Expressing ignorance with determiner phrases

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Some data
The/whatever-DPs

(1a-b) are determiner phrases (e.g. Abney 1987), syntactic constituents composed of a determiner, like *the*, and a noun phrase, like *book that Maria is holding*.

(1)   a. The book that Maria is holding
       b. Whatever book Maria is holding ... is expensive

They are similar – they are both ‘definite’

(2)  *Context: Maria is holding only one book.*  \(\checkmark\) (1a), \(\checkmark\) (1b)
(3)  *Context: Maria is holding three books.*  \(#\) (1a), \(#\) (1b)

\(^1\)‘Determiner’: A closed class, functional morpheme that combines with nouns/noun phrases. ‘Noun phrase’: A phrase headed by a noun.
They also differ – the *whatever*-DP requires ignorance about the identity of its referent (Elliott 1971, Dayal 1997, von Fintel 2000)

(4) **Context:** Maria is holding only one book, *War and Peace.*
    a. The book that Maria is holding
    b. #Whatever book Maria is holding ... is expensive
A/some N or other-DPs

The determiner phrases in (5a-b) are ‘indefinite’ (i.e. existential), but the some N or other-DP requires ignorance about who/what verifies the existential quantificational claim

(5) Look! Maria is holding...  
   a. a book  
   b. some book or other

(6) Context: Maria is holding a book.  
   a. The title is not visible. ✓(5a), ✓(5b)  
   b. It is War and Peace. ✓(5a), #(5b)
Some $N$ or other-DPs belong to the class of so-called ‘epistemic indefinites’ (e.g. Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2013) – i.e. existential DPs that are odd with particular continuations or in particular contexts

(7) María se casó con un estudiante del departamento del lingüística
   ‘María married a linguistics student’

(8) María se casó con algún estudiante del departamento del lingüística
   ‘María married a linguistics student’

(7), ??(8) . . . en concreto con Pedro, ‘Namely, Pedro’

(7), ??(8) . . . ¿Con quien?, ‘Who?’

( Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2003, et seq.)
Epistemic indefinites, unlike ordinary indefinites, are also odd in contexts where the existential witness is considered to be something that is not identifiable in any salient way

(9)  

_Context: Help, I need treatment!..._

  a.  I’ve been stung by _a_ wasp
  b. ??I’ve been stung by _some_ wasp (or other)
  c.  I’ve been stung by _some_ insect  

(Strawson 1974)
Some background
What is the range of ways that grammar allows determiner phrases\(^2\) to be semantically integrated into a sentence?

(10)  
  a. A book fell down  
  b. War and Peace is a book

(11)  
  a. \{ Maria / the woman / a woman \} is here. She looks busy.  
  b. #Every woman is here. She looks busy.

(Kamp 1981, Heim 1982)

(12) Maria and every man are here

\(^2\)‘Noun phrases’ in the terminology of that time.
There are type-shifting principles ‘which... are linguistically-exploited in English and at least potentially universal’

---

3e is the type of individuals, t is the type of truth values, s is the type of possible worlds, \( D_\sigma \) is the set of all \( \sigma \)-type meanings, \( D_t = \{ \text{True, False} \} \), and for any types \( \sigma, \tau, \langle \sigma, \tau \rangle \) (in Partee’s notation, \( \langle \sigma, \tau \rangle \)) is the type of possibly partial functions from \( D_\sigma \) to \( D_\tau \). These are the only types.
What do determiners do?

‘The king . . . contrasts between an e-type meaning $iota(\text{king'})$, and an
$((e, t), t)$-type meaning $\text{THE}(\text{king'})$, traceable to two alternative meanings
for the.’

Determiners are shifters (Barwise & Cooper 1981, Keenan & Stavi 1986)
What do determiners do?

Kadmon & Landman 1993 propose that certain determiners (also) impose constraints on quantificational domains – *any* is an existential with a domain widening constraint

(13) I didn’t see an owl
Meaning: \( \neg \exists x \in \text{De} [x \in C \land x \text{ is an owl} \land \text{I saw x}] \)

(14) I didn’t see any owl
Meaning: \( \neg \exists x \in \text{De} [x \in C' \land x \text{ is an owl} \land \text{I saw x}] \)

*Any*-constraint: \( C \subset C' \)
Subsequent works like Kratzer & Shimoyama 2002, Kratzer 2005, studying quantification in languages like Japanese and German, propose that domain constraints may be the primary function of determiners

“Domain shifts carried by determiners seem to be at the very heart of quantifier constructions... Are there such things as ‘simple’ or ‘natural’ operations on quantification domains?... Which ones of those have to be lexicalized overtly? Which ones can be constructional or carried by zero-morphology?

(Kratzer 2005)
Are there determiners that grammatically encode ignorance?

