Romanian and English Free Choice Free Relatives: Definiteness or Universality?[*]

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Introduction

The aim of the presentation is to investigate the contrast between the semantics of free choice free relatives (FC-FRs) in English and Romanian. English FC-FRs are represented by clauses introduced by *wh*-pronouns with the suffix *-ever*, as illustrated below:

(1)   John grabbed whatever (dish) was on the breakfast table.

Romanian FC-FRs are clauses introduced by the free choice particle ORI- plus a relative pronoun such as *what* below:

(2)   Orice   scrie   are un nucleu emoțional extraordinar,
        FC-what writes has a   nucleus emotional extraordinary,
        dialogurile lui au umor, haos, violență, isteţime.
        dialogues.DEF his have humor, chaos, violence, wit
        'Whatever he writes has an extraordinary emotional core, his
        dialogues contain humor, chaos, violence, wit.'

The theoretical questions that an examination of the distributional pattern of these constructions in these two languages are mainly:
> **a)   what is the status of these clauses (definite or universal)?**
> **b)   what is the semantic contribution of the free choice particle in this syntactic environment as opposed to, e.g. free choice determiners such as English *any* or Romanian *orice*?**

1. What is free choice?
1.1 Free choice as an evaluation constraint
In semantics, free choice is a term which targets a very specific linguistic procedure: the step of determining a referent for a DP (see Farkas 2002, 2006, Chierchia 2013).

The term "free choice" is not to be understood as a component of the asserted content, but as a component of the evaluation level (more particularly, determining a referent for the DP).

Take a free choice item (FCI) such as *any*:

(3)   Karen may pick any present.

Here, the contribution of the determiner *any* is to preclude the assignment of a particular referent across the possible worlds introduced by the deontic modal *may* i.e. all presents in the domain are a possible referent for the DP, none is excluded.

Compare with *Karen may pick a present, namely the one on the right*.

Looking at (3), it also seems that "free choice" is taken literally, at the level of assertion, in this case as Karen's freedom to pick a present;

But this is merely an effect of the semantics of the modal of permission *may*;

Looking at (4), involving an epistemic modal, and (5), involving an ability modal, the paraphrase involving free choice is lost:

(4)   They may have talked to any of the students.
(5)   Any third-grader can solve this problem.

What is left is the evaluation constraint to cast all of the entities in the domain which satisfy the nominal properties (the students and the third-graders respectively) as referents of the free choice DPs in some possible world.

1.2 Licensing FCIs and subtrigging
Obs.: FCIs like any require to be in the scope of a licensing operator (*may* (3),(4), *can* (5), GEN (6))

(6) Any owl hunts mice.

An apparent exception is the episodic environment called subtrigging, a DP which contains an FCI and a relative clause:

(7)   a.   ?? Yesterday we spoke to any customer.
        b.   Yesterday we spoke to any customer who required assistance.

So far, only *any* has been offered as an example of FCI; Romanian[1] disposes of a lexeme which doubles as an FC determiner and an FC relative pronoun introducing free choice free relatives.

(8)   Determiner:
        Orice roman pe care   îl   scrie acest autor conține multă violență.
        FC   novel PE which CL.Accwrites this author contains much violence
        'Any novel that this author writes contains a lot of violence.'

(9)   Relative pronoun:
        Orice scrie acest autor conține multă violență.
        FC   writes this   author contains much violence
        'Whatever this author writes contains a lot of violence.'

As can be seen in the translation of (9) above, English employs *wh-ever* relative pronouns in order to produce FC-FR structures.

2 Free choice free relatives (FC-FRs) in English and Romanian: distribution and properties
Following von Fintel (2000) and Tredinnick (2005), English FC-FRs have two modal flavors: ignorance and indifference.

I will add Romanian examples into the discussion.

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1   On a par with Spanish, Catalan, French, Greek a.o. (see Chierchia 2013 etc.).

2.1 Ignorance

On a par with regular free relatives (*What Arlo is cooking contains a lot of garlic*), FC-FRs have been argued to be definites which can be paraphrased as *the thing/ person/ place that*.

(10) a. English:
          Whatever Arlo is cooking contains a lot of garlic.

      b. Romanian
          Orice   (mâncare) o fi/ va fi   gătind   Arlo acum conţine mult usturoi.
          ori-what dish   AUX be/ AUX be cooking Arlo now contains   much garlic
          'Whatever (dish) Arlo is cooking now contains a lot of garlic.'

Context: I don't know what he's cooking, but I can smell the garlic; epistemic uncertainty and episodic;

Interpretation:
The FC-FR is definite and carries a presupposition of existence (it is presupposed that there exists something that Arlo is cooking)

The FC-FR is interpreted against an epistemic modal base at the level of presupposition (von Fintel 2000)

The relevant set of worlds contains epistemic variants of the actual world, from the point of view of an epistemic agent.

