

UC Santa Cruz

Proceedings of Form and Analysis in Mayan Linguistics 5 (FAMLi 5)

Title

Random choice modality in Chuj: The case of 'komon'

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5587h7df>

Journal

Proceedings of Form and Analysis in Mayan Linguistics, 5

Authors

Royer, Justin
Alonso-Ovalle, Luis

Publication Date

2019-04-01

RANDOM CHOICE MODALITY IN CHUJ:

*The case of 'komon'**

JUSTIN ROYER & LUIS ALONSO-OVALLE
McGill University

Study on modality has focused mainly on verb auxiliaries, but modal expressions outside the verbal domain, like modal indefinites, have started to receive considerable attention (Arregui et al. 2017). With the study of modal expressions outside the verbal domain, questions about the correlation between categories emerge. For instance, what modal flavours can DPs express? Do they parallel the modal flavours attested in the verbal domain? Also, in the verbal domain, there seem to be correlations between syntactic position and modal flavour. Do we find similar correlations outside the verbal domain? The main goal of this short paper is descriptive. The paper describes the interpretation and distribution of the morpheme *komon*, from Chuj, an underdocumented Mayan language. It shows that *komon* can be either internal to the DP ('DP-*komon*') or to the VP ('VP-*komon*'). In both cases *komon* seems to contribute random choice modality, like some modal indefinites in other typologically unrelated languages do. While indefinite DPs containing *komon* parallel other modal indefinites expressing the same type of modality, VP-*komon* doesn't. Despite *prima facie* similarities, DP-*komon* and VP-*komon* differ in interpretation, showing that there are correlations between syntactic position and interpretation, and setting the stage for further investigation.

Keywords: Chuj, Modality, Indefinites, Random-choice, Typology

1 Introduction

Work on modality has traditionally focused on verb auxiliaries, but modal expressions outside the verbal domain have started to receive considerable attention (Arregui et al. 2017). Modal indefinites are a case at hand. These are indefinite DPs that convey modality in the absence of an overt modal (see Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2013; 2015 and references therein). Amongst them, random choice modal indefinites convey, roughly, that an agent acted indiscriminately, as illustrated in the sentence in (1a) with Spanish *un NP cualquiera*. The sentence in (1a) conveys (i) that Juan grabbed a book (just like its counterpart (1b) with a non-modal indefinite does), but also (ii) that he could have grabbed any other book (unlike (1b)).

(1) SPANISH

- a. Juan compró [DP un libro cualquiera].
Juan bought a book CUALQUIERA
≈ 'Juan bought a random book.'¹
- b. Juan compró [DP un libro].
Juan bought a book
'Juan bought a book.'

With the study of modal expressions outside the verbal domain, questions about the correlation between categories emerge. What modal flavours can DPs express? Do they parallel the modal flavours attested in

*We thank Scott AnderBois, Jessica Coon, Aron Hirsch, and the organizers and participants of FAMILi V for valuable help and comments in this project. *Yuj wal yos* to the generous and patient consultants that contributed to this project: Matal Torres, Reinalda Domingo, Matin Pablo, Mach'ol Torres, Mekel Torres Torres, Petul Torres, Rogelio Torres, Yun Torres, and Elsa Torres Velasco. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada provided financial support through Insight Grants *Modality in the Nominal Domain* (435-2013-0103) and *Modality across Categories: Modal Indefinites and the Projection of Possibilities* (435-2018-0524) (Alonso-Ovalle, Principal Investigator), which is gratefully acknowledged here.

