

Particle 'or'¹

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1 Introduction

- (1) A: Alfonso is being very quiet.
B: Or he isn't here.
- (2) B': (No,) He isn't here.

Intuition: B's response with sentence-initial 'or' provides a possible alternative to A's claim, but doesn't suggest that A's claim is necessarily wrong. Often, but not always: corrective, but not a 'full' correction.

The big question

What is the account of 'or' in sentence-initial position?

- Puzzle 1: looks like 'or', but not syntactically binary.
- Puzzle 2: How to account for interpretation?

- (3) Scenario: Murder investigation, butler is acting suspicious.
A: Maybe the butler did it.
B: Or he's being blackmailed.
- (4) A: The printer must be out of ink.
B: Or the drivers are out of date.
C: Or the network is down.
D: Or the printer is broken.
...

Main claims:

- Sentence-initial 'or' is basically a discourse particle.
- Interpretation: introduces additional possible discourse futures.
- Not easily disentangled from the account of regular 'or'.

Roadmap

1. Distributional questions – how general is this, where is 'or' located syntactically?
2. The simplest account: can it be reduced to binary \vee ?
3. A dynamic account for declaratives.
4. Interrogatives and discourse futures.
5. Conclusions: on the ambiguity hypothesis.

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Any of the B–D responses can instead be prefixed with 'maybe', with a very similar meaning.

1.1 Generality

First question: How general is sentence-initial 'or'?

- My answer: extremely general and productive.
- One of the few existing concrete (if brief) comments in the theoretical linguistics literature on this 'or' suggests otherwise.

Szabolcsi (1997) ex. 36a:

(5) Who did you marry? Or, where did you live?

"This suggests that the *or* in [examples] does not really offer a choice but, instead, is an idiomatic device that allows one to cancel the first question and replace it with the second. This idiomatic character is corroborated by the fact that the Hungarian equivalents are entirely unacceptable unless *inkább* 'rather, instead' is added..."

- It's definitely less frequent / natural with two constituent questions.

Webber & Prasad (2009): analysis of PDTB (Prasad et al. 2008) English coordinators, all of them are well-attested S-initially, including 'or'.

- COCA (Davies 2008-): 33k hits for '. or'. About half in spoken+fiction, where the fiction cases are typically dialogue.
- Some more things that can be combined in this way:

(6) A: Do you speak Italian?

B: Or do you speak Spanish?

(7) A: Alfonso speaks Italian.

B: Or does he speak Spanish? (corrective flavor)

(8) A: Does Alfonso speak Italian?

B: #Or he speaks Spanish.

(9) Ask any of my three ex-wives. Or maybe don't ask them.

(10) I couldn't stop thinking about how mean my parents were. Or how noble I was.

Caveat: I am asking a different question than Szabolcsi was. Question there: how productively can constituent interrogatives be disjoined within-sentence? See also Hirsch (2016) for a recent detailed investigation.

Discussion of exx like (5) goes back to Groenendijk & Stokhof 1984.

After Farkas & Roelofsen's 2015 example (15) – which is same-speaker (a so-called *open disjunctive question*).

imperative + imperative, COCA.

embedded exclamative + exclamative? COCA.

Many non-sentential cases, which I will not directly deal with here:

(11) I hadn't realized how demanding the work would be. Or how tedious.

COCA.

1.2 The position of 'or' in the left periphery

It attaches high in the left periphery (Rizzi 1997). First bound: \gg C.

(12) a. Or is he just not here?

'or' \gg C

b. What do you say to him? Or what do you say to other Americans?

'or' \gg Spec,CP, COCA.

- c. OK, what's your favorite soap opera ? Or who's your favorite star?

Where in the 'fine structure'? Only things that appear higher are a few particles like 'well'.

- (13) a. Well, or he isn't here.
b. Well, or they're saying gross injustice is about to be ignored. COCA.

