A dynamic alternative-pruning account of asymmetries in Hurford Disjunctions

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An asymmetry in Hurford's Constraint

(1) a. # John lives in **Paris** or **France**.
Paris ⇒ **France**

b. John ate **some** or **all** of the cookies.
All ⇒ **Some**

c. ?? John ate **all** or **some** of the cookies.
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The puzzle

- All the disjunctions in (1) have a disjunct that entails the other...
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- **Our goal: explain how the linear ordering of scalar items in a disjunctive statement influences felicity.**

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  - Crucially, **all** and (**some but not all**) are non-entailing!

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- So, a scalar implicature computed on **some** may prevent a disjunction of the form (**some** or **all**)$_{\checkmark}$ as in (1b) to violate Hurford's Constraint.
- To capture the contrast with (**all** or **some**)$_{\#}$ however, $\textsc{Exh}$ **must be made asymmetric**...

Accounting for the asymmetry

Two main accounts

- [Fox and Spector, 2018]: Economy constraint controlling EXH-insertion, by checking that it does not lead to a weaker meaning overall... **complex and maybe too global, see (2).**

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- [Tomioka, 2021]: constraint on the shape of the set of alternatives $\mathcal{A}$ generated by the *Contrast Antecedent* of a given scalar item... **unusual take on Exh/$\mathcal{A}$ interactions, and possibly too general as well, see (3).**

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- Those two accounts posit new general constraints that require to reconsider the whole disjunction to apply repairs...

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A familiar machinery

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- More specifically, we claim that **in a disjunctive context, $\mathcal{A}$ undergoes dynamic alternative pruning**, i.e. is impoverished depending on what has been previously entertained:
  - if $\textsc{Exh}_{\mathcal{A}}$ appplies to the first disjunct, no pruning occurs...
  - ...but if $\textsc{Exh}_{\mathcal{A}}$ applies to the second disjunct, **the content of the first disjunct is removed from $\mathcal{A}$**.

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  - ...but if $\textsc{Exh}_{\mathcal{A}}$ applies to the second disjunct, **the content of the first disjunct is removed from $\mathcal{A}$.**
- $\mathcal{A}$ is thus "smaller" whenever $\textsc{Exh}$ applies in the second disjunct, making $\textsc{Exh}$ less powerful (fewer alternatives to negate!).
- In turn, $\textsc{Exh}$ will be less susceptible to prevent a violation of Hurford's Constraint.

A very simple illustration

(Some or all)$_{\checkmark}$ case

$\exists \vee \forall$ (Basic utterance)

$\textsc{Exh}_{\{\forall\}}(\exists) \vee \forall$ ($\textsc{Exh}$ in D_1)

$\textsc{Exh}_{\{\forall\}}(\exists) \vee \forall$ (No pruning)

$(\exists \wedge \neg\forall) \vee \forall$ (Exhaustification)

$\textsc{Hurford}$ ✓

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(All or some)$_{\#}$ case

$\forall \vee \exists$ (Basic utterance)

$\forall \vee \text{Exh}_{\{\forall\}}(\exists)$ (Exh in D_2)

$\forall \vee \text{Exh}_{\{\forall\}\setminus\{\forall\}}(\exists)$ (D_1-pruning)

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Hurford ✗

Want to learn about more complex cases of scalar Hurford Disjunctions? Come see my poster!

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