¹All Chuj data, unless otherwise attributed, come from original fieldwork conducted with speakers of the San Mateo Ixtatán variant of Chuj. Data were collected in communities in Huehuetenango, Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico, and with a consultant in Montreal, Canada. Abbreviations in glosses are as follows: A: ergative/possessive; AG: agentive suffix; B: absolutive; ALGÚN: Spanish *algún*; CLF: noun classifier; CUALQUIERA: Spanish *cualquiera*; DEM: demonstrative; DIV: derived intransitive suffix; DTV: derived transitive suffix; INDF: indefinite; IRGEND: German *irgend-*; KOMON: Chuj *komon*; IV: intransitive status suffix; PASS: passive; PFV: perfective; PROG: progressive; TOP: topic.

the verbal domain? Also, in the verbal domain, there are correlations between syntactic position and modal flavour, which recent work aims to motivate (Hacquard 2009). Do we find similar correlations outside the verbal domain?

The goal of this short paper is descriptive. The paper contributes new data from Chuj, an under-documented Mayan language spoken in Guatemala and Mexico by 45,000 to 70,000 speakers (Piedrasanta 2009). We describe the interpretation and distribution of the morpheme *komon*. We show that *komon* can be either internal to the DP ('DP-*komon*') or to the VP ('VP-*komon*') and that in both cases *komon* seems to contribute random choice modality. We also show that while DP-*komon* parallels Spanish *un NP cualquiera* in interpretation, VP-*komon* doesn't entirely, and that, therefore, changes in syntactic position correlate with changes in interpretation.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we briefly introduce background work pertaining to modal indefinites and random choice modal indefinites. In section 3, we describe the syntactic and semantic distribution of *komon* showing that it can appear both internal to the DP and internal to the VP. Finally, in section 4, we discuss issues that arise from the interpretation of *komon* for existing theories on random choice modality, aiming to set the stage for further work on the topic.

2 Background

As discussed above, among those lexical items that express modality outside the verbal domain, modal indefinites have received considerable attention. Modal indefinites are indefinite DPs that convey modality without overt modals (Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2010). Consider the Spanish example in (2):

- (2) Juan compró [algún libro]
 Juan bought ALGÚN book
 'Juan bought some book.'

The indefinite *algún* makes a double contribution: (i) it makes an existential claim—namely that there exists a book that Juan bought—and (ii) it conveys a modal component—it expresses that the speaker does not know which book Juan bought.

While epistemic modal indefinites, like *algún*, express speaker ignorance, random choice modal indefinites, like Spanish *un NP cualquiera*, German *irgendein*, and Korean *amwu-NP-na* express that an agent acted indiscriminately, as already seen (1a) above. Further examples from German and Korean are provided below:

- (3) a. GERMAN
 Hans hat irgend-ein Buch gekauft.
 Hans has IRGEND-INDF book bought
 ≈ 'Hans bought a random book.' (Buccola and Haidas 2017)
- b. KOREAN
 John-un amwu-khadu-na cip-ess-e.
 John-TOP AMWU-card-OR take-PAST-DEC
 ≈ 'John picked a random card.' (Choi 2007)

Random choice indefinites, like epistemic indefinites, also make a double contribution. On the one hand, like non-modal indefinites, they make an existential claim—in the case of the sentences above, that there is a book that Hans bought or a card that John picked. On the other hand, they make a modal claim, one that we can paraphrase with the help of a modal auxiliary: that Hans/John *could* have bought/picked any other book/card.

One main question that arises is the exact nature of the modal component of random choice indefinites. There is no consensus in the literature about that. What is exactly conveyed by the claim that the agent could have bought any other book? Modal auxiliaries are notorious in being able to express different types of modal flavours. What is the modal flavour of the modal auxiliary in these paraphrases? There is also no consensus about where the modal component is coming from: Is the modal component part of the meaning of the indefinite itself or does it arise from a source external to the indefinite?

The literature has offered different answers to the first question ('what is the exact nature of the modal component?'). Chierchia (2013) offers (mostly in passing) a bouletic account, under which indefinites like Italian *uno qualsiasi* and German *irgendein* are interpreted under the scope of a bouletic modal (a modal that makes reference to the desires of the agent). Under this approach, what *irgendein* conveys in (3a) is that in view of his desires, Hans could have taken any other book, i.e. that Hans' desires did not favour one book over another.

Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito (2018) offer a decision-based account, according to which *un NP cualquiera* is interpreted relative to the decision that the agent of the event described made. In the case of (1a), according to their account, *un NP cualquiera* would convey that Juan decided to buy a book and that, according to the decision that he made and that led to his buying a book, he could have bought any book. This account predicts *un NP cualquiera* to be appropriate in more scenarios than the bouletic account. It could be the case that the agent did not decide to buy a particular book because he didn't want to buy a particular book, but it could also be the case that he wanted to buy a particular book but he could not decide to do so because, for example, he would not know what to do to buy the particular book that he wanted (imagine, for instance, that Juan has to pick a book in front of him in order to buy it and that he was blindfolded).

Choi (2007) and Choi and Romero (2008) offer a counterfactual approach, where random choice modal indefinites in utterances like (1) are taken to convey, roughly, that Juan bought a book from a set of actual books, and that he would have also bought a book if the set of books had been different. This covers the random choice interpretation that we have been talking about, since in cases where the counterfactual component is true, the identity of the books did not matter. But the interpretation allows for other scenarios, as well (see Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2018 for discussion).

Finally, Buccola and Haidas (2017) trace back the modality of *irgendein* to a comparison between potential alternative actions. They focus on the interpretation of *irgendein* in sentences with the adverb *einfach* ('simply'), which they take to be covert in cases like (3a). For them, *einfach* is interpreted with respect to a simplicity order that determines what is simple for the agent of the event described. *Irgendein* provides a set of alternative propositions that *einfach* compares. Some of these alternative propositions are determined by restricting the domain of quantification of *irgendein*: for instance, in (3a) *irgendein* contributes the proposition that Hans bought a book in a given domain of books *D* and the alternative propositions that Hans bought a book in a domain *D'* that is a subset of *D*. What *einfach* conveys is, roughly, that buying a book in any of these subset domains would not have been simpler for Hans. This claim is meant to exclude situations where Hans had preferences as to which book to take. If that were the case, picking a book from a larger set of books would not have been simpler for Hans than picking a book from a subset of those books, because picking a book from a given set involves discarding the books that Hans was not interested in, and the larger the set, the more books that require discarding, hence the more complex for Hans the action would be.

With respect to the second question discussed above ('Is the modal component part of the meaning of the indefinite itself or does it arise from a source external to the indefinite?'), no consensus has been reached, either. On the one hand, some have argued that random choice modal indefinites are themselves modal expressions (Choi and Romero 2008; Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2018). On the other hand, others assume that random choice modal indefinites are not themselves modal expressions, but are

interpreted relative to a possibly covert external modal expression within the verbal domain (Chierchia 2013; Buccola and Haidas 2017).

With this background, we turn in the next section to the behaviour of Chuj’s *komon*. Section 4 will then briefly discuss the significance of our findings to the background questions discussed in section 2.

3 Chuj *komon*

In this section, we describe the syntactic and semantic distribution of the Chuj morpheme *komon*, which, according to Hopkins (2012), is a borrowing of Spanish *común* (‘common’).² As anticipated above, we show that *komon* can be either internal to the DP or to the VP. In both cases, it seems to convey a random choice modal component. Upon closer examination, it turns out that the interpretation of DP-*komon* and VP-*komon* is significantly different. While DP-*komon* patterns with other instances of random choice indefinites, like Spanish *un NP cualquiera*, VP-*komon* does not. We discuss DP-*komon* in section 3.1 and VP-*komon* in section 3.2.

3.1 DP-*komon*

When internal to a DP, *komon* occupies a pre-nominal position between the determiner and the noun, a position typically occupied by adjectival modifiers (Maxwell 1976; Coon 2018). An example of DP-*komon* is provided in (4), and, for comparison, an example with the adjective *saksak* (‘white’) is provided in (5):

- (4) DP-*komon*
 Ix-s-yam [DP jun **komon** regalo] ix Malin.
 PFV-A 1 S-grab INDF KOMON gift CLF Malin
 ≈ ‘Malin grabbed a random gift.’