Targeting specific categories from Cinque's 1999 articulated hierarchy:

- (14) a. Or, maybe he isn't here.
b. #Maybe or he isn't here. 'or' >> epistemic adverbs
- (15) a. ...those ideas usually are better than yours. Or, at least, that's what they think. (adapted from a COCA example)
b. #At least, or, that's what they think. 'or' >> discourse adverbs
- (16) a. Or, frankly, he isn't here.
b. #Frankly, or he isn't here. 'or' >> speech-act adverbs

Unembeddable:

- (17) a. Bill thinks/said (*or) that (*or) the printer was out of ink.
b. Bill asked (*or) whether (*or) the printer was out of ink. 'or' >> the part of the left periphery that can embed

Summary:

- Bound for position: speech-act adverbs ('frankly') are the highest functional head in Cinque's 1999 hierarchy of adverbs.
- Function and peripheral position of sentence-initial 'or' matches Zimmermann's 2011 characterization of *discourse particles*:

"Discourse particles in the narrow sense are used in order to organize the discourse by expressing the speaker's epistemic attitude towards the propositional content of an utterance, or to express a speaker's assumptions about the epistemic states of his or her interlocutors concerning a particular proposition." (pp. 2012-3)

1.3 Particle 'or' is anaphoric

Anaphoricity

Particle 'or' is not syntactically binary. But, this is not to deny that it is semantically/pragmatically binary.

1. Is 'or' anaphoric at all?
2. If so, what is it anaphoric to?

Anaphoricity is a presupposition in the corpus literature – question there is often, how far back can the antecedent be?

- Really bad discourse-initially:

(18) (S walks up to a stranger on the street)
#Or do you have the time?

First approximation: particle 'or' is anaphoric to a proposition.

- Contrast with 'maybe' relative to an overt question:

(19) A: What's wrong with the printer?
B: Maybe it's out of ink.
C: Or the drivers are out of date.

(20) A: What's wrong with the printer?
B: #Or it's out of ink.

Second approximation: particle 'or' is anaphoric to a possible answer.

2 The simplest account

(21) Version 0: in response to ψ , $[\text{or } \varphi] = \llbracket \psi \rrbracket \vee \llbracket \varphi \rrbracket$.

- We need a bit more to get any sensible pragmatics.
- Version 0.1: (21) comes with a scalar inference: $p \vee q$ strengthened to $(p \vee q) \wedge \neg Kp \wedge \neg Kq$. Relatively standard (Sauerland 2004, e.g.).
 - Strengthened response challenges assertability conditions for p ?

This could even be combined with an ellipsis story, to capture the sometimes intuition that S-initial 'or' responses are finishing the other speaker's utterance.

Problems with the simplest account?

- Doesn't handle commitments right. That is, B has no commitment to even the possibility of the antecedent in cross-speaker cases.
- Presentation of a preferred alternative makes a symmetric disjunctive paraphrase hard. Not about knowledge.

I don't mean anything fancy or normative by 'commitment' – simply a question of who turns out to have been correct.

(22) A: The meeting was very hard to schedule, and so needs to be at 7am.
B: Or we could just cancel the whole thing.

\neq B: the meeting will be at 7am or we could just cancel the whole thing.

- Doesn't handle non-declaratives or mixed clause types. (Move to non-classical disjunction?)

(23) A: John's being very quiet.
B: Or is he just not here?

(24) A: Eat your vegetables.
B: Or you'll yell at me?

See Biezma & Rawlins (2016) for discussion of cases like this, as well as Will Starr's recent work on imperatives (Starr 2016).

Summary: The simplest account is hard to integrate with the details of the pragmatics, as well as non-declarative cases.

3 A dynamic account for declarative cases

- (1) A: Alfonso is being very quiet.
B: Or he isn't here.

Back to the core declarative cases. Desiderata to capture:

- B does not accept A's claim per se.
- B doesn't reject it either: accepts it as a *possibility only*.
- B introduces a new, competing possibility.

Consider a more 'normal' case. What is happening between A and B?

- (25) A: Alfonso is being very quiet. B: ok.

- A makes a proposal to update the common ground. B's 'ok' accepts this proposal and triggers the common ground update.
- **Idea:** particle-'or' responses are operating in this space.

Farkas & Bruce 2010. What other things could happen besides acceptance? Examples: rejection, partial acceptance (Rawlins 2010), resistance (Bledin & Rawlins 2016), agreeing to disagree (Farkas & Bruce), ...

