

Multiple Degree

Some observations on multiple degree expressions in conditionals

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Abstract:

It is well-known that indirect questions can have multiple *wh*-phrases. In the interpretation, these multiple *wh*-elements are combined to form pairs, triples etc. by an operation often referred to as 'absorption'. Similar facts can be observed in examples like *whichever book you buy in whatever store, you always pay too much*. It is not obvious whether such sentences are indirect questions or free relative clause adjuncts (cf. discussion in Van Riemsdijk, 2006). The presence of *-ever* suggests that these are not indirect questions. As adjuncts, these free relatives have a semantics that resembles conditionals: if you buy any book in any store, then you will pay too much. It turns out, indeed, straightforward conditional adjuncts evidence a type of absorption, not with *wh*-elements but with degree-phrases, as in *if you read more books on a wider variety of topics, you have a better chance of being admitted in a prestigious university*. In such examples, in order to evaluate your chance of being admitted you must compute the combination of the scales that correspond to number of books and variety of topics: the higher this combined value, the better your chances. This talk will present a range of such facts, attempt a preliminary analysis, determine the range of constructions that show this behavior, and will speculate on what an account might look like.

Riemsdijk, Henk C. van (2006). Free relatives. In Martin Everaert and Henk C. van Riemsdijk eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax*, 338-382. Oxford: Blackwell.