



Uli and our generation: some reminiscences

Orin Percus

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Contents

1.	Andreea C. Nicolae, Patrick D. Elliott, and Yasutada Sudo	
	<i>Introduction</i>	1
2.	Dorothy Ahn	
	<i>ASL IX to locus as a modifier</i>	2
3.	Artemis Alexiadou	
	<i>Decomposing scalar approximatives in Greek</i>	4
4.	Anna Alsop, Lucas Champollion, and Ioana Grosu	
	<i>A problem for Fox's (2007) account of free choice disjunction</i>	7
5.	Anton Benz and Nicole Gotzner	
	<i>Quantifier irgendein and local implicature</i>	10
6.	Jonathan David Bobaljik and Susi Wurmbrand	
	<i>Fake indexicals, binding, and the PCC</i>	13
7.	Brian Buccola and Emmanuel Chemla	
	<i>Alternatives of disjunctions: when a disjunct contains the antecedent of a pronoun</i>	16
8.	Luka Crnič and Brian Buccola	
	<i>Scoping NPIs out of DPs</i>	19
9.	Chris Cummins	
	<i>Some contexts requiring precise number meanings</i>	22
10.	Patrick D. Elliott and Paul Marty	
	<i>Exactly one theory of multiplicity inferences</i>	24

11.	Anamaria Fălăuș and Andreea C. Nicolae	
	<i>Two coordinating particles are better than one: free choice items in Romanian</i>	27
12.	Danny Fox	
	<i>Individual concepts and narrow scope illusions</i>	30
13.	Danny Fox	
	<i>Degree concepts and narrow scope illusions</i>	33
14.	Nicole Gotzner	
	<i>Disjunction, conjunction, and exhaustivity</i>	35
15.	Martin Hackl	
	<i>On Haddock's puzzle and the role of presupposition in reference resolution</i>	37
16.	Andreas Haida	
	<i>Symmetry, density, and formal alternatives</i>	40
17.	Nina Haslinger and Viola Schmitt	
	<i>Strengthened disjunction or non-classical conjunction?</i>	43
18.	Fabian Heck and Anke Himmelreich	
	<i>Two observations about reconstruction</i>	46
19.	Aron Hirsch	
	<i>Modal adverbs and constraints on type-flexibility</i>	49
20.	Natalia Ivlieva and Alexander Podobryaev	
	<i>On variable agreement and scope reconstruction in Russian</i>	52
21.	Hadil Karawani	
	<i>The past is rewritten</i>	54
22.	Manfred Krifka and Fereshteh Modarresi	
	<i>Persian ezafe and proportional quantifiers</i>	56
23.	Paul Marty	
	<i>Maximize Presupposition! and presupposition satisfaction</i>	59
24.	Lisa Matthewson, Sihwei Chen, Marianne Huijsmans, Marcin Morzycki, Daniel Reisinger, and Hotze Rullmann	
	<i>Restricting the English past tense</i>	61
25.	Clemens Mayr	
	<i>On a seemingly nonexistent cumulative reading</i>	65
26.	Marie-Christine Meyer	
	<i>Scalar Implicatures in complex contexts</i>	67
27.	Moreno Mitrović	
	<i>Null disjunction in disguise</i>	70
28.	Andreea C. Nicolae and Yasutada Sudo	
	<i>The exhaustive relevance of complex conjunctions</i>	72
29.	Rick Nouwen	
	<i>Scalar vagueness regulation and locative reference</i>	75