3.1 Proposals and tables

Farkas & Bruce: context has a special slot for proposals, called the *Table*. Asserting puts something on the Table – it is in limbo until accepted or further acted upon.

This is a fundamentally Stalnakerian proposal: the context is recording an elaborated version of what is taken to be *common ground* among discourse participants. (Stalnaker 1978, 1998, etc)

- (26) Let a *context* c be a tuple $\langle cs_c, A_c, Q_c \rangle$ where:
- cs_c is a set of worlds (the *context set*)
 - A_c is either a proposition (type $\langle s, t \rangle$) or \emptyset
 - Q_c is a set of propositions (type $\{\langle s, t \rangle\}$)

One further simplification: I will write but not formally model 2nd-order effects such as how it becomes common ground by default that the agent of an assertion believes what they assert.

For A, Q, \emptyset indicates that the slot is currently empty. More general approach: use a stack. I'm aggressively simplifying.

- (27) $c + \lceil \text{Assert}_x(\varphi) \rceil = \langle cs_c, \llbracket \varphi \rrbracket, Q_c \rangle$ **Assertion**, v.1
Felicity conditions on assertion:

Paraphrase: asserting φ puts φ on the table as a candidate for updating the context set.

- $A_c = \emptyset$
- cs_c is compatible with $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket$
- x believes $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket$

- (28) $c + \lceil \text{Accept}_x \rceil = \langle cs_c \cap \{w \mid A_c(w)\}, \emptyset, Q_c \rangle$ **Acceptance**, v.1
Felicity conditions on acceptance:

Paraphrase: accepting moves φ from the table and incorporates it into the context set.

- $A_c \neq \emptyset$
- x 's belief state is compatible with A_c

- (29) $c + \lceil \text{Question}_x(\varphi) \rceil = \langle cs_c, A_c, \llbracket \varphi \rrbracket \rangle$ **Questioning** v.1

Extremely simplistic for now.

- (30) $c + \lceil \text{Clear} \rceil = \langle cs_c, \emptyset, Q_c \rangle$ **Rejection** v.1

There is a *lot* more to say about how rejection plays out in actual discourse.

For a discourse with agents x, y : $c + \text{Assert}_x(\varphi) + \text{Accept}_y$ amounts to a standard Stalnakerian (1978) assertion update.

3.2 Disjunctive proposals on the table

A further constraint on assertions: must be relevant to a Question Under Discussion/QUD. In this setting, the QUD is the Q slot.

- (31) A proposition p is *relevant* to a question Q iff there is some $q \in Q$ such that either: (i) p entails $\neg q$, or (ii) p entails q . (Roberts 1996)

Point of comparison: the alternative semantics account of disjunction.

- (32) $\llbracket \varphi \text{ or } \psi \rrbracket = \llbracket \varphi \rrbracket \cup \llbracket \psi \rrbracket$
 (33) Simons' Topic condition for disjunction (Simons 2001)
- A question Q_1 is relevant to another question Q_2 iff for all $p \in Q_1$, p is relevant to Q_2
 - A disjunction $[\alpha \text{ or } \beta]$ is appropriate in a context only if $\{\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket, \llbracket \beta \rrbracket\}$ is relevant to the QUD in that context.

I will assume, following Kratzer & Shimoyama (2002), Groenendijk (2009), Ciardelli et al. (2013) that even in non-interrogatives, denotations may have alternative structure. So $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket, \llbracket \psi \rrbracket$ above are type $\{\langle s, t \rangle\}$, even if they are singleton.

- Terminology from inquisitive semantics: a *hybrid* is an alternative set that is both informative and inquisitive.
- An alternative set is informative just in case it doesn't cover \mathcal{W} : even though it may fail choose between many alternatives, it excludes some worlds entirely.
- Assumption: an element in the assertion slot on the table may be a hybrid. The alternative structure is flattened out if it is accepted.
 - Similar to Groenendijk (2009), with flattening in the pragmatics.
 - See discussion in Menéndez-Benito (2006) on assertions in a compositional Hamblin semantics, basic idea goes back to Heim (1982).