- (5) Ix-s-man [DP jun **saksak** libro] ix Malin.
 PFV-A 1 S-buy INDF white book CLF Malin
 ‘Malin bought a white book.’

The sentence in (4), with *komon* within an indefinite DP, can appropriately describe the scenario in (6), where the agent made a random choice.

- (6) Scenario A RANDOM CHOICE: *Malin is at a gift exchange. Everyone knows there’s a jackpot of \$1,000 and that the other gifts are very cheap gifts from the dollar store. There are four gifts left to choose from, the jackpot hasn’t been picked yet and it’s Malin’s turn to choose. All of the gifts are wrapped the same, so Malin just picks one at random, and it’s the jackpot!*

Consider now the scenario in (7), where the agent did not make a random choice.

- (7) Scenario B ‘UNREMARKABLE *x*’: *... Malin’s turn to choose, when she notices that one of the gifts has blue wrapping, while the other three have red wrapping. She assumes the jackpot must be in the gift with blue wrapping. She grabs this gift, but to her disappointment, it’s just a cheap gift.*

The sentence in (4) can be read in such a way as to make a false claim in the scenario in (7), based on the observation that the agent did *not* make a random choice in that scenario. There is however another possible interpretation of (4) under which the sentence can truthfully describe the scenario in (7). Under

²Note that Spanish *común* does not exhibit the same behaviour as Chuj *komon*. As far as we know, it does not have a random-choice modal indefinite reading.

that interpretation, the sentence conveys that the agent bought an ‘unremarkable’ book, which is true in the given scenario.

Finally, the sentence in (4) cannot describe the scenario in (8) where the agent did not make a random choice and the witness of the existential claim (the book that Malin chose) is remarkable.

- (8) Scenario C ‘UNEXPECTED *e*’: ... *There are four gifts left to choose from, the jackpot hasn’t been picked yet, and it’s **not** Malin’s turn to choose, when she notices that one of the gifts is wrapped in blue, while the other three in red. Even though it’s **not** her turn, she runs to the blue gift and unwraps it. It’s the jackpot!*

The behaviour of DP-*komon* with respect to these three scenarios is completely parallel to that of *un NP cualquiera*. The counterpart of (4) with *un NP cualquiera* can also either convey that a random choice was made or that the object that satisfies the existential claim was ‘unremarkable’, and, therefore, it is predicted to be true in Scenario A and false in Scenario C. In Scenario B, the sentence can be read as making a false claim, or a true claim. And the parallel extends beyond this. For instance, with non-volitional predicates, DP-*komon* can only convey that the individual satisfying the existential claim is ‘unremarkable’. The same is true for *un NP cualquiera* (Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2018). Consider, for instance, the sentence in (9), which conveys (i) that a tree fell on a house, and (ii) that the house that the tree fell on was ‘unremarkable’ (for instance, it could be an old rotten house or a house that no one cares about). The random choice interpretation is not possible since the event described has no agent.³

- (9) Ix-telw-i jun te’ y-ib’an [DP jun **komon** pat].
 PFV-fall-IV INDF tree A3-over INDF KOMON house
 ≈ ‘A tree fell on a random house.’

Like *un NP cualquiera*, when DP-*komon* is in subject position (even when it is the subject of a volitional predicate), only the ‘unremarkable’ interpretation is perceived. To provide an illustration, the sentence in (10) conveys that the man that is sleeping is unremarkable (and not that, for example, the man randomly decided to sleep).

- (10) Lan s-way [jun **komon** winak].
 PROG A3-sleep INDF KOMON man
 ≈ ‘An unremarkable man is sleeping’

DP-*komon* (again, like *un NP cualquiera*) cannot give rise to a random choice interpretation when it is used to modify a noun in a predicative construction. That is, the only possible interpretation of *komon* in (11) is one in which Xun is considered unremarkable or ordinary:

- (11) **Komon** winak waj Xun.
 KOMON man CLF John
 ≈ ‘Xun is an unremarkable man.’