(15) \textit{Context: Maria is holding War and Peace}

a. \{The / #whatever\} book Maria is holding is expensive
b. Maria is holding \{ a book / #some book or other \}
Hypothesis 1 (informally)

‘The semantic account’

*Whatever* - and *some N or other*-DPs grammatically encode an ‘Unknown’ meaning component; *the*- and *a*-DPs do not

The Unknown property (in prose)

$x$ has the Unknown property whenever the relevant knower’s beliefs do not entail which relevant identifying property $x$ has.
Hypothesis 1 (informally)

A *whatever*-DP presupposes that the referent has the Unknown property; a *some N or other*-DPs restricts its quantificational domain with the Unknown property

(16) Whatever book Maria bought  
    Denotes: The unique book that Maria bought  
    Presupposes: Maria bought a unique book, and it is unknown

(17) Maria bought some book or other  
    Denotes: True iff there is an unknown book that Maria bought
Hypothesis 2 (informally)

‘The pragmatic account’

*Whatever*- and *some N or other*-DPs grammatically encode a relatively general property (‘Or$^C$’) and evoke alternatives; *the*- and *a*-DPs do not

‘The Or$^C$ property’ (in prose)

$x$ has the Or$^C$ property whenever $x$ has one of the relevant identifying property (‘$x$ is C1 or C2’).
Hypothesis 2 (informally)

A *whatever*-DP presupposes that the referent has the $\text{Or}^C$ property; a *some N or other*-DPs restricts its quantificational domain with the $\text{Or}^C$ property

(18) Whatever book Maria bought  
    Denotes: The unique book that Maria bought  
    Presupposes: Maria bought a unique book, and it is $C_1$ or $C_2$

(19) Maria bought some book or other  
    Denotes: True iff there is a $C_1$ or $C_2$ book that Maria bought
Hypothesis 2 (informally)

Additionally, \textit{whatever}- and \textit{some N or other}-DPs evoke alternatives, determined on the basis of $\text{Or}^C$ (‘$x$ is $C_1$', ‘$x$ is $C_2$’)

Ignorance is inferred with \textit{whatever}-DPs by the pragmatic assumption that speakers presuppose as much as possible (Heim 1991, Sauerland 2008)

Ignorance is inferred with \textit{some N or other}-DPs by the pragmatic assumption that speakers say the logically strongest alternative they have evidence for and the pragmatic assumption that speakers prefer to be brief (Grice 1975)
Both accounts explain the oddness of (20a-b)

(20)  \textit{Context: Maria is holding War and Peace}

a. #Whatever book Maria is holding is expensive
b. #Maria is holding some book or other
Which is better?

The pragmatic account, together with a standard view on the meaning of every, predicts facts like (21)-(22); the semantic account does not.

(21) Context: Maria is holding War & Peace and Susanna is holding Anna Karenina
    Every woman likes whatever book she is holding

(22) Context: Maria is holding War & Peace and Susanna is holding War & Peace
    #Every woman likes whatever book she is holding
Assumptions
The framework

The grammar associates expressions with disambiguated syntactic representations called logical forms (LFs), which are the input to [ ], defined as in Heim & Kratzer 1998 (see appendix)
LFs contain $s$-type proforms for possible worlds; a possible world is an all-encompassing situation, a complete specification of the way things are

The meaning of a declarative sentence is a proposition (an $(s, t)$-function) – it characterizes a set of possibilities$^4$

(23) Maria is French

a. LF: $[0 [\text{Maria} [\text{French-}w_0 ]]]$

b. $\llbracket \text{French} \rrbracket = \lambda w_s . \lambda x_e . \text{True iff } x \text{ is French in } w$

c. $\llbracket \text{Maria} \rrbracket = m$, where $m \in D_e$

d. $\llbracket (23a) \rrbracket^g = \lambda w_s . \text{True iff } m \text{ is French in } w$

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$^4\lambda x_\sigma : A . B'$ is read as ‘the smallest function from $\{x \in D_\sigma \mid A\}$ to $B'$.'
Presupposition

Throughout, ‘(semantic) presupposition’ refers to definedness conditions contributed by particular ‘triggers’ (e.g. *know*)

(24) Juan knows that Maria is French

By the rules of composition, presupposition triggers give declaratives domain conditions

\[
\llbracket (24) \rrbracket = \lambda w_s : \text{m is French in } w. \quad \text{True iff} \\
\begin{align*}
\mathsf{MB}^j_{\text{Bel}}(w) & \subseteq \{ w' | \text{m is French in } w' \} \\
\end{align*}
\]

For any \( w \in D_s, \ x \in D_e \\)
\[
\mathsf{MB}^x_{\text{Bel}}(w) = \{ w' | w' \text{ is compatible with } x's \text{ beliefs in } w \}
\]

