## *On* some *singular indefinites in Romance* Anamaria Falaus, University of Nantes, LLING EA 3827

BACKGROUND: This paper addresses the properties of the Romanian existential indefinite determiner *vreun*, often mentioned in the literature of dependent items (Giannakidou 1997, Alonso-Ovalle & Menendez-Benito (henceforth A&M) 2009), but whose full range of distribution is less frequently considered. The discussion builds on observations in Farkas (2002) and Falaus (2008), brings out previously overlooked contrasts and puts forth new generalizations capturing the distribution of *vreun*. More generally, it adds to the growing class of dependent items sensitive to epistemic modality, and thus puts together *vreun* with other existential determiners in Romance (e.g. French *quelque* (Corblin 2004) and Spanish *algun* (A&M 2009)). Finally, I consider how this pattern can be integrated in a more general theory of polarity-sensitive items, such as the one in Chierchia (2008).

THE CHALLENGE: *Vreun* occurs in two kinds of contexts: (a) typical negative polarity contexts, such as negative contexts, antecedent of conditionals, questions, with a meaning and distribution roughly equivalent to English *any* (as argued for in Falaus (2008)) and (b) non-polarity, positive contexts, discussed in detail in Farkas (2002), with a meaning equivalent to *some*. I present new data and argue that the distribution of *vreun* in non-polarity contexts (i.e. under modals, hypotheticals and attitude verbs, disjunctions) is governed by **epistemic modality**. The contrast between the deontic reading (1) and the epistemic reading (2) of the necessity modal *must* illustrates this requirement:

- (1) \*Trebuie sa scriu vreun articol despre ultimele alegeri.
  - 'I must write some paper about the last elections.'
- (2) Cu numele lui, *trebuie* sa fie *vreun* aristocrat.
  - 'Given his name, he *must* be *some* aristocrate.'

Similarly, I show *vreun* occurs in presumptive contexts, an irrealis mood, conveying the meaning that there is indirect evidence (either hearsay/reported or inferential) that a certain state of affairs might hold/might have held, as discussed in Irimia (2008), who argues presumptive forms are to be analyzed as epistemic modals.

Further empirical support for the hypothesis that epistemic modality is the crucial factor comes from the fact that both disjunctions and presumptive forms (both arguably epistemic modal contexts, cf. Zimmermann 2000) rescue *vreun* in otherwise non-licensing contexts, like *want*, as illustrated by the contrast in (3):

- (3) a. \**Vreau* sa cumpar *vreo* carte despre Picasso.
  - want.1sg SUBJ buy V-A book about Picasso.
  - b. Vreau sa cumpar o/vreo carte sau vreun album despre Picasso.

'I want to buy a/some book or some album about Picasso.

All facts indicate that contexts that impose that the proposition containing *vreun* be the only true alternative rule out *vreun*, with the presence of *epistemic alternatives* being the crucial factor responsible for the licensing of *vreun*.

THE ROLE OF ALTERNATIVES - IMPERATIVES: In previous work, *vreun* is claimed to be ruled out in imperatives. However, a closer examination of the empirical facts reveals that there are certain imperatives which license the use of *vreun*, as illustrated by the following example:

- (4) Vorbeste cu *vreun* vecin, sa primeasca el pachetul
  - 'Talk to some neighbor, so that he receives the package'

These facts can be accounted for once we adopt the proposal in Aloni (2007), who distinguishes between *choice-offering* and *alternative-presenting* imperatives (both of the type *do a or b*), where crucially, only the latter type is compatible with a continuation *don't do b*:

- (5) ??? Take *any* card, but don't you dare take the ace!
- (6) Talk to *some* neighbor, so that he receives the package! But don't even think about talking to Peter, he is never willing to help.

The use of *some* in (6) (parallel to the one involving *vreun* in (4)) brings out the *alternative-presenting* meaning of the imperative (with a meaning like 'one thing you could do'). The imperative in (4) is compatible with a situation where the choice among the set denoted by the noun, the set of neighbors, is not limited to a contextually identifiable set (the speaker might very well not know the identity/the number of neighbors the addressee has) and, crucially, also compatible with a situation where one of

the members of the set is excluded. This is in contrast to imperatives that license *free-choice items* like *any* (5), which rule out *vreun*. The case of imperatives support the hypothesis that the crucial licensing factor is the existence of a set of (epistemic) alternatives, among which any can be false.