30.	Robert Pasternak	
	<i>Unifying partitive and adjective-modifying percent</i>	77
31.	Hazel Pearson and Frank Sode	
	<i>'Not in my wildest dreams': a part time minimizer?</i>	80
32.	Orin Percus	
	<i>Uli and our generation: some reminiscences</i>	82
33.	Jacopo Romoli	
	<i>Why them?</i>	84
34.	Fabienne Salfner	
	<i>The rise and fall of non-conservatives</i>	87
35.	Petra B. Schumacher	
	<i>Vagueness and context-sensitivity of absolute gradable adjectives</i>	90
36.	Stephanie Solt	
	<i>More or less an approximator</i>	93
37.	Giorgos Spathas	
	<i>Plural anaphoric reference and non-conservativity</i>	95
38.	Benjamin Spector	
	<i>An argument for the trivalent approach to presupposition projection</i>	97
39.	Bob van Tiel	
	<i>'The case against fuzzy logic revisited' revisited</i>	100
40.	Lyn Tieu	
	<i>A developmental asymmetry between the singular and plural</i>	103
41.	Tue Trinh	
	<i>A tense question</i>	106
42.	Hubert Truckenbrodt	
	<i>On remind-me presuppositions and embedded question acts</i>	108
43.	Michael Wagner	
	<i>Disjuncts must be mutually excludable</i>	111
44.	E. Cameron Wilson	
	<i>Constraints on non-conservative readings in English</i>	114
45.	Susi Wurmbrand	
	<i>Indexical shift meets ECM</i>	117

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The early 1990s. Uli gives his first talk. Mary told me afterwards how impressed she was with the brilliant final speaker. (She had no idea that it was that same shy young man she had passed so often in the corridor.) I leaned over to my neighbor and reported:

(1) Mary thinks that Uli has many qualities.

What I said was true because Mary situated herself in a world where *the final speaker* had many qualities. Percus and Sauerland (2003) explain this as follows: (1) has a structure where a silent element attaches to the name and creates a concept out of it – like the FINAL SPEAKER concept. In the embedded clause, this expression combines with a world variable as in (2). (2) then describes worlds in which *the value of that concept* has many qualities, and this is what we use to characterize Mary’s doxastic alternatives.

(2) ... [1 w_1 [**G-Uli** w_1] has many qualities]

In a case like (2), **G-Uli** combines with a world variable and thereby creates an individual-denoting expression. But if this proposal is right, it is natural to expect concept-denoting expressions like **G-Uli** to show up in other configurations as well. Does this happen? Fast forward to ...

The early 2000s. Uli and I give a joint talk. I delivered the first half, Uli delivered the second. John was apparently neither watching nor thinking very carefully. When I heard him expressing his amazement at the speaker’s metamorphic skills, I came to this astonishing realization:

(3) John thinks that Uli and I are the same person.

(3) was true because John situated himself in a world where *the closing presenter* and *the opening presenter* were the same person. Now, the predicate *are the same person* plausibly applies to a plurality of concepts: it means *have the same person as their value*. (See Barker 2007 for the contribution of adjectival *same*.) Here, the part of the embedded clause that we use to characterize John’s doxastic alternatives could well be as in (4), then. In (4), no world variable combines with the concept-denoting expressions, and the two coordinate yielding a plurality of concepts.

(4) ... [1 w_1 [**G-Uli** and **H-I**] are the same person]

(4’) is a possibility too if “concept-generators” can yield pluralities of concepts all by themselves – if they can sum together concepts for disjoint parts of a plural argument. The literature doesn’t assume this. Should it? Cut to ...

(4’) ... [1 w_1 **G-[Uli and I]** are the same person]

A few days later. Uli smiled at my description of John’s confusion. No wonder. Those were his phi-feature days, and what I said was:

(5) John thinks that we are the same person.

Sauerland (2003, 2008) argues that features like number and person are interpreted at the DP level. That has implications. Suppose concept-generators *can't* yield pluralities of concepts. In that case, the structure of (5) would have to contain a piece like (4) – the pronoun *we* would realize a complex coordinate structure just like the one there. But this would mean that the features responsible for the pronunciation *we* are interpreted in very different places. The plural feature could only concern the subject as a whole, which denotes a plurality (of concepts). On the other hand, the first person feature would have to be interpreted down below, within the coordination, as it is only there that we have an element whose denotation includes the speaker. If instead concept-generators can yield pluralities of concepts, then the structure of (5) could contain a piece like (4'), for example, and a neater picture emerges. We can maintain that both features are interpreted on the same DP, the concept-generator's sister.

Today. These sentences still attract attention (Zhang 2016). The last word will surely belong to Uli.

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