(Hintikka 1962)
(25) It is Maria who is French

\[ [(25)] = \lambda w_s : \exists! x \in D_e [x \text{ is French in } w]. \]

True iff \( m \) is French in \( w \)
I assume the pragmatic principles in (26a-b) (Stalnaker 1974; Heim & Kratzer 1998)

(26) For any utterance context $c$ and declarative LF $\phi$, $\phi$ is felicitous in $c$ only if:

a. **Bridge Principle**
   
   $$CK_c \subseteq \{ w \in D_s \mid \lfloor \phi \rfloor^g_c (w) \text{ is defined} \}$$

b. **Appropriateness Condition**
   
   For every free index $k$ in $\phi$, $g_c(k)$ is defined

$$CK_c = \{ w \in D_s \mid w \text{ is compatible with the mutual public beliefs of the participants in } c \}$$

$g_c$ is the assignment$^5$ supplied by $c$

---

$^5$an assignment is a possibly partial function from indices (i.e. number-type ordered pairs) $k$ to denotations of the type of the second member of $k$. I will show an index’s type only on an indexed proform/trace and only if it is a type other than e or s.
(In)definiteness

Definites have a uniqueness-based semantics, and indefinites have a strongly existential semantics (I will only discuss \textit{a-} and \textit{some N or other-}DPs in argument position of episodic sentences)

(27) \textbf{Definites} \\
For any $P \in D_{(e,t)}$, $\llbracket \text{Def} \rrbracket(P)$ is defined only if $\exists!x[P(x) = \text{True}]$. \\
When defined, $\llbracket \text{Def} \rrbracket(P) = \forall x[P(x) = \text{True}]$

(28) \textbf{Indefinites} \\
For any $P, Q \in D_{(e,t)}$, $\llbracket \text{Indef} \rrbracket(P)$ is defined only if $\exists x[P(x) = \text{True}]$. When defined, then $\llbracket \text{Indef} \rrbracket(P)(Q)$ is defined only if $\exists x[P(x) = \text{True} \land Q(x) \text{ is defined}]$. \\
When defined, $\llbracket \text{Indef} \rrbracket(P)(Q) = \text{True} \iff \exists x[P(x) = Q(x) = \text{True}]$
The semantic account
The ‘Unknown’ property

The contrasts in (29) arise because *whatever*- and *some N or other*-DPs encode the ‘Unknown’ property whereas *the*- and *a*-DPs do not.

(29) Context: Maria is holding War and Peace
    a. { The / #whatever } book Maria is holding is expensive
    b. Maria is holding { a book / #some book or other }

In a *whatever*-DP, the referent is presuppositionally ascribed the Unknown property

In a *some N or other*-DP, the Unknown property is a restriction on the individuals Indef quantifies over
The ‘Unknown’ property

For any \( w \in D_s, C_1, \ldots, C_n \in D_{(s,(e,t))} \) (\( n \geq 2 \)), \( MB \in D_{(s,(s,t))} \):

\[
[\text{Unknown}] (w)(C_1, \ldots, C_n)(MB)\text{ is defined only if} \\
\forall w' \in MB(w), \forall C \in \{C_1, \ldots, C_n\} \\
i. \quad \exists y \in D_e[C(w')(y) = \text{True}] \\
ii. \quad \neg \exists C' \in \{C_1, \ldots, C_n\}[C' \neq C \land \\
\exists z \in D_e[C(w')(z) = C'(w')(z) = \text{True}]]
\]

When defined, then for any \( x \in D_e \):

\[
[\text{Unknown}] (w)(C_1, \ldots, C_n)(MB)(x)\text{ is defined only if} \\
\forall w' \in MB(w)[\exists C \in \{C_1 \ldots C_n\}[C(w')(x) = \text{True}]].
\]

When defined, \( [\text{Unknown}] (w)(C_1, \ldots, C_n)(MB)(x) = \text{True} \) iff

\[
\neg \exists C \in \{C_1, \ldots, C_n\}[\forall w' \in MB(w)[C(w')(x) = \text{True}]]
\]
The ‘Unknown’ property

‘Unknown’ is in the LFs of whatever- and some N or other-DPs

Their LFs contain property-proforms (von Fintel 1994-style C-variables) and a modal base function proform (e.g. von Fintel & Heim 2010)
Whatever-DPs, the semantic account

Whatever book Maria is holding

\[
\begin{align*}
\llbracket \text{Op}^{\text{presup}} \rrbracket &= \lambda x_e. \lambda P_{(e,t)} : P(x) = \text{True}. x \\
\llbracket \text{book} \rrbracket &= \lambda w_s. \lambda x_e. \text{True iff } x \text{ is a book in } w \\
\llbracket \text{holding} \rrbracket &= \lambda w_s. \lambda y_e. \lambda x_e. \text{True iff } x \text{ is holding } y \text{ in } w
\end{align*}
\]
Whatever-DPs, the semantic account