These worlds are minimally different from each other, varying only with respect to the identity of the individual satisfying the FR condition (the thing Arlo is cooking).

The assertion is that, in each world, the unique thing Arlo is cooking satisfies the main clause condition, namely it contains a lot of garlic.

Therefore, putting the assertion and presupposition together, the ignorance effect becomes evident: Arlo is cooking something (I don't know what) and, whether it's stew, tomato soup etc., it contains a lot of garlic.

Romanian FC-FRs are felicitous on this reading only if the verb in the FC-FR is in the presumptive mood, which is arguably responsible for the epistemic flavor:

2.2 Indifference

On a par with regular free relatives (*Bill grabbed what was on the desk.*), FC-FRs have been argued to be definites which can be paraphrased as *the thing/ person/ place that*.

(11) a. English
          Bill needed a paperweight, so he grabbed whatever was on the desk.
      b. Romanian
          Azi se vinde bine orice s-a produs in anii '50.
          'Whatever was produced in the 50's sells well today.'

Interpretation:
The FC-FR is interpreted against a circumstantial (metaphysical) modal base. - see 2.4 below;

The FC-FR is definite and carries a presupposition of existence (it is presupposed that there was something on the desk)

The modal interpretation is present at the level of presupposition, where the relevant set of worlds contains worlds that are minimally different from each other, varying only with respect to the identity of the individual satisfying the FR condition (the thing that was on the desk).

The assertion is that, in each world, the unique thing (or group of things) on the desk satisfies the condition of being taken.

Therefore, putting the assertion and presupposition together, the indifference effect becomes evident in the shape of a counterfactual: Bill grabbed the thing which was on the table and, had something else been on the table instead, he would have grabbed that.

2.3 The quantificational force of FC-FRs

Indifference (but not ignorance) FC-FRs seem to display quantificational variablity effects in generic contexts;

In these sentences, they seem to behave like (quasi-) universal expressions:

They are paraphrased with *every* rather than a definite description and pass a series of tests for universally quantified expressions, such as modification with *almost* and NPI licensing (see Horn 2000):

(12)   *Almost*-modification:
    a.   Mukhamedov's utter involvement in every role, and his
        subjection of his impressive personality to the style and needs
        of each appearance, ensure that **almost** whoever dances with
        him looks her best.
                                (The [London] Times, 1/21/99)
    b.   …ensure that **almost** *who/ *the partners who/ every partner
        who dance(s) with him look(s) her/ their best.

(13)   NPI-licensing:
    a.   Kay sent a letter to whoever was **the least bit** inclined to care about the problem.
    b.   Kay sent a letter to *who/ *the people who/ everyone who was/ were **the least bit**
        inclined to care about the problem.

Putting the data together, Tredinnick (p.151) concludes that universality effects with FRs occur if the following conditions are met:
    (i) the free relative must appear in a **generic** context;
    (ii) the denotation of the free relative must **co-vary** with the situation introduced by the
    generic operator;
    (iii) the free relative must be an *–ever* free relative;
    (iv) the free relative must be an **indifference** free relative;

But: in Romanian, universality in FC-FRs is always present, with or without a generic context;

First of all, the Romanian pattern of distribution suggests that, in the absence of modal operators, the modal force of *ori-* is always circumstantial (metaphysical). Ignorance readings require the presence of presumptive mood on the predicate in the relative clause (10b)

The indicative version below cannot be interpreted on an ignorance reading:

(14) . ?Orice gateste Arlo acum contine mult usturoi.
ori-what cooks Arlo now contains much garlic

On the indifference reading, (14) is strange if we take *now* to be a point in time i.e. *at this instant* because of the universality requirement: there have to be multiple cooking events.

In generic sentences, the existence of multiple events associated with the FC-FR is a given:

(15)   Azi se vinde bine orice s-a produs in anii '50.
'Whatever was produced in the 50's sells well today.'

(16)   Orice am spus a fost pe cât posibil sprijinit de citate.
'Whatever I said was, as much as possible, supported by quotes.'

But: Romanian FC-FRs are interpreted exclusively as universals, even in environments that are not obviously generic:

(17)   Ne-a pus la dispozitie orice am cerut.
'He/ she placed at our disposal almost anything we asked for.'

Proof: modification by *almost*: Jacobson's (1995) example (18a) is perfectly acceptable in Romanian (18b):

(18)   a. *For years, I did almost/ nearly whatever you told me to do.
       b. Ani   de zile, am   facut aproape orice mi-ai   spus sa fac.
          Years of days PRO.1SG AUX done almost   FC   PRO.2SG me.DAT -AUX told do.SUBJ
          'For years, I have done almost anything you told me to do.'

(19)   Ne-a pus la dispozitie aproape orice am cerut.
'He/ she placed at our disposal almost anything we asked for.'