I discuss the challenges raised by the puzzling distribution of *vreun*, which differs from all other dependent items mentioned in the literature ('modal' indefinites like *quelque*, *algun* or free-choice existentials). First, I argue against Farkas (2006) who defends an ambiguity approach, claiming there are two different *vreun* items, and show it makes wrong empirical predications. Moreover, I show that Giannakidou's unifying analysis of *vreun* in terms of nonveridicality is also not entirely appropriate: *vreun* appears in contexts which are claimed to be veridical (under *believe*, *suppose*, *imagine*) and ruled out in some nonveridical contexts (deontic modals, verbs like *want* or choice-presenting imperatives).

THE PROPOSAL: I argue its distribution can be implemented in the unified approach to polaritysensitive items developed in Chierchia (2006, 2008). In this framework, all dependent elements are **domain widening** existential items. As such, they introduce alternatives (domain and/or scalar ones, which then expand into propositional alternatives), triggering the insertion of an exhaustification operator (7), which ultimately yields to an enriched meaning.

- (7) Op  $(p,ALT(p)) = p \land \Box q [q \Box I-E (p, ALT(p)) \rightarrow \neg q]$ ; (where I-E= the set of innocently excludable, i.e. stronger alternatives that can be excluded without leading to contradiction)
- (8) Op (p,ALT(p))=Op(p,ALT(p)), if  $[p \not\subseteq \cap ALT(p)] \rightarrow [Op(p,ALT(p)) \subset p]; \perp$ , otherwise

Op is defined (8) either if p entails the conjunction of all true alternatives to p (as is the case in negative polarity contexts), or if the exhaustification of p and its alternatives asymmetrically entails p, i.e. if the resulting meaning is stronger than the original assertion. I show that this second condition is only met in modalized contexts, where recursive exhaustification of the alternatives triggered by *vreun* (along the lines of Fox 2006) leads to an *anti-exhaustiveness* implicature: the speaker does not want to rule out any possible alternative that could satisfy the restriction. In non-polarity and non-modal contexts, the requirements of Op are not met and the derivation crashes, resulting in ungrammaticality.

Chierchia's proposal is attractive, insofar as it derives the restricted distribution of *vreun* from its domain widening meaning, unifying the polarity and modal contexts. However, the present proposal derives a free-choice meaning for *vreun* (any domain member can satisfy the existential claim), but fails to integrate the requirement I have identified for *vreun*, namely **any alternative in Alt(p)**, **including** *p*, **the proposition where** *vreun* **occurs, can be false**, a crucial difference between free-choice items and *vreun*. In order to solve this issue, I consider two recent implementations of a similar constraint: Jayez & Tovena 2007 on French *quelque* (who posit an 'evidential' meaning component, where the item is licensed only in cases the epistemic agent has *indirect evidence* for the existential claim), and A&M 2009 on Spanish *algun* (who derive the 'modal' meaning from the restriction on the domain of quantification, which has to contain at least two entities). Both share properties of *vreun*, but differ as far as the negative polarity status is concerned, with *vreun* being much more constrained, a property that I take as supporting the account developed by Chierchia, which allows a natural connection between polarity and non-polarity contexts. Accordingly, I argue that we need to maintain the main insights in Chierchia's approach and supplement it with further restrictions on the alternatives associated with these items, along the lines of these analyses.

The new facts discussed in this paper bring about interesting parallels with other dependent indefinites, whose distribution is also determined by (different types of) modality. Thus, accounting for the properties of *vreun* leads not only to a better understanding of the possible connections between negative polarity and modality, but also enables us to delineate the parameters of variation among semantically dependent items.

SELECTED REFERENCES: Aloni 2007. Free Choice, Modals and Imperatives. *NALS* 15(65—94); Alonso-Ovalle & Menendez-Benito 2009. Modal indefinites (ms); Chierchia 2008. A Theory of Semantic Variation for Polarity Sensitive Items, talk given at LSRL 38; Corblin 2004. *Quelque*, Handbook of French Semantics, CSLI Publications; Falaus 2008. Extreme non-specificity as negative polarity, talk given at LSRL 38; Farkas 2002. Extreme non-specificity in Romanian. in *Romance Languages and Linguistic Theory 2000*; Giannakidou 1997. *The Landscape of Polarity Items*, PhD dissertation, University of Groningen; Jayez & Tovena 2007. Evidentiality and determination,

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