(30) Whatever book Maria is holding
    a. Denotes: The unique book that Maria is holding
    b. Presupposes: The relevant person is not certain which property it has from \{C1, C2\}
Some N or other-DPs, the semantic account

Maria is holding some book or other
Some \textit{N or other}-DPs, the semantic account

(31) Maria is holding some book or other

a. Denotes: True iff there is a book such that the relevant individual is not certain which property it has from \{C_1, C_2\} and such that Maria is holding it

b. Presupposes: There is a book such that the relevant individual is not certain which property it has from \{C_1, C_2\}
Commentary and refinements

MB cannot be deontic but need not be speaker-oriented (von Fintel 2000, Lauer 2009, Abenina-Adar 2020)

(32) Context: Maria was given permission to hold War and Peace, and she was given permission to hold Anna Karenina; she is holding War and Peace

#Whatever book Maria is holding is expensive

(33) Here’s a hint: whatever dish I am cooking contains onions

(34) A: Maria is holding War and Peace
B: No, she’s holding Anna Karenina
A: I think it’s War and Peace, but anyway, whatever book she is holding is expensive

(34) I got you something or other that I think you’ll really like
The need for C’s

Identification is context-dependent (Heller & Wolter 2011, Abenina-Adar 2019)

(35) Whatever book Maria bought was expensive

(36) Context: Maria bought War and Peace #(35)

(37) Context: Two copies of War and Peace, one on the left and one on the right. Maria bought one and Juan bought the other, but we don’t know who bought which. ✓(35)

Precedents for this account are Dayal 1997, von Fintel 2000, Heller & Wolter 2011, Condoravdi 2015, Hirsch 2015 for whatever-DPs, and Farkas 2002 on some N or other-DPs (also suggestions in Becker 1999)
Under the semantic account, (38a) is a presupposition failure (violation of the Bridge Principle); (38b) is either a presupposition failure or not verified in the context

(38) **Context: Maria is holding War and Peace**

a. #whatever book Maria is holding is expensive
b. #Maria is holding some book or other
The pragmatic account
The ‘Or$^C$’ property

Whatever- and some N or other-DPs encode the ‘Or$^C$’ property, they evoke alternatives, and pragmatic constraints apply.

This analysis for epistemic indefinites is based on Kratzer & Shimoyama 2002, Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2003, 2010, et seq.

Or$^C$ in the pragmatic account is compositionally interpreted in the same way as Unknown in the semantic account.
The ‘Or$^C$’ property

For any $w \in D_s$, $C1, \ldots, Cn \in D_{(s,(e,t))}$ ($n \geq 2$):

$[\text{Or}^C](w)(C1) \ldots (Cn)$ is defined only if $\forall C \in \{C1, \ldots, Cn\}$

i. $\exists y_e[C(w)(y) = \text{True}]$

ii. $\neg \exists C' \in \{C1, \ldots, Cn\}[C \neq C' \land \exists z_e[C(w)(z) = C'(w)(z) = \text{True}]]$

When defined, then for any $x \in D_e$:

$[\text{Or}^C](w)(C1) \ldots (Cn)(x) = \text{True}$ iff

$\exists C \in \{C1, \ldots, Cn\}[C(w)(x) = \text{True}]$

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$^6$The set of property-extensions is a ‘partition’ (Schwarzschild 1996) of the extension of its union
Whatever-DPs, the pragmatic account

**Whatever book Maria is holding**
(39) Whatever book Maria is holding
   a. Denotes: The book Maria is holding
   b. Presupposes: The book Maria is holding is $C_1$ or $C_2$
Some N or other-DPs, the pragmatic account

Maria is holding some book or other
Some $N$ or other-DPs, the pragmatic account

(40) Maria is holding some book or other

a. Denotes: True iff there is a book that is C1 or C2 that Maria is holding

b. Presupposes: There is a book that is C1 or C2
Suppose that the Cs are a *War and Peace*-property and an *Anna Karenina*-property and the interlocutors believe what they see.

