

Only as an issue-sensitive particle

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Some claims about *only*

1. *Only* is about an issue, which is normally given by the focus-background structure of its argument.
2. *Only* asserts that its matrix is an exhaustive answer to this issue. In other words, *only* is primarily an exhaustivity marker.
3. The truth of the matrix of *only* is a selection restriction of the exhaustive answerhood relation. It is thus analyzed as a presupposition rather than a conversational implicature.

Lexical semantics for VP *only*

Let us consider a minimal fragment with proper names, definite descriptions, traces, and transitive and ditransitive verbs. Unfocussed *only* is translated in a presuppositional variant with issues of Rooth's alternative semantics as:

$$\text{only}_\tau \mapsto \lambda P \begin{cases} \langle \text{alt}(P), \lambda x_\tau [\text{ea}(\text{alt}(P)(x_\tau), \text{ord}(P)(x_\tau))] \rangle & \text{if } 2\text{D}(P) \\ \lambda x_\tau [\text{ea}(\delta(Q, \text{relevant}(Q, P(x_\tau))), P(x_\tau))] & \text{if } 1\text{D}(P) \end{cases}$$

Here *ea* denotes exhaustive answerhood. The sort predicates 1D and 2D select one- and two-dimensional meanings. In the variant of alternative semantics, focus-free expressions are translated in one dimension. Only when a focus occurs, is the second dimension added. In Rooth's alternative semantics focus-free expressions give rise to (trivial) alternative meanings. *alt* and *ord* select the alternative and ordinary meanings of *only*'s argument, and *P* is a variable over ordered pairs of alternative and ordinary meanings. τ is the type of the argument of the verb phrase. Note that the resulting ordinary meaning does not contain a conjunct $\text{ord}(P)(x_\tau)$, the positive implication is accounted for as a selection restriction of *ea*.

Exhaustivity

The relation *ea* relates a question and its exhaustive answer. The first argument is presupposed to be a question or issue, the second argument is presupposed to be a true answer. Both these presuppositions are selection restrictions. In particular, the answer must be true. This presupposition arises because exhaustivity is explained via a *conditional definition*:

Definition 1 (Exhaustive answer)

Suppose *p* is a true answer to *Q* ($\text{ta}(Q, p)$).

Then the predicate *ea* of exhaustive answerhood is defined for *Q* and *p*. $\text{ea}(Q, p)$

is the case if and only if p resolves (with respect to a given context) all the micro issues of Q .

□

If the condition $\text{ta}(Q, p)$ is not satisfied, then the relation ea is not defined for these two arguments. This selection restrictions explains that *only* presupposes its matrix sentence. The first presupposition might play a role in the explanation of extraction restrictions from the scope of *only*.

Compositional semantics

The compositional semantics of alternative semantics is modified in the following respects: (i) restricted terms give rise to more restricted alternative sets, (ii) the alternatives to terms are computed as plural terms denoting non-monotone antecedents (iii) predication leads to question formation rather than to sets of properties/propositions (but of course questions can be seen as *denoting*) such sets. The resulting questions are pragmatically interpreted as presupposed issues.

Consequences

1. The analysis predicts that the matrix of *only* is presupposed (because exhaustivity *presupposes* truth).
2. However, a separate *encoding* of this presupposition in the lexical entry of *only* is not required.
3. *only* must have an intonationally marked focus in its scope. Otherwise the inquisitiveness condition is not satisfied. Whether so-called second occurrence phenomena can be treated in this setting is so far an open issue.

An example representation

(1) Muriel only voted for [Hubert]_F.

$ea((\text{WH } x_1 : \text{person}(x_1)) \text{ votefor}(\nu(x_2, \text{Muriel}(x_2)), x_1),$
 $\text{votefor}(\nu(x_3, \text{Muriel}(x_3)), \nu(x_4, \text{Hubert}(x_4))))$