Pragmatic strengthening: contrariety and disjunctive syllogism

The dictum that "The essence of formal negation is to invest the contrary with the character of the contradictory" (Bosanquet 1888) describes the tendency for contradictory (apparent wide-scope) negation to be semantically or pragmatically strengthened to contrary readings whenever possible. This tendency is illustrated by lexicalization asymmetries (e.g. *none* 'all not' vs. **nall* 'not all') and the widespread diachronic reanalyses of weaker negatives to contraries (e.g *Il ne faut pas partir* —literally = 'one need not leave' > 'one must not-leave').

Outside the lexical domain, contrary strengthening typically instantiates the inference schema of disjunctive syllogism (modus tollendo ponens):

$$\phi \lor \varphi$$
$$\underline{\neg \, \phi}$$
$$\therefore \varphi$$

The role of disjunctive syllogism can be detected in a variety of strengthening shifts in natural language where the disjunctive premise in question is pragmatically presupposed in relevant contexts. It will be shown that a range of apparently quite diverse phenomena—negative strengthening in lexical and clausal contexts (e.g. neg-raising), scope adjustments with negated plural definites and bare plurals, epistemic strengthening of weak implicature in both main and embedded contexts, conjunctive readings of free choice disjunction, and children's word learning strategies, among others—can be collected under the umbrella of pragmatic strengthening as reflexes of the general preference for contrariety, the operation of disjunctive syllogism, or both.