(41) *Context: Maria is holding War and Peace*

a. #Whatever book Maria is holding is expensive

b. #Maria is holding some book or other

(41a) is not a presupposition failure and (41b) is verified in the context...
Assumptions about alternatives

I take Or$^C$ to be an alternative-evoking expression

In any context $c$, a contextually-guided, grammatically constrained process determines for every LF $\phi$ a set of alternative LFs, $\text{ALT}_c(\phi)$ (Katzir 2007)
The $\text{ALT}_c$-relation

Disjunctions always have their individual disjuncts as relevant alternatives, and if an LF has alternatives and is contained in a larger LF, that larger LF will have alternatives determined on the basis of its alternative-evoking sub-LF (e.g. Sauerland 2004)

(42) For any utterance context $c$ and any LFs $\phi, \psi$:

a. If $\phi$ is an LF of the form $[[ \ldots [ [ \text{Or}^c_w ] C1 ] \ldots ] Cn]$, then $[ C1 w ] , \ldots , [ Cn w ] \in \text{ALT}_c(\phi)$

b. If (i) and (ii) hold, then $\psi \in \text{ALT}_c(\phi)$

(i) $\phi \neq \psi$

(ii) There is an LF $\beta$ that occurs in $\phi$ and an LF $\gamma$ that occurs in $\psi$ such that $\gamma \in \text{ALT}_c(\beta)$ and $\psi$ is the result of replacing $\beta$ in $\phi$ with $\gamma$
In any context, a *whatever*-DP has alternatives that denote the same individual but presuppose that it has a more specific property

\begin{align*}
\text{(43)} & \quad [ [ C_{1,(s,(e,t))} \ w_0 ] ] \ \text{Op}_{\text{presup}} \\
& \quad \quad [ \text{Def} [ [ \text{book} \ w_0 ] [ 6 [ \text{Maria} [ [ \text{holding} \ w_0 ] \ t_6 ] ] ] ] ] ] \\
\text{(44)} & \quad [ [ C_{2,(s,(e,t))} \ w_0 ] ] \ \text{Op}_{\text{presup}} \\
& \quad \quad [ \text{Def} [ [ \text{book} \ w_0 ] [ 6 [ \text{Maria} [ [ \text{holding} \ w_0 ] \ t_6 ] ] ] ] ] ]
\end{align*}
(45) (Heim 1991, Sauerland 2008) rules out the use of the *whatever*-DP if it is common knowledge which $C$-property the referent has

(45) **Maximize Presupposition**

For any utterance context $c$ and declarative LF $\phi$, $\phi$ is felicitous in $c$ only if there is no $\psi \in \text{ALT}_c(\phi)$ such that

a. $\{ w \in D_s | \llbracket \psi \rrbracket^g_c(w) \text{ is defined} \} \subseteq \{ w \in D_s | \llbracket \phi \rrbracket^g_c(w) \text{ is defined} \}

b. $CK_c \subseteq \{ w \in D_s | \llbracket \psi \rrbracket^g_c(w) \text{ is defined} \}$

c. $\{ w \in CK_c | \llbracket \psi \rrbracket^g_c(w) = \text{True} \} \subseteq \{ w \in CK_c | \llbracket \phi \rrbracket^g_c(w) = \text{True} \}$

(46) a. I will go to the beach because $\{ \text{the / #a} \}$ sun is shining
b. #Maria is holding War and Peace, and whatever book she is holding is expensive
(47)-(48) satisfy Maximize Presupposition because there is no common knowledge; there is no possibility of a deontic reading

(47) Here’s a hint: whatever dish I am cooking contains onions

(48) A: Maria is holding War and Peace
B: No, she’s holding Anna Karenina
A: I think it’s War and Peace, but anyway, whatever book she is holding is expensive
Some *N or other*-DPs’ alternatives

Some *N or other*-DPs have alternatives that existentially quantify over a smaller set, hence are logically stronger

(49) \[
[ [ \text{Indef} [ [ C_{1,(s,(e,t))} \ w_0 ] [ \text{book} \ w_0 ] ] ]
[ 6 [ \text{Maria} [ [ \text{holding} \ w_0 ] t_6 ] ] ] ]
\]

(50) \[
[ [ \text{Indef} [ [ C_{2,(s,(e,t))} \ w_0 ] [ \text{book} \ w_0 ] ] ]
[ 6 [ \text{Maria} [ [ \text{holding} \ w_0 ] t_6 ] ] ] ]
\]
Grice (1975) famously proposed that we draw certain inferences because we assume interlocutors obey Quantity/Quality

(51) Quantity
   a. Make your contribution as informative as required for the purposes of the exchange
   b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

(52) Quality
   a. Do not say what you believe to be false
   b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
Suppose we’re in a context where our purpose is to find out what book Maria is holding; some book or other is worse than its alternatives for this purpose.

Assuming Quantity and Quality are the deciding factors in the speaker’s message choice to use, the speaker is inferred to be uncertain of each alternative.
As discussed in Aloni & Port 2013, Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2013, Quantity/Quality do not explain judgments of oddness like (53) (see also Magri 2009, et seq.)