Formal implementation with *hybrids*. φ is now of type $\{\langle s, t \rangle\}$ below:

- (34) Where φ is type $\{\langle s, t \rangle\}$, $\text{flatten}(\varphi) = \lambda w_s . \exists p \in \varphi : p(w)$
 (35) $c + \lceil \text{Assert}_x(\varphi) \rceil = \langle cs_c, \llbracket \varphi \rrbracket, Q_c \rangle$ **Assertion v.2**
- $A_c = \emptyset$
 - cs_c is compatible with $\text{flatten}(\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket)$
 - x believes $\text{flatten}(\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket)$
 - $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket$ is relevant to Q_c .
- (36) $c + \lceil \text{Accept}_x \rceil$ **Acceptance, v.2**
 $= \langle cs_c \cap \{w \mid \llbracket \text{flatten}(A_c) \rrbracket(w) \}, \emptyset, Q_c \rangle$
- $A_c \neq \emptyset$
 - x 's belief state is compatible with $\text{flatten}(A_c)$

There is a huge industry on QUDs. Intuitively, a QUD is a public shared discourse goal, of resolving the question. Some key references: Roberts (1996), Ginzburg (1996, 2012), Büring (2003).

Alonso-Ovalle (2005, 2006), Simons (2005), Rawlins (2008). See also Groenendijk (2009), Ciardelli et al. (2013), Roelofsen (2013).

This Q-Q relevance is fairly strong; a weaker version would involve existential quantification and amount to Lewis's 1988 *non-orthogonality*.

Write $\{\alpha\}$ for the type of sets whose elements are type α .

Relative to $\mathcal{W} = \{w_1, w_2, w_3, w_4\}$, the set $\{\{w_1, w_2\}, \{w_3\}\}$ would be informative, but $\{\{w_1, w_2\}, \{w_3, w_4\}\}$ would not be. The singleton $\{\{w_1, w_2, w_3\}\}$ would also be informative, but not inquisitive.

'flatten' is Kratzer & Shimoyama \exists . Cf. also Heim (1982) on assertions, Inquisitive semantics double negation.

Paraphrase: Assertion puts a (potentially inquisitive) alternative set on the table as a proposal to update the context set.

Paraphrase: Acceptance incorporates the flattened (information-only) version of the alternative set on the table.

$$(37) \quad c + \lceil \text{or} \rceil \varphi \rceil = \langle cs_c, A_c \cup \llbracket \varphi \rrbracket, Q_c \rangle$$

Felicity conditions:

- a. $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket$ is relevant to Q_c
- b. $A_c \neq \{\}$
- c. Agent's belief state is compatible with φ .

$$(38) \quad \text{Corollary: if binary 'or' is Hamblin, then } c + \lceil \varphi \text{ or } \psi \rceil \text{ comes out to } c + \lceil \varphi \rceil + \lceil \text{or} \rceil \psi \rceil.$$

Paraphrase: particle 'or' introduces a new alternative into the (non-empty) set of assertion proposals on the table.

Should (37) encode exclusivity / non-overlap? Unclear, but:

- (39) a. Alfonso is taking Semantics 1. So he must have taken Language & Mind.
- b. Or he took Cognition. (\nrightarrow he didn't take both?)

I will leave the question of exhaustification for particle 'or' open.

3.3 Example

Suppose that:

$$Q_c = \llbracket \text{where's John} \rrbracket = \{ \lambda w_s . \text{J-at-work}'(w), \lambda w_s . \text{J-at-home}'(w) \}$$

$$\llbracket \text{here} \rrbracket = \llbracket \text{at work} \rrbracket$$

$$(40) \quad c' = c + \lceil \text{Assert}_x(\text{J's not here}) \rceil = \langle cs_c, \{ \llbracket \text{J's not here} \rrbracket \}, Q_c \rangle$$

Felicity condition requires that $\llbracket \text{J's not here} \rrbracket$ be relevant to Q_c .

$$(41) \quad c'' = c' + \lceil \text{or he's (here and) hiding} \rceil$$

$$= \langle cs_c, \{ \llbracket \text{J's not here} \rrbracket, \llbracket \text{J's (here and) hiding} \rrbracket \}, Q_c \rangle$$

Strengthen 'hiding' to 'here and hiding'. This could follow from exhaustification.

