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Domain Widening and Domain Restriction in Malayalam: aar-um vs. aar-enkil-um

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the semantic distinction between the two Malayalam counterparts of the English indefinite any — aar-um and aar-enkil-um — through the lens of domain widening theory as developed by Kadmon and Landman (1993) and subsequently refined by Aloni (2002). While both quantifiers can function as Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) and Free Choice Items (FCIs), this paper argues that a key difference between them lies in their domain properties: aar-um induces domain widening in a manner parallel to English any, ranging over a wider, contextually unrestricted set of individuals, while the conditional morpheme enkil in aar-enkil-um restricts the domain to a normal or explicitly delimited set. This domain restriction/widening asymmetry accounts for numerous distributional contrasts between the two items, including their behaviour in necessity modal contexts, partitive constructions, and episodic sentences. The paper also examines the role of subtrigging and proposes that enkil functions as an implicit subtrigging trigger in necessity modal contexts, explaining the unexpected grammaticality of aar-enkil-um in non-overtly-subtrigged necessity environments.

Keywords: Domain Widening; Free Choice Items; Malayalam; Negative Polarity Items; Subtrigging.

1. Introduction

The question of why a language possesses two lexical items that seem to have the same semantics and function has long been of interest in linguistic theory. In Malayalam, the two counterparts of the English indefinite any — aar-um and aar-enkil-um — present precisely this puzzle. Both items function as Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) and Free Choice Items (FCIs), and both occur across a wide range of syntactic environments. Yet they are not freely interchangeable. A systematic examination of the contexts in which one is permitted and the other is blocked reveals a principled asymmetry whose source, this paper argues, lies in the domain properties of the two quantifiers.

Kadmon and Landman (1993) were the first to introduce the notion of domain widening as the unifying semantic property of the English indefinite any. Their account links the grammaticality of any to the strengthening effect that domain widening creates in downward-entailing contexts. This paper applies and extends their framework to the Malayalam data, proposing that aar-um is the domain-widening counterpart while aar-enkil-um — by virtue of the conditional morpheme enkil — introduces a domain restriction. This is, to our knowledge, a previously unattested morphological mechanism for domain restriction in the literature on polarity-sensitive indefinites.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews Kadmon and Landman's (1993) domain-widening account and Aloni's (2002) revision for possibility modals. Section 3 presents evidence from Malayalam for the domain asymmetry between aar-um and aar-enkil-um. Section 4 examines partitive constructions and the behaviour of the two quantifiers with necessity and possibility modals. Section 5 addresses episodic contexts and the asymmetric rescue effects of subtrigging. Section 6 concludes.

2. Methodology:

Domain Widening and the Semantics of *any:*

Kadmon and Landman (1993) defined the semantics of **any CN** as the corresponding indefinite NP a CN with additional semantic and pragmatic characteristics — specifically, domain widening and strengthening — contributed by **any**. Consider their classic minimal pair:

1. (a) I don't have potatoes.

(b) I don't have any potatoes.

In (1a), the domain of **potatoes** is contextually restricted to, say, edible potatoes. In (1b), **any potatoes** widens the domain to include even contextually marginal instances — rotten or spoiled potatoes. Widening enlarges the set of relevant alternatives and leads to a superset containing both relevant and irrelevant alternatives. According to Kadmon and Landman (1993), **any** is licensed only if its domain-widening creates a *stronger* statement, where strength is defined in terms of entailment. In a Downward Entailing (DE) context such as negation, widening the domain of an existential quantifier leads to a statement that is stronger. In a positive sentence, widening creates a weaker statement — which correctly predicts why * **I have any potatoes** is ungrammatical.

However, Kadmon and Landman's (1993) account does not straightforwardly explain why FC **any** is grammatical in possibility modal contexts such as **You can pick any card**, where domain widening does not create a stronger statement in the classical sense. To address this, Aloni (2002) revised the semantics of the possibility modal, proposing that possibility modal operators are universal operators over alternative propositions defined in terms of the possible values of **any**. This allows strengthening to proceed in the modal case: if one imagines that your mother is the most relevant person to come and your father the most irrelevant, **Anyone may come** implies both that your mother may come and that your father may also come. The same universal force does not apply to the necessity modal, which explains the ungrammaticality of * **Anyone must come** in the unsubstituted case.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Domain Asymmetry in Malayalam: Evidence

With this theoretical background in place, let us examine the Malayalam data. The central claim of this paper is that **aar-um** induces domain widening in a manner parallel to English **any**, while the conditional **enkil** in **aar-enkil-um** restricts the domain rather than widening it. The evidence for this claim comes from several carefully constructed minimal contexts.