(53) **Context:** Everyone who is holding a book gets a bookmark. Maria is holding *War and Peace.*

#Maria gets a bookmark because she’s holding some book or other

The context is such that the information conveyed by *some book or other* is sufficient for the purposes of the exchange and the speaker believes it
Aside on clausal disjunction
“A declarative sentence A or B conveys that the speaker doesn’t know which of A and B is the case because if he did know, he would have been in a position to say A or to say B, as the case may be, and thus he could have said something more informative than A or B with less linguistic effort. . . . Because the speaker expended the extra effort, he is taken as not having been in a position to cooperatively assert A or assert B and is thus taken as not knowing whether A or B is the case.” (McCawley 1978)
“In using a disjunction, the speaker necessarily has to mention two [disjuncts] which are usually more specific... The hearer hence will look for a reason why the speaker chose a more complex expression in order to give less information.” (Eckardt 2007)
Lauer 2014, 2016 observes that ignorance with disjunction arises even in contexts where the information that a disjunct would supply is not relevant to resolving the salient question under discussion (i.e. when Quantity does not obviously distinguish between $A \text{ or } B$ and $A$)

(54) What city is Maria in?
   a. Maria is in Paris or Berlin
   b. Maria is in Europe

(55) Is Maria in NYC?
   a. Maria is in Paris or Berlin
   b. Maria is in Europe
According to Lauer, disjunctions trigger Need-A-Reason Implicatures

(56) The use of an expression \( \alpha \) will trigger a mandatory Need-A-Reason Implicature if:

a. there is another form \( \beta \) which is not semantically weaker
b. there is preference favoring \( \beta \) over \( \alpha \) that is present in all contexts

c. the use of \( \alpha \) automatically makes \( \beta \) salient as an alternative
Ignorance, teasing the addressee, preventing eavesdropping, and maintaining parallelism, (57a) (Lauer 2014, fn.5), are possible reasons for using something relatively long and uninformative

(57) A: If only Maria were in Paris or Berlin
    B: But Maria is in Paris or Berlin. She landed in Berlin this morning.
Unless some reason can be found, the expression is infelicitous

(58) A: If only Maria were in Europe
B: #But Maria is in Paris or Berlin! She landed in Berlin this morning.
B’: But Maria is in Berlin! She landed in Berlin this morning.
(59) **Brevity**

For any utterance context $c$ and declarative LF $\phi$, $\phi$ is felicitous in $c$ only if there is no $\psi \in \text{ALT}_c(\phi)$ such that

a. $\psi$ is structurally simpler than $\phi$ (e.g. in the sense of Katzir, Rett 2015)

b. There is no Reason to use $\phi$ in $c$ instead of $\psi$  
(Reasons: upholding Quantity, upholding Quality, maintaining discourse parallelism, withholding information...)

A disjunct is simpler than a disjunction
Some $N$ or other-DPs, NaR Implicatures

Brevity is relevant in determining the felicity of a *some $N$ or other*-DP

(60)  
A: If only Maria were holding some book or other.
B: But Maria is holding some book or other. She’s holding War and Peace.

(61)  
A: If only Maria were holding a book.
B: But Maria is holding some book or other. She’s holding War and Peace.
B’: But Maria is holding a book. She’s holding War and Peace.

(62)  
I got you something or other that I think you’ll really like

(61), B is a Brevity violation
Evidence for the pragmatic account
I will discuss whatever-DPs that are bound into by every and some N or other-DPs in the restrictor of every.

Every projects universal presupposition (i.e. every individual quantified over satisfies the presuppositions of the nuclear scope) (Heim 1983, Chemla 2009)

(63) Every woman$_1$ likes the book that she$_1$ is holding
Presupposes: For every woman $x$, there is exactly one book that $x$ is holding
For any \( P, Q \in D_{(e,t)} \):

\[ \llbracket \text{every} \rrbracket (P)(Q) \] is defined only if

\[ \forall x \in [P(x) = \text{True} \rightarrow Q(x) \text{ is defined}] . \]

When defined, \( \llbracket \text{every} \rrbracket (P)(Q) = \text{True} \) iff

\[ \forall x \in D_e [P(x) = \text{True} \rightarrow Q(x) = \text{True}] \]
Every binding into whatever-DPs

(65) Every woman likes whatever book she is holding

LF sketch: [ [ every [ woman ] ]
            [ 1 [ t₁ [ likes whatever book she₁ is holding ] ] ] ]

Presupposes (sem): For every woman \( x \), the relevant individual is not certain which property from \( \{ C₁, C₂ \} \) applies to the book that \( x \) is holding

Presupposes (prag): For every woman \( x \), there is a property in \( \{ C₁, C₂ \} \) that applies to the book that \( x \) is holding
The pragmatic account and the definition of $\text{ALT}_c$ predicts that (65) has alternatives $\phi, \psi$ with the presuppositions below

