Hurford disjunctions: an experimental and theoretical investigation

Fifty years ago, Hurford 1974 proposed the constraint whereby a disjunction is odd if one disjunct entails the other:

(1) # Either John visited Germany or he visited Berlin.

Ever since, these types of disjunctions have proven instrumental in the theorization of various phenomena, from redundancy/triviality (c.f. Schlenker 2009, Katzir & Singh 2013) to implicature (c.f. Chierchia, Fox & Spector 2012). However, a full account of Hurford phenomena is still lacking (cf. Marty & Romoli 2022). Amongst the controversies surrounding Hurford sentences, we distinguish the following three questions:

Q1) Is it the case that positive Hurford cases like (1) show the same kind of redundancy/triviality as negative Hurford cases like (2)? Mandelkern & Romoli 2018 argue that the answer is "yes", while Kalomoiros 2024 offers a dissenting view.

(2) (#) Either John didn't visit Berlin or he didn't visit Germany.

Q2) Are Hurford disjunctions sensitive to order effects of the kind found with redundancy /triviality in conjunctions, i.e., how do the cases in (3) compare to the cases in (4)?

(3a) Either John visited Berlin or he visited Germany.
(3b) Either John visited Germany or he visited Berlin.

(4a) # John visited Berlin and he visited Germany.
(4b) John visited Germany and he visited Berlin.

Q3) Is the effect of redundancy/triviality in Hurford disjunctions comparable to the effect of redundancy/triviality in conjunctions, i.e., is the contrast between (5a) vs (5b) comparable to the contrast between (6a) vs (6b)?

(5a) Either John visited Berlin or he visited China.
(5b) # Either John visited Berlin or he visited Germany.

(6a) John visited Berlin and he visited China.
(6b) John visited Berlin and he visited Germany.

We present two experiments aimed at resolving the empirical landscape around these three questions. In the second part of the talk, we examine the extent to which current theories are compatible with our results, and single out the novel notion of *super-redundancy* from Kalomoiros 2024 as being especially helpful in accounting for the patterns we find.