

Ever free relatives as dependent definites: a cross-linguistic perspective

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Background and problem statement Ever free relatives (eFRs), exemplified by the bracketed part of *Dave ate [whatever Sue cooked]*, have been discussed in the semantic literature with regard to two theoretical issues: (i) their denotation/semantic type, i.e. whether they are definite descriptions (orig. Jacobson 1995; call it DD approach) or universal quantifiers (e.g. Iatridou & Varlokosta 1998; call it UQ approach), and (ii) the semantic contribution of the ever-morpheme, where many partial controversies have arisen (see, e.g., Dayal 1997, von Stechow 2000, or Condoravdi 2008). The DD approach has to cope with observations suggesting that (some) eFRs do, in fact, behave as universal quantifiers (see esp. Tredinnick 2005), e.g. wrt *almost*-modification, NPI-licensing, and (narrow-)scope-taking. The reason why most researchers have become convinced that the DD approach is correct, is the existence of uncontroversially definite eFRs (sometimes called identity eFRs), first observed by Elliott (1971), exemplified by *[Whichever movie (it is that) is now playing at the Avon] is making a lot of money*, combined with the hope for a unified analysis for all eFRs. The problem for the DD approach, on the other hand, is that quite a few languages have been reported to lack the identity reading of eFRs, e.g. Hungarian (Anna Szabolcsi, p.c. with von Stechow 2000), Greek (Gianakidou & Cheng 2006), and Romanian (David 2014); see also Eilam (2007), who shows that Modern Hebrew patterns with English.

Basic data We investigate the semantics of eFRs in a number of Slavic languages (Serbo-Croatian, Russian, Polish). It turns out that while SC readily allows for identity readings (like English or Hebrew), Ru and Po (apparently) do not (like, e.g., Greek). The data stem from an informal questionnaire filled out by linguists (4 for SC, 4 for Po, and 5 for Ru).

- (1a) Juče u 8 Miloje je gledao šta god su davali na HBOu. [SC]
yesterday at 8 M. AUX watched what EVER AUX gave on HBO
- (1b) #Včera v 8 časov Miša smotrel čto by ni pokazyvali po HBO. [Ru]
yesterday at 8 o'clock M. watched what SUBJ EVER showed on HBO
- (1c) #Wczoraj o 8 Marek oglądał, cokolwiek puszczali na HBO. [Po]
yesterday at 8 M. watched what:EVER showed on HBO
(Intended:) 'Yesterday at 8pm, M. watched whatever (it was) that they showed on HBO
(I don't know what it was).'

Once the 'at 8pm' modifier is left out in Ru and Po, the sentences in (1) become acceptable. Crucially, however, they imply that M. watched more than one thing, which (together with the unacceptability of (1b/c)) might indicate that Ru/Po eFRs are universal quantifiers (introducing an anti-uniqueness presupposition; Sauerland 2008). Yet, the UQ approach fails on data like (2), where the (episodic) past of (1) is switched to (episodic) future. There, the identity reading is available for all languages (only Ru illustrated for space reasons).

- (2) Segodnja v 8 časov Miša budet smotret' čto by ni pokazyvali po HBO. [Ru]
today at 8 o'clock M. will watch what SUBJ EVER showed on HBO
'Tonight at 8pm M. will watch whatever they will show on HBO.'

Proposal We take (2) to show that Jacobson's DD approach is on the right track even for Ru and Po. We further follow the tradition initiated by Dayal (1997) and assume that the ever-morpheme introduces a kind of *variation requirement*, which dictates that the denotation of eFRs varies in one way or another. We capture the variation requirement by treating eFRs as

dependent definites (an option considered but rejected by Lauer 2009)—definite counterparts of Farkas’ 2002 dependent indefinites. The basic idea is that the resource situation (in the sense of Schwarz 2009) of eFRs must covary with some bound variable, i.e., it must be co-bound, and the quantificational domain of the binder must correspond to a set of varying eFR referents. In (3), the denotation of the eFR covaries with s , which is bound by the Q-adverb *vsegda* (working assumption: DDs are individual concepts; Elbourne 2005); the variation requirement is formulated in (3c) as a presupposition stating that there be at least two situations in which the denotations of the eFR are not counterparts of each other (\neq used for the sake of simplicity).

(3a) Miša vsegda est čto by ni prigotovila Vera. [Ru]
 M. always eats what SUBJ EVER cooked V.
 ‘M. always eats whatever Vera cooks.’

(3b) $\forall s < w_0 [\exists x \text{ has.cooked}'(\text{Vera}', x, s) \rightarrow \text{eats}'(\text{Marek}', \iota y [\text{has.cooked}'(\text{Vera}', y, s)])(s)]$

(3c) Variation presupposition of (3a):

$\exists s, s' \in \text{quant.dom}_{\text{vsegda}} \iota x [\text{has.cooked}'(\text{Vera}', x, s)](s) \neq \iota x [\text{has.cooked}'(\text{Vera}', x, s')](s')$

In (2), the eFR denotation covaries with the situation variable bound by the future tense auxiliary (*budet* ‘will’), which we take to be a necessity modal (Copley 2009). Informally, the thing showed/watched varies from one possible future situation to another. The availability of the identity reading corresponds to the fact that only a single (minimal) situation bound by the modal quantifier is part of the actual world (only one thing will *actually* be showed/watched).

“Self-licensing” If eFRs appear in episodic contexts, without any apparent quantifier over situations, they are interpreted *as though* such a quantifier was there (e.g. Tredinnick 2005). This is what gives the universal flavor to the sentences in (1b/c)—the versions *without* the ‘at 8pm’ modifier—the reading being that all (temporally non-overlapping) yesterday-situations were such that M. watched what they showed on HBO in them (and every time it was something else). We assume that English and SC eFRs can be self-licensed not just by a covert version of ‘always’, but also by a covert doxastic/epistemic operator (a covert version of ‘I believe/know that’; cf. Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito 2010). In that case, variation is satisfied within the doxastic/epistemic state of the speaker, giving rise to the ignorance implication (‘I have no beliefs about/don’t know the identity of the eFR referent’).

Locus of variation The cross-linguistic difference in the semantics of eFRs lies in the kind of Q-domain with respect to which the variation requirement can be satisfied. While all languages seem to exhibit licensing by root modals and (covert) Q-adverbs, only some (English, SC) exhibit licensing by doxastic or epistemic operators. An additional piece of evidence supporting this view is that some Polish speakers do accept (1c) (albeit with hesitations), but crucially, only under the so called indifference reading, implying that if HBO had showed something else than in actuality, M. would still have watched it. The indifference reading clearly relates to *root* (rather than epistemic) *modality*: even if the *circumstances* had been different (different TV program), it would have changed nothing about the truth of the sentence. Just like before, this would be a case of “self-licensing”, though via a covert root counterfactual modal (rather than Q-adverb). This observation further supports the view that indifference readings are not (necessarily) derivative of ignorance readings (cf. Lauer 2009). The overall implication of the present approach is that eFRs are akin to free choice items in that their exact licensing conditions (the nature of ‘licensing operators’) can differ from language to language (see e.g. Fălăuș 2014 and the references therein). A number of questions remain open: What are the parameters responsible for the variation? What are the limits of variation? Is there any intra-linguistic relationship between eFR licensing and free choice item licensing?

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