Polarity driven quantification: On some parallelisms between definites, bare arguments and donkey pronouns.

Gennaro Chierchia

Consider a slogan like "People are fed up; don't mess with them". The first sentence in it means roughly: **All** the people around are fed up. The second means: Do not mess with **any** of them. Even though the second sentence looks just like a negative counterpart of the first, it doesn't have the expected compositional meaning: it doesn't mean "do not mess with **all** the people". This phenomenon is extremely general. It takes place with Bare Plurals, like *people* in our slogan. It figures prominently in the behavior of Plural Definites, where it goes under the rubric of 'homogeneity' (*I spoke to the students in trouble* $\cong \forall$/*I didn't speak to the students in trouble* $\cong \neg\exists$). It also takes place with to Donkey pronouns (*Every farmer who had a donkey sold it* $\cong \forall$/ *No man who had a donkey sold it* $\cong \neg\exists$). These switches of quantificational force under polarity reversals call to mind Free Choice phenomena. In particular, a determiner like *any* is interpreted as a narrow scope existential in a sentence like *I didn't talk to any student in trouble* $\cong \neg \exists$; however, in positive environments, the existential meaning of *any* emerges as strengthened to universal *I spoke to any student in trouble* $\cong \forall$. It is tempting to conjecture that the source of this uniform behavior is a uniform mechanism. While these constructions (Free Choice *any*, Bare Plurals, Plural Definites, and Donkey pronouns) have been studied extensively, and insightful analyses have been proposed in some cases (cf., in particular, Bar Lev (2018, 2019) on Plural Definites), a unitary analysis has not been attempted to the best of my knowledge. In spite of the many challenges that such a unified analysis faces, it is worth a try, for, if successful, it would considerably push forward our understanding of a wide range of very diverse constructions.