

Ordering expectation: The semantics of scalar *only* in Indian English

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PLC 47

Introduction This talk examines the semantics of post-positional *only*, a focus-sensitive operator in Indian English. It is proposed that *only* contributes a presupposition placing the intension of its complement at the top of an expectation scale of contextually-determined focus alternatives. *only* interacts with negation and results in different presuppositions depending on whether the negation scopes inside or outside the focus-marked constituent.

Apart from exclusive *only*, Indian English (IE) has a post-positional scalar *only* (Bhatt 2000, Lange 2007, Parviainen 2009). Lange (2007) describes it as a presentational or non-contrastive focus. But it seems to also have contrastive uses. There is no formal account of its semantics to date.

(1) John ate [apples]_F **only**.

At-issue meaning = John ate apples.

Presupposition = Of all the food options, he was most likely to eat apples.

The Semantic Contribution of IE *only* I propose that *only* is a focus-sensitive operator, which operates on a set of contextually-determined focus alternatives, as in Rooth (1985). I assume *only* always LF-raises and adjoins to S. It combines with α of type t as follows, assuming a trivalent semantics with weak Kleene logic.

(2) $only[\alpha] \rightsquigarrow \alpha \wedge \partial(\forall p[[C(p) \wedge p \neq \wedge \alpha] \rightarrow p <_{expected} \wedge \alpha])$

If $\alpha = [\alpha \dots \beta_F \dots]$, $C \subseteq \lambda p. \exists \beta[p = \wedge [\alpha \dots \beta \dots]]$ where $\beta \in D_{type(\beta)}$

For the classical exclusive *only*, the right side of the implication would be $\neg p$. The lexical entry for *only* is then as follows:

(3) $only_{<t,t>} \rightsquigarrow \lambda q_t. q \wedge \partial(\forall p[[C(p) \wedge p \neq \wedge q] \rightarrow p <_{expected} \wedge q])$

Consider a context where John is at a party where there are several fruits laid out on a table as snacks. John's favourite fruit is apples, and he is therefore expected by everyone to eat some apples. He may or may not additionally eat other fruits. Treating 'apples' as a proper name for convenience:

(4) John ate [apples]_F **only**.

At-issue meaning (a): John ate apples.

Presupposition: $\forall p[[p \in F \wedge p \neq \wedge a] \rightarrow p <_{expected} \wedge a]$ where $F = [\wedge Ate(j, x) : x \in D_c \subseteq D_e]$ and D_c is a contextually determined subset of D_e .

Thus, *only* creates a presupposition which places its complement at the highest end of an 'expectation scale', with the alternatives determined by the focussed constituent. This is a presupposition because it survives under negation, as seen in (5) below.

(5) John didn't eat [apples]_F **only**.

At-issue meaning ($\neg a$): $\neg(\text{John ate apples})$

Presupposition: Same as in (4)

The presupposition also projects out of the antecedent of a conditional, and a question environment. Sentences (6) and (7) have the same presupposition as (4) above.

(6) If John ate [apples]_F **only**, then everything is as expected.

(7) Did John eat [apples]_F **only**?

Negation and scope The behavior in (4) requires that negation scope above *only*. If negation is included in the focussed constituent, this account makes a prediction of the opposite scope which is borne out. The following minimal pair shows the two possible scopes, the sentences are distinguished by prosody.

- (8) Context: I was expected to go to the party.
 I didn't [go]_F only.
 At-issue meaning: I didn't go.
 Presupposition: \wedge I went_{>expected} \wedge I didn't go
- (9) Context: I was not expected to go to the party.
 I [didn't go]_F only.
 At-issue meaning: I didn't go.
 Presupposition: \wedge I didn't go_{>expected} \wedge I went

No additivity Although *only* patterns under negation somewhat similarly to NPI *even* (Giannakidou 2007), it does not have an additive meaning with or without negation. This is predicted by the current proposal but cannot be accounted for using the NPI *even* theory.

- (10) John ate [apples]_F only. He didn't eat anything else.
 (11) #John even ate [apples]_F. He didn't eat anything else.
 (12) John didn't eat [apples]_F only. However, he ate other fruits.
 (13) #John didn't even eat [apples]_F. However, he ate other fruits.

Exclusivity With this *only*, exclusivity is not an entailment but a cancellable implicature, which is correctly predicted by this account. The context is of a wedding, where the bride is (one of) the most likely to be present.

- (14) [The bride]_F only didn't show up to the wedding. Of course no one else came.
 (15) [The bride]_F only didn't show up to the wedding. But everyone else came.

In (14), the bride is not necessarily the exclusive individual who did not show up to the wedding. Contrast this with a parallel sentence with exclusive *only*, as in ((16)).

- (16) #Only [the bride]_F didn't show up to the wedding. Of course no one else came.

In fact, exclusive *only* can co-occur with post-positional *only*.

- (17) Ram eats only [vegetarian food]_F only.
 = Ram eats only vegetarian food, and this was the most expected fact about his dietary preferences.

Theoretical implications Given the facts above, it is clear that IE *only* cannot be subsumed under exclusive *only*. This work seeks to contribute to the debate on polysemy in focus-sensitive particles like *even*, *until* and *any*. By comparatively studying the formal properties of the two *only*s, we might arrive at a core semantics of *only*. From a different angle, given the similarity in behavior, these facts might also contribute to the understanding of scalar *even*, as IE *only* shows a wider distribution than the NPI *even*, without additivity. This could lead to a reanalysis of that particle as consisting of decomposable subparts.

References

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