

## CAN ANY EXPRESS ANY QUANTITY?

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*Any* has been aptly described as a "many-splendoured thing". Not the least of its splendours can be attributed to the fact that *any* is a quantifier. This view is accepted by most scholars but it raises a question which is not always easy to answer: if *any* is a quantifier, what quantity does it express? The problem here is not that it expresses no quantity, but rather that it expresses a wide variety of quantities, so wide in fact that it is difficult to reconcile this polysemy with the idea that *any* is a single word insofar as the expression of quantity is concerned. Since our main concern here will be to show the underlying unity of *any*, we shall focus our attention on its quantitative facets. However, such is the diversity of this "extraordinary word" that we shall not be able, in the time at our disposal, to deal adequately with all these facets, let alone its other splendours.

We can best begin by examining some clear cases where the quantity expressed is not in doubt. For example, if I want to find the city hall, someone may well tell me:

(1) *Ask any man you meet.*

Here the speaker obviously intends me to pick out one man at random from among those I meet and ask directions. Similarly, when showing someone a card trick, one might say:

(2) *Take any card.*

Again it seems obvious that the speaker intends the other person to choose a single card out of the deck. The meaning of *any* in these two cases can be characterized as 'one'

This first sense of *any* can be contrasted with the sense it suggests in the following sentence:

(3) *Give me any letters you find.*

Here the speaker seems to have in mind something like 'all the letters, however many this may be'. Similarly, in:

(4) *Any changes could be made in proof.*

the sense is something like 'all changes that may be required'.

Examples (3) and (4) thus indicate that *any* has the possibility of expressing an all-inclusive quantity, a totality.

So far we have seen that *any* can express quantities as different as 'all' and 'one'. A third sense can be discerned in the following sentence:<sup>1</sup>

- (5) *The closest scrutiny is owed to the Anglo-Saxon kennings and the Homeric epithets; if any words and phrases are formulaic, they will be.*

Here the suggestion is something like 'if there really are certain words and phrases which are formulaic...'. Quantity-wise, *any* here appears to have the sense 'a certain number of', that is, some quantity intermediate between 'one' and 'all'. The following use of *any* can be understood in the same way:

- (6) *That any people retain doubts on these questions is symptomatic of two unfortunate conditions of modern existence.*

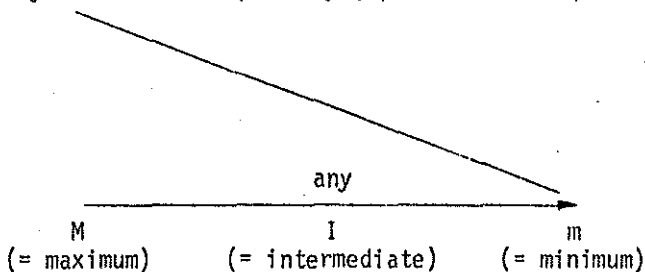
The writer has in mind something like 'that there should be a certain number of persons who...'. Again one gets the impression of a quantity which is neither 'one person' nor 'all people' but somewhere in between the two.

These examples will suffice to show that *any* can express not just one quantity but a range of quantities. An observation of this sort is by no means original. *Webster's Third*, for example, has the following entry for *any*: "one, some or all indiscriminately of whatever quantity". To my knowledge, however, nobody has yet come to grips with the problem of polysemy posed by these data. If *any* is the same word in each of our examples, and I believe most speakers of English would hesitate to declare it otherwise, then underlying these different senses there must be some principle which ensures the notional unity of the word, some meaning potential which can give rise to the expression of quantities ranging from 'all' to 'one'.

The principle to be proposed here is drawn from Guillaume's theory, the Psychomechanics of Language, where it is postulated that language is operative in nature. This postulate suggests that the underlying meaning of *any* (or of any other morpheme with a number of observable senses) is not something static - a particular quantity, for example - but rather something kinetic: some mental operation making it possible for the speaker to obtain a representation of the various senses expressed by the

<sup>1</sup> This example, like most of the others in this paper, has been taken from Sahlin 1979.

morpheme. In other words, if we postulate that the meaning potential of *any* is a movement from a point representing 'all', a maximum quantity, to a point representing 'one', a minimum quantity, then the quantitatively different senses of *any* in discourse can all be seen as resulting from intercepting this movement at the point corresponding to the quantity to be expressed in the sentence being constructed. The following diagram will express this contractive movement from maximum quantity (M), through any intermediate quantity (I), to minimum quantity (m):<sup>2</sup>



