

Postscript to “Whatever” {Comments on Condoravdi}

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1 “Whatever” (2000)

The ignorance component of the meaning of *whatever* escapes most embeddings.

- (1) Unless there’s a lot of garlic in whatever Arlo is cooking, I will eat out tonight.
- (2) I suspect that there’s a lot of garlic in whatever Arlo is cooking.
- (3) When Emma finds whatever she is looking for, she certainly won’t tell me.

But not all of them:

- (4) Pascal correctly suspected that whatever he was eating was not vegetarian.
- (5) Every one of the contestants suspected that whatever (it was that) he was eating was not vegetarian.

The indifference meaning remains local:

- (6) Unless Zack simply voted for whoever was at the top of the ballot, he must have spend at least 5 minutes in the voting booth.

My proposal in 2000: the ignorance component is a presupposition and projects accordingly.

2 Something Other Than Presupposition?

Condoravdi shows that the ignorance component is not a presupposition:

- Ignorance is not signalled as taken for granted
- No presupposition denial
- No presupposition filtering

So, what else could I have reached for in 2000?

Not much, because I tend to buy my tools on the open market rather than develop them myself.

Possibilities now:

- conventional implicature, à la Potts [3].
- storage-and-discharge

Condoravdi's system (i) generates alternatives to the property inside the *whatever* definite description, (ii) puts them into a kind of storage, and then (iii) discharges them either rather locally (in which case we get indifference readings) or globally (in which case ignorance readings predominate).

Storage and discharge mechanisms, ever since the invention of Cooper-storage, are a way of moving items without moving them syntactically.

Given the increasingly numerous uses of alternatives in semantics, I am worried that we won't be able to keep them all straight. In the end, we may need to posit syntactic links between the discharge location and the point of origin of the alternatives.

Why not then consider a movement analysis in the first place? In fact, as Condoravdi mentions, my desperate stab at a unified account actually depended on moving ignorance *whatever* to give it widest scope.

3 A Quick “Summary” of Condoravdi

- (7) Unless there's a lot of garlic in whatever Arlo is cooking, I will eat out tonight.

Condoravdi's analysis gives (7) two meaning components:

- (i) Unless there's a lot of garlic in the dish Arlo is cooking, I will eat out tonight. [ordinary meaning, definite description *in situ*]
- (ii) For all alternative, more specific subproperties P of “dish that Arlo is cooking”: there is a world in *c* (updated with the ordinary meaning) where: unless there's a lot of garlic in the P, I will eat out tonight.

The existence presupposition of *the P* makes it so that for each P, it must be possible that there is a P. That is, for all *c* is concerned, Arlo may be cooking soup or stew. This derives the ignorance interpretation (or related meanings).

Note that since one can use (7) even if one has significantly narrowed down the possibilities, the alternative set needs to be tailored. (This didn't arise in my initial 2000 analysis because all that was required there was some uncertainty rather than universal uncertainty wrt to a given set of alternatives as here in Condoravdi's proposal).

(8) I grabbed whatever tool was in front of me.

For indifference cases, Condoravdi's uses a slightly different discharge mechanism:

- (i) I grabbed the tool that was in front of me. [ordinary meaning]
- (ii) For all alternative, more specific subproperties P of "tool that was in front of me": there is a world w' in the set of worlds maximally similar to w_0 where P is instantiated such that I grabbed the P in w' .

The second component expresses the indifference/indiscriminacy that I tried to analyze with a counterfactual meaning (if a different tool had been in front of me, I would have grabbed *that one*).

4 Moving "Whatever"

Let's try two things:

1. Use movement instead of store-and-discharge.
2. Make explicit the modal base that *whatever* is sensitive to, like I did in 2000.

Assume that the structure of the free relative (before movement) is this:¹

- (9) the (whatever (w) (f) (P))
where w is a world argument, f is the covert modal base argument and P is the clausal description (e.g. $\lambda w.\lambda x$. Arlo is cooking x in w).

The argument of *the* is of far too high a type to serve as its argument and so it moves away, leaving behind a property variable.

¹Two remarks: (i) what follows is not at all worked out in formal detail but I hope a suitably explicit and carefully constructed descendent will work, (ii) I was inspired by conversations I had with Danny Fox about this material in 2001 or so, where we speculated about a movement analysis of *whatever* and *any*.

Let's say it moves to a clausal position higher up. It now has four arguments: the evaluation world, the modal base, the property P and a function from properties to propositions (simply the λ -abstract created by the movement).

Here's what it does with those three arguments:

- (10) whatever (w) (f) (P) (\mathcal{P}) imposes two conditions:
- a. $\mathcal{P}(P)(w) = 1$ (ordinary meaning)
 - b. for all alternative, more specific subproperties P' of P :
 $\exists w' \in f(w) : \mathcal{P}(P)(w')$.

Different readings come about by different choices of modal base: if f picks out the speaker's epistemic alternatives (together with Condoravdi's explanation of how the existence presupposition of the in-situ definite projects), we get ignorance; if f picks out the subject's bouletic alternatives, we get indifference.

We can get embedded ignorance readings as in the sentences in (4) and (5) by moving *whatever* to the top of the embedded clause, which is where it can pick up the epistemic alternatives of the subject of the attitude verb. [Condoravdi doesn't analyze these sentences, but I assume she might posit an embedded occurrence of her global discharge mechanism.]

The main mystery (shared with my 2000 analysis and Condoravdi's analysis):

- (i) ignorance is not part of the ordinary truth-conditional content
- (ii) indifference is part of the ordinary truth-conditional content

We could say that ignorance is a second-dimensional / expressive / conventional implicature meaning à la Potts. (Since Condoravdi has shown it is not a presupposition.)

But how and why does the indifference component become part of the ordinary meaning?

5 Modally loaded NPs

As Condoravdi mentions, *whatever* free relatives are one of many related items. In the end, we want a typology and not just piecemeal analyses.

I suspect that a worthwhile project would be to start with structures where the modal meaning is clearly parenthetical (second-dimensional):

- (11) Unless the thing Arlo is cooking – whatever it is – has a lot of garlic in it, I will eat out tonight.
- (12) I grabbed the tool that was handy – it didn't matter (to me) what it was.

Then, one would move to structures that might have evolved out of these:

- (13) Anne cherche n'importe quelle bouteille de vin
Anne look-3s NEG matter which bottle of wine
'Anne is looking for a bottle of wine – any kind will do'

Zabbal [4] proposes a movement analysis for *n'importe qu-*.

Finally, one would get to structures whose complex compositional nature has become obscured (*whatever, any*, etc.).

Exciting Times.

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