Acceptance after a simple assertion:

This would resolve Q_c .

$$(42) \quad c' + \lceil \text{Accept}_x \rceil = \langle cs_c \cap \{ w \mid \llbracket \text{J's not here} \rrbracket(w) \}, \emptyset, Q_c \rangle$$

Acceptance after a particle 'or' response:

$$(43) \quad c'' + \lceil \text{Accept}_x \rceil$$

$$= \langle cs_c \cap \text{flatten}(\{ \llbracket \text{J's not here} \rrbracket, \llbracket \text{J's hiding} \rrbracket \}), \emptyset, Q_c \rangle$$

$$= \langle cs_c \cap (\{ w \mid \llbracket \text{J's not here} \rrbracket(w) \} \cup \{ w \mid \llbracket \text{J's hiding} \rrbracket(w) \}), \emptyset, Q_c \rangle$$

It is now common ground that J is not both here and not hiding. No progress on Q_c per se.

Rough-and-ready commitments:

adapting ideas from Gunlogson (2008))

- Given a sequence of contexts \mathcal{C} , if the context set of the final element of \mathcal{C} entails or is compatible with φ , then the *Source* of φ relative to the context sequence is the set of agents (which may be empty) who caused φ to be on the table as an element of some assertion at a context in the sequence.

4 From declaratives to interrogatives

The key idea: particle ‘or’ disjoins proposals to update the context.

- Assertions: proposal to update the common ground.
- New: questions are *proposals* to update the QUD.
- Potentially competing proposals can co-exist!

- (44) A: Does Alfonso speak Spanish?
B: Or does he speak Italian?

The context after B’s move contains two, parallel proposals.

- One proposal involves asking (& presumably answering) A’s question. The second, B’s question.
- Attempting to respond will decide between these proposals.

4.1 A bunch of technical stuff

- (45) A *context* is a tuple $\langle cs, Q \rangle$ such that:

- cs is a context set.
- Q is a stack of sets of propositions.

- (46) A *supercontext* is a tuple $\langle cs, Q, \mathcal{F} \rangle$ such that:

- $\langle cs, Q \rangle$ is a context.
- \mathcal{F} is a set of contexts.

- (47) $sc + \lceil \text{Assert}_x(\varphi) \rceil = \langle cs_{sc}, Q_{sc}, \{c_{sc} \oplus \lceil \varphi \rceil\} \rangle$ **Assertion v.3**

- $\mathcal{F}_{sc} = \emptyset$
- x believes $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket$

- (48) $sc + \lceil \text{Question}_x(\varphi) \rceil = \langle cs_{sc}, Q_{sc}, \{c_{sc} \otimes \lceil \varphi \rceil\} \rangle$ **Questioning v.2**

- $\mathcal{F}_{sc} = \emptyset$
- x ’s belief state does not resolve $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket$
- x believes another agent may be able to resolve $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket$.

- (49) $sc + \lceil \text{Clear} \rceil = \langle cs_{sc}, Q_{sc}, \emptyset \rangle$ **Rejection v.2**

- (50) Local updates. For a context c ,

- $c \oplus \lceil \varphi_{\{s,t\}} \rceil = \langle cs_c \cap \{w \mid \text{flatten}(\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket)(w)\}, Q_c \rangle$
 - cs_c is compatible with $\text{flatten}(\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket)$. (assertability)
 - φ is relevant to $\text{top}(Q_c)$
- $c \otimes \lceil \varphi_{\{s,t\}} \rceil = \langle cs_c, \text{push}(Q_c, \varphi) \rangle$
 - cs_c is compatible with $\text{flatten}(\varphi)$. (answerability)
 - φ is relevant to $\text{top}(Q_c)$ or $Q_c = \langle \rangle$

- (51) $sc + \lceil \text{Accept}_x \rceil = \langle \bigcap \{cs \mid \exists c \in \mathcal{F}_{sc} : cs_c = cs\}, Q, \{\} \rangle$, where Q is the unique element in $\{Q' \mid \exists c \in \mathcal{F}_{sc} : Q_c = Q'\}$

- $|\{Q' \mid \exists c \in \mathcal{F}_{sc} : Q_c = Q'\}| = 1$

Interesting point of comparison: Starr (2016), which has a similar treatment of imperatives.

