

Free Choice Relatives in Telugu

THE PUZZLE: In English (and Hindi, with *jo-bhii*) an *-ever* free relative (FR) can have one of three interpretations (Dayal 1997, von Stechow 2000, Condoravdi 2005) –ignorance, indifference, and quantificational. In Telugu, each of them is expressed through a separate construction, (1) –the ignorance reading via a disjunctive particle and ‘but’ correlative, the indifference reading via a conditional correlative, and the quantificational reading via a concessive conditional free relative.

- (1) a. ravi uma eemi vanDind-oo kaani, adi tinnaaDu IGNORANCE
 Ravi Uma what cooked-DISJ but, that ate
 ‘Ravi ate whatever Uma cooked.’
- b. ravi uma eemi vanDu-tee adi tinnaaDu INDIFFERENCE
 Ravi Uma what cooked-IF that ate
 ‘Ravi ate whatever Uma cooked.’
- c. ravi uma eemi vanDi-naa tinnaaDu QUANTIFICATIONAL
 Ravi Uma what cooked-CONC ate
 ‘Ravi ate whatever Uma cooked.’

Whereas theoretical analyses have tried to unify the various readings in English (Condoravdi 2015), or subsume one under the other (Dayal 1997, Tredinnick 2005), the theoretical challenge in Telugu is to explain how and why each reading is associated with a different structure and derive the semantic mechanism based on the morphosyntax of the structure that it is associated with.

THE DESCRIPTIVE GENERALIZATIONS: The speaker’s epistemic uncertainty about the identity of the referent of the correlative is signalled in the ‘disjunctive plus but’ correlative. It fails the namely test (Dayal 1997), (2). It is also used to form extreme ignorance questions, (3) & (4).

- (2) #nuvvu eemi vanDutunnaav-oo kaani, anTee caapalu, (adi) caalaa kampu koDutoondi.
 you what cooking-DISJ but, namely fish, it much smell come.
 ‘Whatever you are cooking, namely fish, is smelling a lot.’
- (3) ravi eemi ayyi-pooyeeD-oo kaani? (4) ravi ekkaDi-ki vellipooyeeD-oo kaani?
 ravi what happened-off-DISJ but ravi where-to go-away-DISJ but
 ‘Whatever happened to Ravi?’ ‘Wherever did Ravi go?’

Indifference about the identity of the referent is signalled through the conditional correlative. This reading is compatible with the identity of the referent being explicitly mentioned, (5). A list in apposition to such a sentence is interpreted conjunctively, (6). It is also the structure employed to express extreme indifference/indiscrimination, (7)-(8), like the English bare *wh-ever* construction.

- (5) ravi ee-bussu vas-tee adi ekkeeDu. adi aidoo no. bussu avvaDam jarigindi.
 Ravi which-bus come-IF that climbed. That five no. bus happening happened.
 ‘Ravi got onto whichever bus came. It happened to be Bus no.5.’
- (6) ravi eedi doriki-tee adi sanciloo veesukunnaaDu –pencilu, pennulu, pustakaalu.
 Ravi which find-IF that bag-in put –pencils, pens, books.
 ‘Ravi put whatever he found into the bag –pencils, pens, books.’
- (7) ravi eedi paDi-tee adi tinTaaDu (8) talupu terisi un-Tee evaru an-Tee vaallu vastaaru
 Ravi what fall-IF that eats door open be-IF who say-IF they come-will
 ‘Ravi eats whatever.’ ‘If the door is open, whoever will come in.’

Generic interpretations are good with concessive free relatives, (9), but not with others, (10).

- (9) ee paamu-ni paTTi-naa kaaTestadi (10) *ee paamu-ni paD-tee adi kaaTestadi
 which snake-ACC catch-CONC bites which snake-ACC catch-IF that bites
 ‘Whatever snake you catch bites.’ ‘Whatever snake you catch, it bites.’