Consider first a context in which a mother and son are discussing the son's prospective marriage. The son has met five girls, of whom two are doctors, one an engineer, and two journalists. The mother's reply can be rendered using either quantifier:

2. **doctor aaya aar-ey-enkil-um kalyaaNam kazhiccə-koLLuu**

doctor be who-ACC-if-CONJ marriage do-PERM

'Marry anyone who is a doctor (from amongst the girls you have met).'

3. **doctor aaya aar-e-yum kalyaaNam kazhiccə-koLLuu**

doctor be who-ACC-CONJ marriage do-PERM

'Marry anyone who is a doctor.'

Example (2) with **aar-enkil-um** suggests that the mother intends the son to choose from among the two doctors he has already met — a restricted, contextually delimited domain. Example (3) with **aar-um**, on the other hand, gives the son a wider range: all possible doctors are a marriage option, not just the ones he has met so far. The domain of **aar-um** extends beyond the contextually explicit set, while **aar-enkil-um** remains anchored to it.

A second piece of evidence comes from a discourse context involving a job announcement:

4. **ii jooli aar-kk-enkil-um ceyy-aam, ennu veccaal aar-kk-um ceyy-aan meelaa.**

this job who-DAT-if-CONJ do-MOD but who-DAT-CONJ do-MOD not

'Anyone can do this job, but that doesn't mean ANYone.'

5. **ii jooli aar-kk-um ceyy-aam, ennu veccaal aar-kk-enkil-um ceyy-aan meelaa.**

In (4), **aar-enkil-um** covers only a basic set of qualified individuals (those with the requisite skills), while **aar-um** in the second clause, stressed, refers to a wider domain that includes even individuals who would normally be outside the relevant set. When the positions of the two quantifiers are reversed in (5), the sentence is ungrammatical. This confirms the asymmetry: the domain of **aar-um** is wider than that of **aar-enkil-um**, and the two cannot be simply swapped without altering the discourse logic.

A third source of evidence comes from a magic-show scenario in which a magician addresses three audience members — Johny, Maria, and Thomas — and utters:

6. **aar-kk-um ii kasaara-yil irik'k'-aam**

who-DAT-CONJ this chair-LOC sit-MOD

'Anyone can sit in this chair.'

7. **aar-kk-enkil-um ii kasaara-yil irik'k'-aam**

who-DAT-if-CONJ this chair-LOC sit-MOD

'Anyone can sit in this chair.'

Sentence (6) with **aar-um** implies that in possible world W1, the magician gave all three members of the audience a chance to sit on the chair. The possible set of members who sat on the chair includes all subsets: {Johny}, {Maria}, {Thomas}, {Johny, Maria}, {Johny, Thomas}, {Thomas, Maria}, {Johny, Maria, Thomas}. For sentence (7) with **aar-enkil-um**, even though it is possible for any of the three members to sit on the chair, permission is given to only one among the three. The possible set reduces to the singletons: {Johny}, {Maria}, {Thomas}. The set-theoretic analysis thus confirms that **aar-um** ranges over a larger, widened domain, while **aar-enkil-um** ranges over a restricted, existentially delimited domain.

We can therefore conclude that **aar-enkil-um** ranges over a normal or regular domain that is explicitly stated or implicitly understood, while **aar-um** in Malayalam induces something similar to domain widening, as proposed by Kadmon and Landman (1993) for English **any**. In other words, while **aar-um** ranges over the larger set, **aar-um** plus the conditional **enkil** (i.e., **aar-enkil-um**) *restricts* the domain. Rather than domain widening, we see a domain restriction, or narrowing of the domain, when the conditional **enkil** is attached.

3.2. Partitive Constructions and Modal Contexts

Dayal (2009) provides a characterisation of the situations which allow and disallow **any** in English: it is acceptable in generic statements (but not if it is a partitive phrase), with possibility modals, with necessity modals only if subtrigged, and in episodic statements only if subtrigged. Let us examine how the Malayalam counterparts behave in these same environments.

