A split in mandatory embedded implicatures

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Magri (2009) observed that a weak scalar item like *some* is infelicitous when it is contextually equivalent to its stronger scalemate, like *all*.

(1) Context: *bears form a species.*
   a. # Some bears are mammals.
   b. ? All bears are mammals.
   c. Bears are mammals.

This follows, Magri contends, if exhaustive interpretations of *some* are derived via an operator EXH blind to contextual information and operating on logical strength only.

Magri (2011) argues that this observation extends: weak scalar items are also infelicitous in downward-entailing environments, when the context makes them equivalent to the strong one, as in (2).

(2) Context: *In Italy, children always inherit the last name of their father.*
   a. # Every father some of whose children have a funny last name must pay a fine.
   b. ? Every father all of whose children have a funny last name must pay a fine.
   c. Every father whose children have a funny last name must pay a fine.

(2) is used as an argument for the presence of embedded EXH, even in downward-entailing environments: at matrix level, EXH is vacuous since (2)b is logically weaker than (2)a ; if EXH can apply inside the restrictor of *every,* a contradiction can be derived locally.

But I argue the facts are more nuanced: under equivalence, certain downward-entailing environments do ban weak scalar items, but others in fact require them. I use the scale <*allowed*, *required*>: both its items easily embed under negation and it has no homogeneous competitors (cf c sentences in (1) and (2)).

(3) **Context:** *in this dystopian regime, there is no free choice ; every action is either forbidden or mandatory.*
   a. # I am allowed to vote for the party.
   b. ✓ I am required to vote for the party.

Under negation, only the weak *allowed* is felicitous. This pattern is the mirror image of (2) and contradicts Magri (2011)'s claims.

(4) Negation
   a. ✓I am not allowed to vote for the opposition.
   b. # I am not required to vote for the opposition.

In antecedent of conditionals however, the facts are just as Magri observed them in (2).

(5) Conditionals
   a. #If I'm allowed to vote on Friday, Iris will be upset.
   b. ✓If I'm required to vote on Friday, Iris will be upset.

no offers a useful minimal pair: while "*no* p q" is classically equivalent to "*no* q p", *no*'s restrictor prefers the strong item *required*, while its scope demands *allowed*.

(6) *What a terrible act of rebellion...*
   a. # No one who was allowed to vote on Friday did so.

b. ✓ No one who was required to vote on Friday did so.
c. ✓ No one who voted on Friday was allowed to.
d. # No one who voted on Friday was required to.

Generally, restrictors conform to Magri (2011)'s predictions while the scope of negation and negative quantifiers shows the opposite pattern. These facts are perhaps connected to the non-emptiness presupposition of restrictors: these environments are Strawson downward-entailing but not strictly so.

References

Magri, G. (2011). Another argument for embedded scalar implicatures based on oddness in downward entailing environments. *Semantics and pragmatics*, 4, 6–1. https://doi.org/10.3765/sp.4.6

Magri, G. (2009). A theory of individual-level predicates based on blind mandatory scalar implicatures. *Natural language semantics*, 17(3), 245–297.