

Positive Polarity Verbs and Positive Polarity Indefinites in Hindi-Urdu

Rajesh Bhatt, UMass Amherst [joint work with Vincent Homer, UMass Amherst]

Typically, Positive Polarity Items (PPIs), e.g. 'would rather', cannot be interpreted in the scope of a clausemate negation (barring rescuing or shielding) (Baker 1970, van der Wouden 1997, Szabolcsi 2004 a.o.):

- 1a. John would rather leave.
- 1b. *John wouldn't rather leave.

The scope of most of them is uniquely determined by their surface position. But PPI indefinites are special: they can surface under negation and yet yield a grammatical sentence under a wide scope interpretation:

- 2. John didn't understand something. ok: SOME > NEG; *NEG > SOME

We examine two classes of PPIs in Hindi: (i) compound verbs and (ii) PPI indefinites and show that they pattern together with respect to anti-licensing and rescuing. Compound verbs do not seem to be scopally mobile and their acceptability depends upon the monotonicity properties of their surface position. Here we address the question of the mechanism through which a PPI of the 'some' type takes wide scope out of an anti-licensing configuration. One possibility is (covert) movement, another is mechanisms that allow indefinites to take (island-violating) ultra-wide scope such as choice functions (Reinhart 1997). The relevant configurations that have motivated choice functions for other languages can be set up for Hindi-Urdu too.

We can therefore assume that a device that generates wide-scope for indefinites without movement is available in Hindi-Urdu too. We show that in Hindi-Urdu at least, this device is unable to salvage PPIs in the relevant configuration. Only good old fashioned overt movement does the needful. If we think of overt movement in Hindi-Urdu as being the analogue of covert movement elsewhere, then the Hindi-Urdu facts are an argument that it is movement, albeit covert, that salvages PPIs in English too, not alternative scope-shifting devices. We explore whether the conclusion from Hindi-Urdu does in fact extend to English.