Paraphrase: S/he provided all of the things we asked (and if we had asked for other things, s/he would have provided those as well)

(19) is an apparently unmodalized episodic context, associated with a short time span this can be enforced by adding *for the duration of our visit*).

According to Tredinnick (2005), such cases do involve some sort of genericity, with the generic operator quantifying over subparts of the episode:

(20)   Yesterday morning, John grabbed whatever dish was on the breakfast table.
       a. "Yesterday morning, John grabbed *the dish* that was on the breakfast table."
       b. "Yesterday morning, John grabbed *every dish* that was on the breakfast table."

(21) $\lambda s_0.\exists s[s$ is past with respect to s_0 & GENs'$\leq$s [C(j, s')] [grab (j, [whatever dish was on the breakfast table in s'], s')]]

In words, (26) asserts that there is a situation s in the past and every one of its subsituations of the appropriate type containing John (introduced by the contextual parameter C) is a situation in which John grabs whatever dish is on the table

(22)   In those days, every morning, John grabbed whatever dish was on the breakfast table.
        a. "In those days, every morning, John grabbed *the dish* that was on the breakfast table."
        b. "In those days, every morning, John grabbed *every dish* that was on the breakfast table."

Reading (27)(b) involves two layers of genericity, one habitual, introduced by in those days, and another one operating on partitions of the habitual situations (subsituations of mornings).

The question which remains to be answered is why for Romanian *ori-* FRs dislike reading (20b).

2.4 A possible account
The fact that the same interpretation as (21b), but not (21a) arises for free choice determiners *orice* and *any* in subtrigged sentences suggests the existence of certain common factors in the semantics of these FC pronouns and determiners, while still maintaining the distinction which emerges from their syntax.

An example of a subtrigged sentence containing an FC determiner:

(23)   Maria a   citit orice carte pe care   i-a
        *Mary **PF.AUX** read FC   book PE which CL.$_{3.SG.DAT}$-PF.AUX*
        recomandat-o   profesorul.
        recommended-CL.$_{3.SG.FEM. ACC}$ teacher.DEF
        'Mary read any book which the teacher recommended.'

Subtrigged sentences were analyzed in Panaitescu (2022) as involving what was called "serial universality". Serial universality involves a form of covert modality that is distinct from genericity.

What (23) conveys is that during the reference interval, there was a regular pattern in the sense that whenever some book or other was recommended, it necessarily was also read by Mary.

There is variation of individuals based on the entity variable introduced by the DP, but also times and worlds.

This kind of variation was modeled following the time-world framework of Thomason (1984).

The modal base is circumstantial (metaphysical).

Serial univ. universality effects in apparently episodic sentences do not actually involve genericity, which is **not** sensitive to the temporal ordering of situations, as assumed by Tredinnick (2005).

On the contrary, I have tried to show that both subtrigged *orice* and indifference FC-FRs obey certain temporal and aspectual constraints and will opt for the presence of an underlying conditional structure in these apparently episodic environments, in the spirit of Iatridou & Varlokosta (1996, 1998) and Baker (1995).

(24)

a. After the talk, John gladly answered any question.
b. Serial universality:

w_1: question a asked & answered; question c asked & answered; no other question asked;

w_2: question a asked & answered; no other question asked;

w_3: question a asked & answered; question b asked & answered; no other question asked;

w_4: question b asked & answered; ; no other question asked
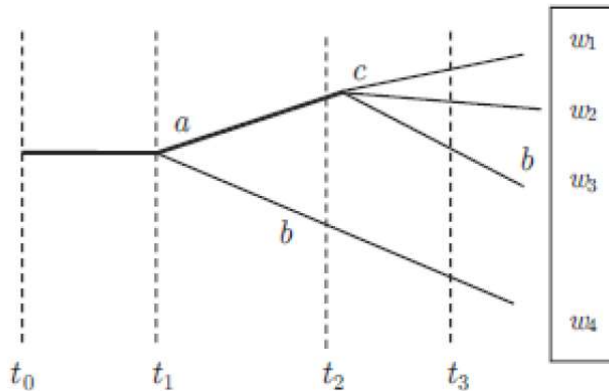
Conclusion

DPs headed by *orice* are indefinite and FC-FRs containing *orice* are definite.

Both guises of orice come with an evaluation constraint which translates as a causal loink between two events.

Thus, in the absence of FC licensing operators, (apparently) non-modalized episodic sentences with determiner and FR uses involve serial universality.

The modal flavor of these contexts is counterfactual and the distribution of alternatives is sensitive to temporal ordering. In order to best describe the phenomenon, I claimed that the time-worlds branching universe applies to Romanian FC-FRs as well.

Translated in a time-world framework, the event associated with the relative clause must not be settled at the time of evaluation and its occurrence functions as a cause for the occurrence of the main clause event.

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