If, then, the potential meaning of *any* is a movement with this contractive form, going from greater to less, one can obtain the actual or contextual meaning of 'all' by holding up the movement at its very beginning (M). The movement will produce the representation of a minimum quantity, 'one', if intercepted at its very last instant (m). The representation of an intermediate quantity can be obtained through an interception somewhere between the first and last instants. The significant point for us here is that this manner of conceiving the potential meaning of *any* - as a movement between limits - permits us to maintain the notional unity of the word and yet account for its variability in usage.<sup>3</sup>

A second point of theory can be introduced by examining several examples where *any* occurs as a pronoun:

- (7) *If any among the hardy hundreds who sat in the downpour are in doubt about how it comes out, let them take comfort.*

<sup>2</sup> The reason for postulating a contractive movement (M - m) rather than an expansive movement (m - M) is, ultimately, the hypothesizing character of *any*. This characteristic can be demonstrated only through a comparison with *some*, a discussion which cannot be undertaken here due to limitations of space.

<sup>3</sup> For the application of this operational model in the analysis of another problem of English grammar, see Hirtle 1982.

In (7), *any* expresses an intermediate quantity, some indefinite number of individuals within "the hardy hundreds". Similarly, in:

- (8) ... *there was no sound or light in the entire house to indicate that any of the occupants were awake.*

Judging by the evidence of *were*, we are to interpret *any* as evoking more than one from the group "the occupants". This intermediate scope of *any* in (7) and (8) can be contrasted with its sense in (9):

- (9) *If any of them has any power to veto the Secretary General's decision the nature of the organisation will have changed.*

Here, if one can judge by the verb *has*, *any* expresses 'one, no matter which' from among the group constituted by "them". This minimal scope sense is sometimes made explicit by lexical means, as in (10):

- (10) *Turn off at any one of the marked picnic areas.*

Besides providing further illustration of the quantitative variation already noted, these sentences bring out clearly a second characteristic of *any*. In (7), (8), (9) and (10), the phrase following *any* evokes a group or set out of which *any* selects a sub-set made up of one or more individuals. That is to say, pronominal *any* designates a quantity as part of a whole which is often expressed by an *of*-phrase. In other words, *any* functions as a *partitive*.

It is important to keep this partitive function in mind if only because it helps us to understand the role of *any* in other contexts. For example, in:

- (11) *At each step of a derivation we look through all the transformations to see if any are applicable, apply any that we find are applicable and obligatory ...*

the first *any* has the intermediate sense of 'some', 'a certain number' out of "all the transformations". That is, we have a partitive function here as well, even though there is no *of*-phrase. Indeed, one could add *of them* to *any* here without substantially changing the sense.

The second *any* in (11) expresses something like 'all those', and so would appear to evoke maximum scope, that is, the totality of those "that we find are applicable and obligatory". Can we

properly speak of a partitive function in a case like this? I think we can because *any* here evokes all the entities in a set, the totality of parts making up a whole. This is a significant point because it tells us that pronominal *any* can function as a partitive whatever its quantitative sense:

- maximum scope would correspond to all parts;
- intermediate scope would correspond to a number of parts;
- minimal scope would correspond to a single part.

We are now in a position to characterize pronominal *any* with a little more precision. It is not merely a quantifier, but rather a *partitive quantifier* since it evokes a quantity or scope as a portion, more or less extensive, of a whole. In other words, *any* evokes a quantity as one term of a part-whole relationship.

How about adjectival *any*? Can it be realistically considered a partitive quantifier? In examples (1) and (2) above I think it can, because the very meaning of the sentence is to select one out of a larger number, one part out of the whole. Similarly for examples (3) and (4) where, although there is no idea of a choice since *any* has a 'maximum scope' reading, there is the idea of including all the individuals in the set, all the parts of the whole, however many or few they may turn out to be. Likewise in (5) and (6), the effect of *any* is clearly to set off one portion as opposed to another - what has been called a contrastive use. Thus in

- (5) *If any words and phrases are formulaic, they are.*

a portion of "words and phrases" is considered as possibly formulaic, thereby distinguishing certain words from the rest, which are, by implication, not formulaic. Such observations permit us to characterize *any*, whether in pronominal or adjectival usage, as a partitive quantifier.