$\phi$: For every woman $x$, $C1$ applies to the book that $x$ is holding

$\psi$: For every woman $x$, $C2$ applies to the book that $x$ is holding
The contrast in the contexts in (66)-(67) (Abenina-Adar 2019) is not predicted by the semantic account (both presupposition failures), but the pragmatic account rules out only (67) (MP violation)

(66) Context: Maria is holding War and Peace and Susanna is holding Anna Karenina

(67) Context: Maria is holding War and Peace and Susanna is holding War and Peace

(68) Every woman likes whatever book she is holding
The two accounts make different predictions for (69)

(69)  [ not [ some N or other . . . ] ]

the semantic account predicts that (70) denies the existence of an unknown witness (compatible with there being a witness who is known)

The pragmatic account predicts no pragmatically-derived inferences because the uttered LF is the strongest among its alternatives; conveying information is a legitimate Reason
Some $N$ or other-DPs and negation

The prediction is not easy to test for some $N$ or other-DPs; they are positive-polarity items (Szabolcsi 2004)

(70)  a. Maria isn’t holding some book or other ($\neq$ Maria isn’t holding any book)
     b. I didn’t understand something from the lecture ($\neq$ I didn’t understand anything...)
Some N or other-DPs in the restrictor of every

The same differing predictions arise for (71a-b) because every is downward entailing on its restrictor\(^7\)

\[(71)\quad \text{Everybody who is holding some book or other will receive a bookmark}
\]
\[\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & [ \text{Everybody} [\text{who Indef}^{\text{sem}} \ldots ] [ \ldots ] ] \\
\text{b. } & [ \text{Everybody} [\text{who Indef}^{\text{prag}} \ldots ] [ \ldots ] ]
\end{align*}\]

\(^7\)For any NP’ that entails NP (e.g. psych student entails student), every NP entails every NP’ (e.g. every student entails every psych student)
Some *N or other*-DPs in the restrictor of every

(72) Everybody who is holding some book or other will receive a bookmark

a. [ Everybody [who Indef^sem \ldots] [\ldots] ]

b. [Everybody [who Indef^prag \ldots] [\ldots] ]

(72a) makes a generalization about people who are holding an unknown book; if someone is holding a book whose relevant property is known, (72a) does not entail that they will receive a bookmark

(72b) makes a generalization about people who are holding a book with any one of the relevant properties; there are no pragmatically-derived inferences because what was said is the strongest alternative

(73) #What about Maria, who is holding War and Peace?
Some \textit{N or other}-DPs in the nuclear scope

The pragmatic account also predicts the following contrasts (see Abenina-Adar 2019, 2020 for more)

(74) Everybody is holding some book or other

a. \textit{Context: Maria is holding War and Peace. Susanna is holding Anna Karenina.} \quad \checkmark (74)

b. \textit{Context: Maria is holding War and Peace. Susanna is also holding War and Peace.} \quad \# (74)
An open question
What counts as identifying?

Clearly, not all properties could fill in for the C-variables (Heller & Wolter 2011)

(75) Context: Maria is holding War and Peace. Is that a long book, or a short book? Well,

a. #Whatever book Maria is holding is expensive
b. #Maria is holding some book or other
What counts as identifying?

There is cross-linguistic variation in the methods of identification that epistemic indefinites rule out (Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2003)

(76) Context: you are watching a soccer match.
   a. Guck mal! Da ist irgendein Fussballspieler verletzt. Weisst Du wer das ist?
      ‘Look! Some player got injured. Do you know who he is?’
   
   b. Guarda! Un qualche giocatore si è fatto male. Sai chi è?
      ‘Look! Some player got injured. Do you know who he is?’

(Aloni & Port 2013)
There is also variation within languages; in Japanese, WH-words/‘indeterminate pronouns’ may take on existential quantificational force with the suffix -ka and convey ignorance

(77) John-wa kinoo dare-ka-ni atteta yo
John-TOP yesterday who-KA-DAT was.meeting PRT
‘John was meeting somebody yesterday’ (→ I don’t know who)

(78) John-wa kinoo hito-ni atteta yo
John-TOP yesterday person-DAT was.meeting PRT
‘John was meeting somebody yesterday’ (↗ I don’t know who)

(Sudo 2010)
Alonso-Ovalle & Shimoyama 2014 observe that the choice between *which* and *what* produces a contrast – *which* appears to convey ‘ostensional’ ignorance (term from Aloni 2001, Aloni & Port 2013)

(79)  

a.  

[Dore-ka]  

kinoko-ni  

sawat-ta!  

which.one-KA mushroom-DAT touch-Pst  

b.  