In partitive constructions, both **aar-um** and **aar-enkil-um** parallel the English **any**: neither is acceptable in a generic phrase that also contains a partitive element. Consider:

8. (a) ***ii peNNungaL-il aar-kk-um john-inə iSTam-aaNə**

these girls-LOC who-DAT-CONJ John-ACC like-be-PRES

'*Any of these girls like John.'

(b) ***ii peNNungaL-il aar-kk-enkil-um john-inə iSTam-aaNə**

these girls-LOC who-DAT-if-CONJ John-ACC like-be-PRES

'*Any of these girls like John.'

Both forms are ungrammatical in the partitive generic, mirroring the behaviour of English * **Any of these girls like John**. With possibility modals, both quantifiers are felicitous:

9. (a) **John-inə ii peNNungaL-il ninnum aar-e-yum therañə eTukk-aam**

John-DAT these girls-LOC from who-ACC-CONJ choose take-MOD

'John may choose any of these girls.'

(b) **John-inə ii peNNungaL-il ninnum aar-ey-enkil-um therañə eTukk-aam**

John-DAT these girls-LOC from who-ACC-if-CONJ choose take-MOD

'John may choose any of these girls.'

The critical divergence from English emerges in necessity modal contexts. In English, **any** is unacceptable with a necessity modal unless the sentence is subtrigged. In Malayalam, **aar-um** behaves as English **any** does — it is ungrammatical without subtrigging — but **aar-enkil-um** is grammatical even without overt subtrigging:

10. (a) ***John ii peNNungaL-il ninnum aar-e-yum therañə eTukk-aNam**

John these girls-LOC from who-ACC-CONJ choose take-MOD

'*John must choose any of these girls.'

(b) **John ii peNNungaL-il ninnum aar-ey-enkil-um therañə eTukk- aNam**

John these girls-LOC from who-ACC-if-CONJ choose take-MOD

'John must choose any (one) of these girls.'

The same asymmetry is confirmed with a different predicate:

11. (a) ***amita ivar-il aar-e-yum iSTa-ppeTa-Nam**

Amita these-LOC who-ACC-CONJ like-MOD

'*Amita must like anyone.'

(b) **amita ivar-il aar-e-enkil-um iSTa-ppeTa-Nam**

Amita these-LOC who-ACC-if-CONJ like-MOD

'Amita must like anyone/someone.'

Examples (10a)–(11b) establish that even without subtrigging, sentences with **aar-enkil-um** in necessity modal contexts are grammatical, while those with **aar-um** are not. This shows that it is not the partitive set that produces the subtrigging effect, but the conditional **enkil** itself. The proposal here is that **enkil**, being a conditional morpheme, introduces a restricted domain that parallels the subtrigging effect produced by a post-nominal relative clause modifier in other languages. This is analogous to the role of the subjunctive in Catalan, which Dayal (2009) shows produces a subtrigging effect that allows **any** to be felicitous in indicative-like contexts.

With subtrigging applied overtly, both quantifiers are felicitous in necessity modal contexts:

12. (a) **kaaNu-nna aar-ey-um ram piTi-k'k'aNam**

see-PRES who-ACC-CONJ Ram capture-MOD

'Ram must capture anybody he sees.'

(b) **kaaNu-nna aar-e-yenkil-um ram piTi-k'k'aNam**

see-PRES who-ACC-if-CONJ Ram capture-MOD

'Ram must capture anybody he sees.'

This confirms that subtrigging rescues **aar-um** in necessity contexts, and that **aar-enkil-um** does not need overt subtrigging in such contexts because **enkil** provides the subtrigging effect internally.

3.3. Episodic Contexts and Asymmetric Subtrigging

Any in English is disallowed in episodic contexts unless subtrigged. Both Malayalam counterparts are similarly unacceptable in episodic sentences:

13. (a) ***anjali aar-e-yum sahaayi-ccu**

Anjali who-ACC-CONJ help-PAST

'*Anjali helped anybody.'

(b) ***anjali aar-e-enkil-um sahaayi-ccu**

Anjali who-ACC-if-CONJ help-PAST

'*Anjali helped anybody.'