So far we have been looking at examples involving substantives expressing discrete or 'count' notions. The two characteristics of *any* discerned up to this point - quantitative variation and partitive representation - are also found where substantives expressing continue or 'mass' notions are concerned. Thus in:

- (12) *Confiscate any alcohol you find.*

*any*, with maximum scope, evokes all the alcohol found, whatever the amount. Similarly in:

- (13) *Does this suggest ... that the UN is making any progress whatever toward its goal?*

the writer seems to have in mind something like 'even the slightest progress', i.e., a minimum scope, as opposed to what someone else might have claimed or even expected under the circumstances. Finally, in:

(14) *I don't think he got to drink any of it.*<sup>4</sup>

*any* with intermediate scope evokes some drinkable portion of whatever liquid "it" refers to. Such examples show that *any*, whether used as a pronoun or an adjective, can evoke a quantity as part of a whole, be the whole represented as 'count' or 'mass'.

Viewing *any* in this way - as a partitive - helps to clarify an important theoretical point about the nature of the limits imposed on the underlying movement of quantification. It can now be seen that the maximum scope of *any* is determined in a given sentence by the size of the whole or set of which it evokes the totality. That is to say, *any* can evoke a quantity just as great as, but never greater than, that of its substantive simply because part or parts cannot be greater than the whole. At the other extreme, *any* must evoke at least a minimal quantity (one for 'count' notions, and the smallest imaginable amount for 'mass' notions) because no quantity at all would not constitute a part. That is to say, the limits we have recognized in observing various uses of *any* are by no means arbitrary; they are a necessary consequence of the postulate that *any* is by nature a partitive.

The claim that *any* evokes a quantity as part of a whole helps us to understand its functioning in a number of uses. One of the most common uses of *any* is the expression:

(15) *in any event*

with the sense of 'whatever happens'. Generally used to sum up a discussion during which a number of eventualities have been suggested, this expression evokes the prospective realization of one happening or set of circumstances among all those envisaged, a sense made possible by its partitive nature, which permits *any* to evoke one possibility from among a set of possibilities. Expressions like *in any case* and *at any rate* also illustrate this use of *any* with minimal scope.

The functioning of *any* in a negative sentence can be shown by the following:

<sup>4</sup> Lars Hermerén has pointed out that if *any* is stressed, it will have the sense of 'even the slightest bit', suggestive of minimum scope. This observation calls attention to another facet of *any* whose examination would be too lengthy to undertake here.

(16) *There isn't any Santa Claus.*

This might be said by some disappointed youngster who had expected to find a Santa Claus in a store. *Any* permits him to evoke the possibility of finding him whereas the negation denies this possibility access to reality. (16) may, however, have another sense. It might also be said by someone discovering that Santa Claus is not a real person. In this case, "Santa Claus" is thought as a proper noun, as a substantive whose extension is limited to one individual. That is to say, the whole or set presented by the substantive is made up of one indivisible part. This single part which constitutes the whole is evoked by *any*; when it is negated, it is the very existence of the individual and the set that is denied.

The following sentence provides another negative context:

(17) *He doesn't lend his books to anybody.*

Read with falling intonation on *any*, the sentence suggests that the speaker lends his books to nobody. That is, a single possible borrower is evoked by *any* as typical of all possible borrowers. When negated, it has the effect of denying his lending to any person whoever he may be. On the other hand, if *any* is given a fall-rise tone, the sentence expresses another meaning: 'he doesn't lend his books to everybody, just to certain people'. In this case, *anybody* has maximum scope. The negation denies this all-inclusive scope, but not narrower scopes, so the sentence implies that the subject does lend his books to certain people.

Since it is time to conclude, let me summarize by answering the question, or rather the questions, asked by the title of this paper:

*Can Any Express any Quantity?*

Read without stress on *any*, the question calls for the answer "yes" because it amounts to asking if *any* can express quantity, if *any* is a quantifier. On the other hand, if *any* is stressed, it evokes the possibility of all the different quantities imaginable, *quantity* here expressing a 'count' notion. In this case, although we have seen that *any* can express a variety of quantities, we must answer "no" because *any*, being a partitive, cannot express a quantity greater than the whole evoked by the substantive, or smaller than the minimal part involved in the whole. However, *any* can evoke any quantity within these limits because its potential meaning is a mental movement which can be intercepted anywhere between its beginning and its end.

References

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