Up until this point, we have only seen examples where DP-*komon* co-occurs with an indefinite determiner. Unlike what happens with *un NP cualquiera*, that doesn’t have to be the case. Consider the following

³Note that though random choice interpretations require the presence of a salient AGENT, random choice interpretations may still arise with DP-*komon* in passive constructions even though the agent is implicit:

- (1) Ix-man-chaj jun **komon** libro.
 PFV-buy-PASS INDF KOMON book
 ≈ ‘A random book was bought.’ (can mean that the book was unremarkable or that it was chosen at random)

example, in which *komon* co-occurs with a noun classifier, used as a definite determiner in the language (see Buenrostro et al. 1989; García Pablo and Domingo Pascual 2007; and Royer 2018), and with the proximal demonstrative *tik*.

- (12) Ix-s-yam [ch'anh **komon** regalo tik] waj Xun.
 PFV-A3-grab CLF KOMON book DEM CLF Xun
 ≈ 'Xun grabbed this 'unremarkable' gift.'

As the translation shows, in cases like this, only the 'unremarkable' interpretation arises.

We conclude here the overview of DP-*komon*. To sum up: the behaviour of DP-*komon* parallels the behaviour of *un NP cualquiera*. In the following section, we turn to the semantic and syntactic distribution of *komon* when it appears internal to a VP.

3.2 VP-*komon*

In addition to appearing in a DP position, *komon* can also appear within the VP, in a position typically occupied by adverbial material in Chuj. Adverbs that appear in this position get incorporated within the verb stem, between person marking and the root. When *komon* is incorporated within a transitive stem, it triggers the presence of the so-called derived transitive status suffix, a stem-forming suffix typically used to derive non-transitive roots into transitive stems (Hopkins 1967).⁴ An example of VP-*komon* is provided in (13), and, for comparison, an example with the adverb *mol* 'together' is provided in (14):

- (13) VP-*komon*
 Ix-s-**komon**-man-ej jun regalo ix Malin.
 PFV-A1S-KOMON-buy-DTV INDF gift CLF Malin
 ≈ 'Malin randomly grabbed a gift.'

- (14) Ix-ko-**mol**-man-ej jun libro.
 PFV-A1P-together-buy-DTV INDF book
 'We bought a book together.'

It is worth comparing the interpretation of the sentence in (4), with DP-*komon*, described in the previous section, with the interpretation of the sentence in (13). Just like its counterpart with DP-*komon* (or with *un NP cualquiera*), the sentence in (13) is true in Scenario A (6) above, where Malin grabbed a gift at random. Unlike its counterpart with DP-*komon*, (13) cannot describe Scenario B in (7) above, but can describe Scenario C in (8), repeated in (15) below.

- (15) Scenario C (UNEXPECTED *e*): *Malin is at a gift exchange. Everyone knows there's a jackpot of \$1,000 and that the other gifts are very cheap gifts from the dollar store. There are four gifts left to choose from, the jackpot hasn't been picked yet, and it's **not** Malin's turn to choose, when she notices that one of the gifts is wrapped in blue, while the other three in red. Even though it's **not** her turn, she runs to the blue gift and unwraps it. It's the jackpot!*

As discussed before, the random choice interpretation is false in this scenario (since Malin specifically chose the book with red packaging) and the 'unremarkable' interpretation is also false (since the gift was remarkable, it was the jackpot). According to our consultants, what makes this scenario one where (13) is true is that the event described was unmotivated, unexpected, or happened for no apparent reason. This

⁴We have only been able to identify three other adverbs that appear in this position: *mol* 'together', *wach* 'good/more', and *te'*, an intensifier. Other Mayan languages also allow adverbs in this position (e.g. see Vázquez Álvarez 2011, section 5.6 on Ch'ol).

‘unexpected event’ interpretation reveals itself in cases where the event described is not volitional, like in (16), as its approximate translation indicates. In (16), the only possible interpretation is one in which a tree was not expected to fall, but still did.