Key intuition (transfers from Farkas & Roelofsen): if he speaks Spanish, it doesn’t matter that he speaks Italian. If he speaks Italian, it doesn’t matter that he speaks Spanish.

We’re going to mostly skip this section.

I will write $\langle \rangle$ for the empty stack.

Call this c_{sc} for arbitrary supercontext sc .

Call \mathcal{F} the *possible 1-step discourse futures*.

Paraphrase: project a discourse future where φ is common ground.

Paraphrase: project a discourse future where φ the immediate QUD.

I’m assuming here that a failure of a felicity condition percolates up, like exceptions in programming languages. Relevance therefore applies to all updates that use \oplus, \otimes .

Paraphrase: acceptance merges all outstanding cs -reducing futures, and is licensed only if there is a unique stable QUD across futures. (One might consider generalizing the QUD case.)

- (52) $sc + \lceil \text{dispel} \rceil = \langle cs_{sc}, \text{pop}(Q_{sc}), \mathcal{F}_{sc} \rangle$
 a. $\mathcal{F}_{sc} = \emptyset$
 b. $Q_{sc} \neq \langle \rangle$

Assume that if in sc $\text{top}(Q_{sc})$ is completely resolved by cs_{sc} , that context is automatically shifted to $sc + \lceil \text{dispel} \rceil$. (Resolved QUDs vanish.)

- (53) An alternative set φ chooses a context c if either (or both):
 a. φ is relevant to $\text{top}(Q_c)$, or
 b. $cs_{c \oplus \varphi} = cs_c$.
- (54) If an assertion or question φ with content ψ by x occurs in sc such that $\mathcal{F}_{sc} \neq \emptyset$, then to interpret φ :
 a. If there is a unique $c \in \mathcal{F}_{sc}$ such that $\llbracket \psi \rrbracket$ chooses c , shift to $\langle cs_c, Q_c, \{\} \rangle$
 b. If acceptance is possible, shift to $sc + \text{Accept}_x$

In some cases both of these could apply, so 'non-determinism' is possible (and a hearer must infer what was intended). In some cases neither could apply; this version is silent about what happens then.

4.2 The punchline

The final treatment of particle 'or' for this handout. Keep in mind that now φ includes a force operator.

- (55) $sc + \lceil \text{or } \varphi \rceil = \langle cs_{sc}, Q_{sc}, \mathcal{F}_{sc} \cup \mathcal{F}_{(sc + \lceil \text{clear} \rceil + \varphi)} \rangle$
 a. Felicitous only if $\mathcal{F}_{sc} \neq \emptyset$

Paraphrase: φ is another possible way forward for the conversation.

This loses the clean equivalence with binary 'or', but something similar is retained (assuming, again, Hamblin binary 'or'):

- (56) $sc + \lceil \text{Assert}_x(\varphi) \rceil + \lceil \text{or } \text{Assert}_x(\psi) \rceil + \lceil \text{Accept}_y \rceil$
 $= sc + \lceil \text{Assert}_x(\varphi \text{ or } \psi) \rceil + \lceil \text{Accept}_y \rceil$

5 Binary and particle 'or'

Ambiguity?

How do binary 'or' and unary 'or' relate?

- Hypothesis 1: Accidental homophony. We've got 'or₁' and 'or₂'.
- Hypothesis 2: Systematic relationship. ('regular polysemy?')
- Hypothesis 3: Same item. Extreme idea, but compatible with my proposal.

Confound: if particle 'or' is productive and general, many same-speaker examples in the literature become hard to distinguish.

- Need a good diagnostic for same-speaker sentence boundary.
- Intonation / prosody provide cues. Massive speaker variability.

5.1 *Is this English-specific?*

Hypothesis 1 predicts this to be an English-specific phenomenon. Test with core declarative cases – **are there translations of (1) that use a binary disjunction in the language?** Romance:

(57) Spanish (María Biezma, p.c.)