The question is then whether subtrigging rescues both items in episodic contexts, as it does in English (cf. **Minnu helped any child that came up to her**). The asymmetric answer is one of the most striking findings of this study. When subtrigging is applied:

14. (a) **ii vazhi pooy-a aar-ey-um amita sahaayi-ccu**

this way pass-PAST who-ACC-CONJ Amita help-PAST

'Amita helped anyone who passed this way.'

(b) ***ii vazhi pooy-a aar-e-yenkil-um amita sahaayi-ccu**

this way pass-PAST who-ACC-if-CONJ Amita help-PAST

'*Amita helped anyone who passed this way.'

aar-um is rescued by subtrigging in episodic contexts (14a), while **aar-enkil-um** remains ungrammatical even with overt subtrigging (14b). This result is confirmed by a second pair:

15. (a) **Jew alla-yirunna aar-ey-um avaL veRu-ttu**

Jew not-be who-ACC-CONJ she hate-PAST

'She hated anyone who was not a Jew.'

(b) ***Jew alla-yirunna aar-e-yenkil-um avaL veRu-ttu**

Jew not-be who-ACC-if-CONJ she hate-PAST

'*She hated anyone who was not a Jew.'

These results reveal an important asymmetry in the subtrigging behaviour of the two quantifiers. The conditional **enkil** in **aar-enkil-um** induces a subtrigging effect specifically in necessity modal contexts, allowing it to be grammatical there without overt subtrigging. However, this same **enkil**-induced subtrigging effect does not extend to episodic contexts.

Furthermore, not only does **enkil** fail to produce subtrigging in episodic contexts, it appears to actively block the rescue that overt subtrigging would otherwise provide. **aar-enkil-um** is infelicitous in episodic contexts with or without subtrigging, while **aar-um** is rescued by overt subtrigging in episodic contexts.

This can be understood in terms of the domain properties proposed in Section 3. **aar-um**, being a domain-widening quantifier, is compatible with the subtrigging modification: the post-nominal modifier effectively provides the restriction on the domain that allows a strengthening statement to be formed even in an episodic context. **aar-enkil-um**, by contrast, already comes with a domain-restricting **enkil** that yields only existential force over a restricted domain. Episodic sentences assert that an event took place in the actual world at a specific time, and this assertion is incompatible with the conditional, possibility-implying semantics of **enkil**. Even when a post-nominal modifier is added to narrow the domain further, the existential force over a conditional domain that **enkil** contributes remains incompatible with the actuality requirement of the episodic predicate.

Table 1. Licensing Conditions for aar-um and aar-enkil-um

Context	**aar-um**	**aar-enkil-um**
Necessity modal contexts	*	ok
Subtrigged necessity modal contexts	ok	ok
Episodic contexts	*	*
Subtrigged episodic contexts	ok	*
Possibility/permission modals	ok	ok
Generic phrase + partitive phrase	*	*

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the semantic distinction between the Malayalam quantifiers **aar-um** and **aar-enkil-um** is best understood in terms of domain properties. **aar-um** induces domain widening in a manner parallel to English **any**, as formulated by Kadmon and Landman (1993), ranging over a set that extends beyond the contextually delimited set of individuals. **aar-enkil-um**, by contrast, ranges over a restricted, contextually explicit domain — a restriction produced by the conditional morpheme **enkil**. This domain restriction/widening asymmetry accounts for the quantifiers' divergent behaviour across partitive constructions, necessity modal contexts, and episodic sentences.

In necessity modal contexts, **enkil** functions as an implicit subtrigging trigger, making **aar-enkil-um** grammatical without overt post-nominal modification — a role parallel to the subjunctive in Catalan as described by Dayal (2009). In episodic contexts, this implicit subtrigging does not apply; further, even overt subtrigging cannot rescue **aar-enkil-um** in

episodic sentences, because the conditional semantics of **enkil** is incompatible with the actuality requirement of episodic predicates. **aar-um**, being a domain-widening quantifier, is rescued by overt subtrigging in episodic contexts. The existence of two lexical items in Malayalam, this paper has argued, is thus not primarily to separate NPI from FCI function, but to encode a distinction between widened and restricted quantificational domains — a finding with broader implications for the typology of polarity-sensitive indefinites.

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