- (16) Ix-**komon**-telw-i jun te’ yib’an jun pat.
 PFV-KOMON-fall-IV INDF tree over INDF house
 ≈ ‘A tree randomly fell on a house.’ (compare with (9) above)

The random choice interpretation of VP-*komon* is not available with basic intransitives, as the translations below suggest. According to our consultants, the sentences in (17a) and (17b) only have one interpretation, namely one which describes an event that was unexpected. In (17a), it was unexpected that Xun would arrive. In (17b), it was either unexpected that Xun would start dancing or that he would dance the way he did.

- (17) a. UNACCUSATIVE
 Ix-**komon**-kot waj Xun.
 PFV-KOMON-arrive CLF Xun
 ≈ ‘Xun randomly arrived.’
 b. UNERGATIVE
 Ix-**komon**-chanhal waj Xun.
 PFV-KOMON-dance CLF Xun
 ≈ ‘Xun randomly danced (or he randomly started dancing).’

Random choice interpretations are possible with implicit objects. There is an interesting contrast between underived intransitive verbs like *ixinwa’i* ‘eat_{iv}’, an intransitive verb similar to the one in (17b), and derived transitive verbs like *ixinwa’ej* ‘eat_{tv}’. First consider examples of sentences with these verbs without *komon*:

- (18) a. INTRANSITIVE
 Ix-in-wa’-i (*jun tek).
 PFV-B 1 S-eat-IV (INDF soup)
 ‘I ate.’
 b. DERIVED TRANSITIVE
 Ix-in-wa’-ej jun tek.
 PFV-A 1 S-eat-DTV INDF soup
 ‘I ate a soup.’

When the intransitive root *wa’* appears in a basic intransitive stem, as shown in (18a), it cannot appear with an overt object and appears with the intransitive status suffix *-i*. When it appears within a transitive stem, marked with the derived transitive status suffix *-ej*, as in (18b), it typically surfaces with an overt object, though this is not always obligatory (see (19b) below). When there is no overt object, the interpretation is equivalent to that resulting from having a covert indefinite object, as the translation below suggests.

- (19) a. Ix-in-**komon**-wa’-i.
 PFV-B 1 S-KOMON-eat-IV.
 ‘I ate.’
 b. Ix-in-**komon**-wa’-ej.
 PFV-A 1 S-KOMON-eat-DTV
 ‘I ate (something).’

Now consider the sentences in (19) in the scenarios in (20):

- (20) a. Scenario A (felicitous with both (19a) and (19b)): *Though I carefully selected the food I ate today (since I'm following a new diet), I had a very busy day and ate at very unexpected hours.*
 b. Scenario B (felicitous with (19b) only): *For lunch today, there was a buffet. Everything looked good, so I picked and chose things to eat indiscriminately.*

The sentence in (19a) is only felicitous with a scenario that forces an ‘unexpected event’ reading, as expected from an intransitive verb. Example (19b), on the contrary, is compatible with both the scenario that forces a random choice interpretation and the scenario that forces an ‘unexpected event’ interpretation, as shown by the felicity of (19b) in both scenarios in (20). We hypothesize that this is due to the fact that (19b) has an implicit object.

Random choice interpretations can also arise with passives (with *-chaj*) and absolutive antipassives, which Coon (2019) argues feature implicit external and internal arguments. Consider the following sentences:

- (21) a. PASSIVE
 Ix-**komon**-man-ch-aj jun libro.
 PFV-KOMON-buy-PASS-DIV INDF book
 ≈ ‘A book was randomly bought.’
 b. ABSOLUTIVE ANTIPASSIVE
 Ix-in-**komon**-man-w-aj-i.
 PFV-B1S-KOMON-buy-AG-DIV-IV
 ≈ ‘I did some random buying.’

