

## An experimental investigation of long-distance indefinites in English and German

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Indefinites have always been a central topic in investigations of the semantics-pragmatics interface. New insights about the behaviour of indefinites, in particular about their anaphoric and discourse properties, led to groundbreaking new semantic theories in the 1980s, which are still the basis for modern semantics and pragmatics. At the same time, there is much debate about the denotation of indefinites, i.e. whether they are to be treated as existential quantifiers or rather as restricted variables or referential expressions (dependent on speakers' intentions); furthermore, there is disagreement about the judgments on the acceptability of indefinites with certain interpretations, and in certain syntactic environments. Our research program makes a contribution on both empirical and theoretical levels, through an experimental investigation of the semantic and pragmatic factors that influence indefinite interpretation.

Our main concern is the so-called long-distance (LD) behaviour of indefinites. Under the classical assumption that indefinites denote existential quantifiers, it is puzzling why indefinites – in contrast to other quantifiers – seem to be able to take LD scope (also termed 'exceptional wide' scope) out of scope islands, such as finite complement-clauses, *if*-clauses (as in (1)), or relative clauses (as in (2)) (Fodor and Sag 1982, among many others). If the indefinite in (1) takes LD scope out of the *if*-clause island (the LD wide scope reading, WSR), (1) states that there is a particular relative of the speaker such that if this specific relative dies the speaker will inherit a fortune. In contrast, on the narrow scope reading (NSR) of the indefinite, (1) states that the speaker will inherit a fortune upon the death of any relative.

- (1) If a relative of mine dies, I will inherit a fortune. [cf. Fodor & Sag 1982]

It has further been noted (e.g., Farkas 1981) that indefinites can scope outside the island but underneath a higher quantifier, obtaining an LD intermediate scope reading (ISR), as in (2). On this reading, each student read all books assigned by a (potentially different) professor.

- (2) Every student read every book that a professor assigned.

ISR of indefinite: every student > a professor > every book

Many authors assume that the ISR is actually a functional reading (FR) that can be forced by a functional continuation such as '*namely (the book assigned by) the professor that the respective student likes most*'. It has been argued, however, that the FR is actually a distinct reading from the ISR.

The property of indefinites to have LD WSRs and ISRs out of islands is undisputed. However, it is still under debate how LD scope readings are best explained (**qu. A**); whether all indefinites are equally compatible with LD readings (**qu. B**); whether the distinction of FRs and ISRs is empirically verifiable (**qu. C**); and by which mechanism(s) ISRs are derived (**qu. D**). Our research program contributes to all four of these questions, through experimental testing of the availability of WSRs, ISRs, and FRs to different types of indefinites in English and German, particularly testing predictions of a recent proposal by Endriss (2009). Endriss (2009) links LD scope and information-structural properties and argues that only topical quantifiers can take LD scope. She furthermore claims that topical indefinites are realized with a heavy (rising) accent on the determiner in German. The question is open whether this prediction also holds for English. Indefinites with stressed *some*, unlike those with unstressed *some*, seem to facilitate or even require wide scope (Kratzer 1998, Giannakidou in press), but this has not been tested experimentally. Ionin (in press) has found that *one* takes LD scope more readily than *a*, but it is not clear whether this was due to the stress pattern or the determiner form.

The goals of our study are to examine the availability of LD scope to different types of indefinites in both English and German, focusing on which factors (determiner form, stress pattern, information structure and context) are relevant for the availability of WSRs and ISRs. Each experiment will have an English version and a German version. The test instrument in each experiment will be a picture-based truth-value judgment task.