

Negative Polarity Items and Overcoming Assertoric Inertia

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(p. 1)

Since my first discussion (Atlas 1991) of Larry Horn's (1969, 1979, 1992, 1996) analysis of Only Muriel voted for Hubert, I have carefully distinguished between the cases in which the focal Noun Phrase is a singular term, e.g. Muriel, and cases in which it is a Common Noun or Count Noun, e.g. Democrats in Only Democrats voted for Clinton.

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- (4) a. Only John ever suspected David Alexander.
b. Only your wife gives a hoot about what happens to you. (McCawley 1981:83)
c. Only Phil would lift a finger to help Lucy.

I (Atlas 1996) have argued that though ¹only Proper Name¹ was not downward entailing, it was "pseudo-anti-additive," i.e. that it met the DeMorgan condition of closure under finite unions, as in (5), while failing to meet the downward entailing conditions (6 a,b).

(5) Only John smokes & only John drinks ||- Only John (smokes or drinks).

- (6) a. Only John (smokes or drinks) ||- Only John smokes & only John drinks.
b. Only John smokes v only John drinks ||- Only John (smokes and drinks).

By contrast with the Proper Name case, I always held that the Count Noun case was downward entailing, as in (7 a,b), and even anti-additive by also satisfying (8). I criticized

- (7) a. Only women smoke or drink ||- Only women smoke & only women drink.
b. Only women smoke v only women drink ||- Only women smoke and drink.

(8) Only women smoke & only women drink ||- Only women smoke or drink.

the semantic explanation of NPI licensing by observing that ¹only Proper Name¹ was not downward entailing yet still licensed some NPIs, as in (4) above. But ¹only NP¹ does not license every NPI, as shown in (9). I (Atlas 1996: 286) speculated that the NPI minimizer data of (4 b,c) were explicable by conventionalization of the use of minimizers with focused NPs – the very feature of NPs that would occur in denial and

echoic question contexts, as in (10 a,b), thus explaining the acceptability of even the upwards entailing NP in (10c).

- (9) a. * Only Bill wants Sam to finish the report until Friday.
b. ? Only I was all that keen to go to the party.
c. ? Only Phil would give Lucy a red cent.
- (10) a. Don't say that! I do too give a hoot about what happens to you.
b. Why am I alive at all? I'm alive at all because ...
c. Even Phil would lift a finger to help Lucy.

The co-occurrence with [only NP] of a “weak” NPI like ever or any, I speculated, might be explained by its focused character combined with the pseudo-anti-additivity of [only NP]. In Horn’s CLS Lecture he seems to think that I had claimed that focused character alone sufficed as an explanation for the licensing of any or ever. I made no such claim.

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In my (Atlas 1991: 138) view the positive “proposition is a **syncategorematic proposition**, and it cannot be simplistically conjoined with No one other than a is F by ‘&’ to yield a logical form for the [‘only’] sentence of the type P & Q,” where P and Q are closed formulae. The objection that Horn makes to the traditional conjunctionalist analysis does not apply to my entailment analysis.

That analysis of Only Muriel voted for Hubert was One individual, and Muriel if anyone, voted for Hubert, whose logical form is: $\exists x \forall y [(x = y \leftrightarrow Fy) \& (Fy \rightarrow y = m)]$.

- (19) a. Only Muriel voted for Hubert.
b. One individual, and Muriel if anyone, voted for Hubert.
c. $\exists x \forall y [(x = y \leftrightarrow Fy) \& (Fy \rightarrow y = m)]$.

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With the failure of Karttunen and Peters’s account of the assertoric meaning of “presuppositional” utterances, and the consequent weakness of an account like Horn’s (2002) that essentially relies upon it, the analysis that I had proposed, in (19), and the treatment of assertoric force that I gave in the quotation that just precedes (19), still seem to me to do justice to the data of NPI licensing, to intuitions about speech-acts, and to logical intuitions that we have about the entailments only NP sentences. I remain as unconvinced as ever that downward entailment can explain the distributional data of NPI licensing.