Both examples above can receive a random choice interpretation. For example, (21a) is felicitous in a scenario in which the person who bought the book did so indiscriminately, and (21b) is felicitous in a scenario in which the speaker went to the grocery store and bought items at random. In recent work, Coon (2019) argues that the morpheme *-aj* is the overt realization of existential closure and that it correlates with the presence of implicit arguments (be it AGENT or THEME). The availability of random choice interpretations in the utterances in (21) is thus expected.

Finally, recall that random choice interpretations of DP-*komon* were only possible if the object is indefinite. Interestingly, this is not the case for VP-*komon*, which can receive a random choice interpretation despite the object being clearly definite:

- (22) Ix-s-**komon**-yam-ej ch’anh libro tik ix Malin.
 PFV-A3-KOMON-grab-DTV CLF gift DEM CLF Malin
 ≈ ‘Malin randomly grabbed this gift.’

The utterance in (22) is felicitous in the scenario in (6) above, where the random choice interpretation is forced, thereby demonstrating that random choice interpretations can arise with VP-*komon* even if the object is definite.

4 Conclusions

We have shown that the morpheme *komon* can give rise to different interpretations depending on the position it occupies. The findings are summarized in Table 1. We have seen that in cases where *komon* is part of an indefinite DP, it can convey that the agent of the event described made a random choice, or that the

individual that satisfies the existential claim was ‘unremarkable’. *VP-komon* can also convey that the agent of the event described made a random choice. On top of that, it appropriately describes situations where the event described was unexpected. Unlike *DP-komon*, it cannot describe situations where the agent did not make a random choice, but the theme of the event described was ‘unremarkable.’

Table 1: Possible interpretations of *komon*

<i>DP-komon</i>			<i>VP-komon</i>		
RC	UNREM <i>x</i>	UNEX <i>e</i>	RC	UNREM <i>x</i>	UNEX <i>e</i>
✓	✓	*	✓	*	✓

These facts pose some questions in light of the background discussed in Section 2.

Let’s start first with *DP-komon*. With respect to the question of what type of modality random choice indefinites convey, we have informally described *DP-komon* as lumping together two interpretations: what we called the random choice and the ‘unremarkable’ interpretations. This raises a question: is *DP-komon* literally ambiguous between two interpretations or does it have a meaning that is weak enough to be true in the type of situations illustrating the random choice interpretation and also the type of situations illustrating the unremarkable interpretation?

We have noted before that, according to Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito (2018), Spanish *un NP cualquiera* can also convey either random choice or the fact that the theme of the event described is unremarkable. Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito (2018) argue that this a true ambiguity: that there are two homophonous items with different interpretations. The behaviour of *DP-komon* casts doubts about this hypothesis, as we will be forced to assume the same ambiguity for an (allegedly) unrelated form in an unrelated language.

If the ambiguity hypothesis is on the right track, the interpretation of random choice indefinites and, in particular, their modal flavour, need to be reconsidered: an interpretation weak enough to cover both the random choice and the ‘unremarkable’ cases needs to be postulated.

Our findings about *VP-komon* also pose theoretically significant questions. Consider its modal flavour. We have seen that *VP-komon* lumps together a random choice interpretation with what we called an ‘unexpected event’ interpretation. Again, the question of whether this is due to an ambiguity arises, but, in the absence of evidence for that possibility, we should consider the null hypothesis that *VP-komon* is not ambiguous, but that it rather conveys an interpretation that can be satisfied both in the random choice scenarios and in the ‘unexpected event’ scenarios.

This is a significant conclusion, because none of the possible interpretations of random choice modality that are discussed in the literature on random choice indefinites make the right predictions for *VP-komon*. First, notice that *VP-komon* does not require agentive events. That means that the bouletic, and decision based approaches discussed in Section 2 are ruled out, since they presuppose an agent. Second, notice that in the unexpected event cases, the counterfactual approach would yield an unattested interpretation. To see that, consider, for instance, the example in (16), repeated in (23) below.

- (23) Ix-**komon**-telw-i jun te’ yib’an jun pat.
 PFV-KOMON-fall-IV INDF tree over INDF house
 ≈ ‘A tree randomly fell on a house.’

