

A Unified Semantic Analysis of the *-aa* marker in Tamil

There are two disjunctive markers in Tamil: *-oo* and *illai na*. Both can occur in declaratives as well as interrogatives. A third particle, is the clitic *-aa* in Tamil which can only occur in questions. Because it can create a disjunction effect when used in questions, it looks suspiciously like another disjunction marker and has, in fact, been traditionally classified as such. However, based on the significantly differing distributional patterns of *-aa* and the other two markers *-oo* and *illai na*, I argue that while the latter are straightforward disjunction markers, the clitic *-aa* is merely a question particle and that any disjunctive effects from *-aa* are derived from a combination of independent factors.

However, *-aa* seems to be more than just a question particle: it also functions as a focus-sensitive operator. In unfocused sentences, the *-aa* occurs canonically after the sentence-final verb; but when there is a focused element in the sentence, it occurs adjacent to the focused element. Since the *-aa* in focused sentences is mandatory in order for the entire sentence to be interpreted as a question, I claim that this focus-particle *-aa* is in fact the same *-aa* that also acts as a question-marker in unfocused interrogative constructions.

The goal of this work is to show how to compositionally derive a unified semantic analysis of *-aa* that integrates its dual functions as a question-marker and a focus-sensitive particle. Such an approach obviates the need to posit two separate lexical entries for *-aa*, and is hence appealing as an economical analysis within a formal semantic framework.

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