w' \ \& \ p(w'') = 1]]\}$

The data from French and the analysis presented in this paper strongly suggest that there is a FC effect that is not pragmatic but part of the semantics, unlike the FC effect induced by anti-exhaustivity inferences, argued for in Kratzer and Shimoyama (2002) for *IRGEND-* and in Fox (2006) for disjunction.

References

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