A: Juan no está aquí B: O está siendo muy silencioso
 Juan NEG is here or is being very quiet
 'Juan isn't here' 'Or he's being very quiet'

(58) Italian (Ilaria Frana, p.c.)

A: Gianni non è qui. B: {O / Oppure} si sta nascondendo
 Gianni NEG is here. or / or.EXCL SI is hiding
 'Gianni isn't here.' 'Or he's hiding'.

If 'o' is used, it must be focused.

(59) French (Geraldine Legendre, p.c.)

A: Jean (n') est pas là B: Ou bien il se cache
 Jean (NEG) is NEG here Or BIEN he SE hides
 'Jean isn't around' 'or he's hiding'

'ou bien' strongly preferred to 'ou'. Cannot use 'soit'.

(60) Romanian (Ioana Grosu, p.c.)

A: Ion nu este aici. B: Ori el este foarte tacut.
 John NEG is here or he is very quiet
 'John isn't here' 'Or he's being very quiet'

In some cases 'sau' >> 'ori'.

Further afield:

(61) Korean (Najoung Kim, p.c.)

A: con yeki eps-ney B: Animyen swum-e iss-kena
 John here exist.not-DECL or hide-INF be-or
 'John's not here.' 'Or he's hiding.'

n.b. Korean is complicated. 'kena' suffix may be possibility modal in this context, and something like it is required.

(62) Japanese (Akira Omaki, p.c.)

A: John-wa koko-ni i-nai-yo. B: sore-ka, shizukani shiteru-dake kamoshirenai.
 John-TOP here-at be-NEG-PART that-or quiet being-only might
 'John's not here.' 'Or he might be just being very quiet.'

n.b. Japanese is also complicated. Modal of some kind is required.

(63) Kannada (Sadhwi Srinivas, p.c.)

A: John illa illi B: tumba quiet-aagi idaane athva
 John NEG here very quiet-like he.is or
 'John's not here' 'Or he's being very quiet'.

'athva' ok at either edge. A reminder that 'peripheral' ≠ 'left'. Can also use exclusive/conditional 'illa andre'.

(64) Hindi (Sadhwi Srinivas, p.c.)

A: John yahan nahin hai B: yaa wo bohot chup hai
 John here NEG is or he very quiet is
 'John's not here' 'Or he's being very quiet'

Can also use exclusive 'yaa phir' or 'nahin toh', these are ok at either edge.

(65) Bulgarian (Christo Kirov, p.c.)

A: John ne e tuk B: Ili prosto ne se obajda
 John NEG is here or just NEG calling.out
 'John's not here' 'Or he's being very quiet'.

Two disjunctions can be used: 'ili' or 'a'. For 'ili' either a possibility modal or an exclusive is preferred, but optional; 'a' can only be used in combination with possibility modal 'mojo bi'.

Generalizations from cross-linguistic data:

- Of the set of binary disjunctions in a language, at least one of them can be used as unary disjunction. (Potential exception: Japanese.)
- Often a preference for marking exclusivity, possibility, or both if available. In some cases, required.
- Disjunction in other languages is way more interesting!

Either hypothesis 2 or 3 is right – I will not try to differentiate them.

- Reminiscent of Kratzer (1986) on 'if'. Not clear that focus on binary 'or' is a *mistake* – but it's missing a big part of the picture.

5.2 Wrapping up

Conclusions

- 'Or' can productively be used as a syntactically unary 'discourse particle' in English that appears with a range of sentence types. Pattern appears to be cross-linguistically robust.
- Particle 'or' is licensed just in case its prejacent is relevant to the QUD, and other relevant possibilities have already been provided.
- Particle 'or' disjoins proposals for how the context should change – **discourse possibilities**.

Some more future directions:

- Particle 'or' and the pragmatics of attention (Bledin & Rawlins 2016).
- Better account of relevance to goals in discourse beyond just QUDs.
- Generalize to *n*-step discourse futures (cf. Krifka to appear).
- Other modal particles as discourse possibility vs. informational possibility: 'maybe' etc.
- Return to 'S-internal' cases, Hirsch (2016) etc. Return to embedded antecedents.

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