On the Licensing of Understating NPIs: Manipulating a domain of degrees? Japanese a(n)mari & sonnani

1. Preliminary

- A common approach to Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) like a(n)mari and sonnani is to posit a domain of degrees, i.e., a high degree of some property is required.
- But, what about NPIs like all that do not strengthen but contribute to attenuation or understatement? (Israel, 2006; Soto-wa, 2012)
- Is it possible to extend the analysis of strengthening type to understatement?

2. Goals

- Analyze degree modifiers a(n)mari 'very (much)' and sonnani 'that (all)' such as in Japanese.
- Extend the notion of domain widening to the degree of truth. (Building on the approach by Chierchia (2006))
- Reconsider the notion of 'strength' in terms of quality or relevance rather than quantity or informativity. (As suggested by Israel (2006), van Rooy (2005))

3. Data

(1) Kyoo-wa [a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu. 
   a. [M a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu hot
   b. [M a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu hot
   Intended: 'It's very hot today.'

(2) Kyoo-wa [a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu to-nai.
   a. [M a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu to-nai hot
   b. [M a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu to-nai hot
   'It isn't very hot all today.'

(3) [A(n)mari/sonnani]atsu kara eakon-o
   a. [A(n)mari/sonnani]atsu hot PAST-because ACC-ACC
   b. [A(n)mari/sonnani]atsu hot PAST-because ACC-ACC
   tsuketa.
   turn-on-PAST
   'I turned on the air conditioner, because it was very hot.'

(4) Soto-wa [a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu no-nai?
   a. [M a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu hot
   b. [M a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu hot
   'Is it (really) very hot all that hot outside?' (Rhetorical)

5. Domain of Degrees

- For determiner NPIs, the relevant domain under discussion was that of individuals.
- What domain should be considered for degree modifying NPIs like a(n)mari? Possibly, that of degrees.
- Manipulating a domain of degrees is not a new idea, e.g., Morzycki (to appear) on Extreme Degree Modifiers

7. An Attempt

(10) [a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu hot(d)(x)

(a) [a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu hot(d)(x) = \begin{align*}
\text{M}(\text{a(n)mari/sonnani}) \land (\exists d \in D > Stndq \land G(d)(x))
\end{align*}

(b) ALT\{[a(n)mari/sonnani]atsu hot(d)(x)\} = \begin{align*}
\text{M}(\text{a(n)mari/sonnani}) \land (\exists d \in D > Stndq \land G(d)(x))
\end{align*}

Where D is the widest domain of degrees that are salient in the current discourse, and D' a smaller sub-domain of D, whose maximal degree is smaller than that of D. The degree of very hot is greater than that of very hot.

(6.1) van Rooy (2003): Strength should be measured in terms of 'relevance' utility rather than 'informativity' entailment.

8. Strength as relevance

- van Rooy (2003): Strength should be measured in terms of 'relevance' utility rather than 'informativity' entailment.
- Purpose of widening the domain: (a) strengthening of the claim, (b) avoiding a false claim, (c) avoiding a false exhausiveness

9. Further Questions

- How theoretically adequate and empirically correct is this speculative operator M?
- Why cannot E behave like M scope-wise?
- M daught clauses (3):
  - M [a(n)mari/sonnani]hot because turned on AC
  - M [a(n)mari/sonnani]hot because turned on AC

10. References

Israel, Michael. 1996. 'Polarity sensitivity as lexical semantics.' Linguistics and Philosophy 19, 609-646.