Under the counterfactual approach, the sentence in (23) would be predicted to convey (i) that a tree fell on an actual house, and (ii) that if the set of actual houses would have been different, a tree would a fell on a house, too. This interpretation would be satisfied in a situation where the falling of the tree on a house was completely expected, contrary to fact.

In conclusion: both DP-*komon* and VP-*komon* challenge our current understanding of what random choice modality is. They also pose the following question: can we reduce both types of *komon* to one basic core and predict the different interpretations attested based on their different syntactic distributions? We pose these questions here in the hope that they will fuel future research and plan to address them in future work.

References

- Alonso-Ovalle, Luis, and Paula Menéndez-Benito. 2010. Modal indefinites. *Natural Language Semantics* 18:1–31.
- Alonso-Ovalle, Luis, and Paula Menéndez-Benito. 2013. Two views on epistemic indefinites. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 17:105–122.
- Alonso-Ovalle, Luis, and Paula Menéndez-Benito. 2015. *Epistemic indefinites: Exploring modality beyond the verbal domain*. Oxford University Press.
- Alonso-Ovalle, Luis, and Paula Menéndez-Benito. 2018. Projecting possibilities in the nominal domain: Spanish *uno cualquiera*. *Journal of Semantics* 35:1–41.
- Arregui, Ana, María Luisa Rivero, and Andrés Salanova. 2017. *Modality across syntactic categories*, volume 63. Oxford University Press.
- Buccola, Brian, and Andreas Haidas. 2017. Expressing indifference in German. In *Amsterdam Colloquium*, volume 21, 165–174.
- Buenrostro, Cristina, José Carmen Díaz, and Roberto Zavala. 1989. Sistema de clasificación nominal del Chuj. In *Memorias del segundo coloquio internacional de Mayistas*, volume II. Mexico City: UNAM.
- Chierchia, Gennaro. 2013. *Logic in grammar*. Oxford University Press.
- Choi, Jinyoung. 2007. Free Choice and Negative Polarity: A Compositional Analysis of Korean Polarity Sensitive Items. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- Choi, Jinyoung, and Maribel Romero. 2008. Rescuing existential free choice items in episodic sentences. In *Empirical issues in formal syntax and semantics*, ed. Olivier Bonami and Patricia Cabredo Hoffner.
- Coon, Jessica. 2018. Distinguishing adjectives from relative clauses in Chuj (with help from Ch’ol). In *Heading in the right direction: Linguistics treats for Lisa Travis*, ed. Laura Kalin, Ileana Paul, and Jozina Vander Klok. McGill Working Papers in Linguistics.
- Coon, Jessica. 2019. Building verbs in Chuj: Consequences for the nature of roots. *Journal of Linguistics* 55:35–81.
- García Pablo, Gaspar, and Pascual Martín Domingo Pascual. 2007. *Stz’olalil sloloni-spaxtini heb’ chuj: Gramática descriptiva chuj*. Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala.
- Hacquard, Valentine. 2009. On the interaction of aspect and modal auxiliaries. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 32:279–315.
- Hopkins, Nicholas. 1967. The Chuj language. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL.
- Hopkins, Nicholas. 2012. *A dictionary of the Chuj Mayan Language*. Tallahassee, FL: Jaguar Tours.
- Maxwell, Judith M. 1976. Chuj intransitives: Or when can an intransitive verb take an object? *Journal of Mayan Linguistics* 1:128–140.
- Piedrasanta, Ruth. 2009. *Los chuj, unidad y rupturas en su espacio*. Guatemala City, Guatemala: Amrar Editores.
- Royer, Justin. 2018. Domain restriction and noun classifiers in Chuj. In *Paper presented at the 49th annual meeting of the North East Linguistics Society*.
- Vázquez Álvarez, Juan J. 2011. A grammar of Chol, a Mayan language. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas Austin, Austin, TX.