[Nani-ka]  

kinoko-ni  

sawat-ta!  

what-KA mushroom-DAT touch-Pst  

‘I touched a mushroom!’
Identifying properties constrained by WH-

There is a similar effect with English free relatives (Abenina-Adar 2020)

(80)  \{ \#Whichever / whatever\} mushroom I just touched is giving me a rash
The ostension involved in the meaning of *which* is recognized with the term ‘D-linking’ in interrogatives (e.g. Pesetsky 1987); *which*, unlike *what*, is infelicitous unless there is a domain for the WH-word that is familiar to both speaker and hearer

(81)  
A: I had dinner last night at Restaurant X. Do you know it?  
B: No! Tell me more...  
(i) #Which appetizer did you order?  
(ii) What did you order for your appetizer?
Hebrew has epistemic indefinites formed with the WH-word eyze/o(sheX)

i. Dani received compensation for the flight
ii. Dani received eyze compensation for the flight
iii. Dani received eyzeshehu compensation for the flight
iv. (In particular,) $2000
There is evidence for a pragmatic derivation of ignorance

v. Everyone received eyzeshehu compensation for the flight

vi. Rina received $2000 and Dani received a voucher
Although eyze is a D-linked, ‘ostensional’ WH-word, given vii.-viii., it does not contribute an ostensional flavor of ignorance in epistemic indefinites; x.-xi. are felicitous in the mushroom scenario.

vii. Which appetizer did you order?
viii. What did you order for your appetizer?
ix. I touched a mushroom
x. I touched eyzo mushroom
xi. I touched eyzoshehi mushroom
How is identification constrained by the make-up of the determiner phrase?
Wrapping up
Wrapping up

I have argued that an ‘Or\textsuperscript{C}’ domain shift provides a better account of the readings of \textit{whatever-} and \textit{some N or other-}DPs than an ‘Unknown’ domain shift.
Are there domain shifting determiners that grammatically encode ignorance?

(82)  

a. Middle High German

*neizwer* ‘somebody’ < *ne weiz wer* ‘(I) don’t know who’

b. Romanian (dialectal)

*neștine* ‘some’ < *nescio quis* (Latin) ‘I don’t know who’

c. Bulgarian (dialectal)

*na(m)koj* ‘somebody’ < *ne znam koi* ‘I don’t know who’

(Haspelmath 1997: 131)

Maybe – hopefully this exercise will help us to identify them when we see them
Thank you!
[·]_g^\ast should be read as prefixed with ‘For any assignment g’, where an assignment is a possibly partial function from indices (i.e. number-type ordered pairs) k to denotations of the type of the second member of k. I will show an index’s type only on the indexed proform/trace (not on the abstractor) and only if it is a type other than e or s.
Function Application
If $\alpha$ is an LF with $\{\beta, \gamma\}$ as the set of its daughters, then $[\alpha]^g$ is defined if $[\beta]^g$, $[\gamma]^g$, and $[\beta]^g([\gamma]^g)$ are defined. In this case, $[\alpha]^g = [\beta]^g([\gamma]^g)$
Predicate Modification
If $\alpha$ is an LF with $\{\beta, \gamma\}$ as the set of its daughters, then $[\alpha]^g$ is defined if $[\beta]^g$ and $[\gamma]^g$ are defined and $[\beta]^g, [\gamma]^g \in D(e,t)$. In this case, $[\alpha]^g = \lambda x_e : [\beta]^g(x)$ is defined $\land [\gamma]^g(x)$ is defined. True iff $[\beta]^g(x) = [\gamma]^g(x) = \text{True}$
Predicate Abstraction
If $\alpha$ is an LF whose daughters are the index $\langle n, \sigma \rangle$ and $\beta$, then $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^g = \lambda x_{\sigma} : \llbracket \beta \rrbracket^{g^{\langle n, \sigma \rangle/x}}$ is defined. $\llbracket \beta \rrbracket^{g^{\langle n, \sigma \rangle/x}}$. The modified assignment $g^{\langle n, \sigma \rangle/x}$ is the same as $g$ except for the possible difference that $g^{\langle n, \sigma \rangle/x}(\langle n, \sigma \rangle) = x$. 
Partial definition of \[ \ ]

Proform and Traces/Lexicon
If \( \alpha \) is a terminal node bearing index \( k \), \( [\alpha]^g \) is defined only if \( g(k) \) is defined, and if \( [\alpha]^g \) is defined, then \( [\alpha]^g = g(k) \). If \( \alpha \) is a terminal node bearing no index, then \( [\alpha]^g = [\alpha] \), given in the lexicon.
References


von Fintel, Kai & Irene Heim. 2010. Lecture notes on intensional semantics. Manuscript, MIT.


