

Disjunct size, positive polarity and the scope of disjunction in Russian

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Problem Szabolcsi (2002) claims that disjunction markers *vagy* in Hungarian and *ili* in Russian behave like positive polarity items (PPIs) in being unable to scope under clausemate sentential negation, as evidenced by De Morgan’s laws failing to hold in (1).

- (1) On ne znaet russkogo ili nemeckogo
he not knows Russian or German
(*‘He speaks neither Russian nor German.’) [$\neg > \vee$]

Szabolcsi (2002) adduces further evidence from locality and PPI-rescuing to show that *ili* aligns with *some* in English as regards its PPI-properties.

Claim This paper claims that the scope properties of the Russian disjunction marker *ili* correlate with the phrasal *vs.* clausal nature of the disjunction: phrasal disjunction yields narrow scope whilst clausal disjunction yields wide scope. In so doing, we introduce the following empirical generalisations that are problematic for purely semantic analyses of PPI-disjunction.

Gen 1: Interactions with movement Rudnev (2016) observes that once the disjunction phrase is topicalised so as to appear to the left of the negation marker *ne*, the narrow-scope reading for the disjunction becomes readily available:

- (2) a. Russkogo ili nemeckogo on ne znaet. b. On russkogo ili nemeckogo ne znaet.
Russian or German he not knows he Russian or German not knows
(‘He speaks neither Russian nor German.’) [$\neg > \vee$; $*\vee > \neg$]

The fact that disjunction scopes under negation in (2) whereas it could not do so whilst being c-commanded by it (1) creates a scope paradox that is problematic for approaches defining PPI-hood as being incompatible with DE-environments (Nicolae 2017; Spector 2014; Szabolcsi 2002).

Gen 2: Negated predication Whilst Szabolcsi (2002) shows that *ili* is only anti-licensed very locally, disjunction being able to scope under negation even under secondary predication, primary predication in the present tense, where the overt copula is absent, disallows *ili* occurring under sentential negation:

- (3) a. *On ne vor ili mošennik b. *On vor ili mošennik ne.
he not thief or crook he thief or crook not
(‘He’s not a thief or he’s not a crook.’) (‘He’s not a thief or a crook.’)

The unavailability of the wide-scope reading in (3a) is unexpected, unlike that of the narrow-scope reading.

Gen 3: Sentence-medial disjunction under negation The final generalisation concerns the unavailability of the wide-scope reading when the disjunction phrase appears sentence-medially: (4) is unacceptable on both the wide- and narrow-scope readings.

- (4) *On ne dal vodku ili pivo Maše [*¬ > ∨; *∨ > ¬]
 he not gave vodka or beer to.Masha

Proposal The three seemingly disparate generalisations follow once one dispenses with the stipulation that disjunction is a scopal element that can take wide scope via (QR-like) movement. Instead I propose that narrow scope results from phrasal disjunction whereby *Russian or German* form a constituent, and wide scope from clausal disjunction followed by ellipsis (5).

- (5) [He doesn't speak Russian] or [~~he doesn't speak~~ German]

Since **Gen 1** clearly shows that *ili* 'or' is capable of appearing in a local DE-environment and scope under negation, which it could not do when being directly c-commanded by the negation marker *ne*, I follow Zeijlstra (2004) in claiming that the Russian marker of sentential negation *ne* is not clausal negation itself but is instead licensed by an abstract operator OP_{\neg} , as in the following LFs:

- (6) a. OP_{\neg} he *ne* speaks [Russian or German]
 b. OP_{\neg} [Russian or German] he *ne* speaks
 c. OP_{\neg} he [Russian or German] he *ne* speaks

I analyse PPI-effects associated with *ili* in (1) as an instance of an intervention effect, with *ne* acting as intervener (6a). Once the disjunction moves past the intervener (6b–6c), it becomes able to scope under OP_{\neg} . To be able to move, however, the disjunction phrase must be a constituent, hence the obligatory phrasal nature of the disjunction in **Gen 1**, which also correctly rules out the wide-scope interpretation.

Gen 2 is derived as follows: (i) the PPI-effect arises due to *ne*-intervention, as above; (ii) moving the disjunction phrase past the negation marker is impossible for independent reasons. Phrasal disjunction, therefore, works as predicted. The wide-scope reading, on the other hand, is arguably unavailable due to a failure to recover the source of ellipsis in the rightmost disjunct.

Finally, **Gen 3** follows from the fact that (4) is incompatible with the clausal disjunction structure: either *vodku ili pivo* moves past the recipient argument *Maše*, in which case it forms a constituent; or the recipient argument is extraposed, in which case it belongs in the same clause as the entire disjunction phrase.

Implications The view advocated in this paper has a number of advantages compared with purely semantic approaches to PPI-disjunctions. First, its reliance on the negative concord status of Russian correctly predicts that *ili* will only give rise to PPI-effects when negative concord is permitted rather than in all DE-environments. Second, it derives the scope properties of *ili* whilst maintaining a credible syntax for disjunction (cf. Toosarvandani 2013 for a similar argument for *but*-coördination), thereby avoiding unmotivated movement operations with unclear properties. This view, if correct, suggests a more significant rôle of syntax in PPI-anti-licensing than previously assumed.